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Sold to a Mafia King by Hlengiwe Mathebula

Chapter 1

I always knew that my parents disliked me but today they showed that they don't dislike me they hate me so much. They know very well that I'm starting a new job tomorrow, actually not just a new job it's my dream job but they decide to drop a bomb on me.

It's 8AM I am taking a long bath after cleaning the yard and house for 3 hours. I always wake up at 5AM every Sunday so I can clean the house and yard. My parents are the most untidy people ever. They always host their stupid parties almost every Saturday with the food I bought, and I have to clean up when I wasn't even part of their parties. *Psssh* as if I'd join them.

"Mandy hurry up, we have guests" my mom budes into my room

without even knocking I hate it when she does that.

“Give me 5 minutes” I tell her.

“You need to hurry up. They are very important people they can’t be kept waiting” she tells me.

Gosh this woman can be annoying. She can see that I’m still bathing after 3 hours of cleaning their mess.

“I said 5 minutes if they can’t wait that long they can leave” I tell her.

“You’re so annoying” she leaves slamming the door it rattles on its hinges. I bought that door you know.

I take my time, her guests can’t tell me what to do and what not to do. Why is she even dressed up? When was the last time I saw her dressed up? Gosh I can’t even remember. Now I’m curious I hurry so I can see her guests. After 10 minutes I’m done. I walk into the lounge and the atmosphere changes. There’s something about the men in black suits. They are very powerful and very handsome I must say. Even my loud parents are very quiet. I walk into the room, all eyes on me. I sit next to my mom. I greet them. The old man smiles and greets me but the young one just nods looking around the house with a disgusted look. *So rude.* We sit in

uncomfortable silence.

“Mntanami (my child) we have something to tell you” my dad tells me.

Okay something huge is going on here. My dad has never called me that not even when I bought him the most expensive whiskey. Okay maybe not that expensive but it did cost me a lot you know and he finished it within 2 days my God was I hurt.

“Kanti didn’t you tell her?” the young man

asks clearly annoyed. “What’s going on

here?” I ask when my parents go mute.

“Can you tell her already, we don’t have all day”

the young man replies. “Ayanda relax. Will you?”

says the old man.

So his name is Ayanda he’s really handsome even Trey Songz is not this handsome gosh. Pity he’s rude.

“This is not easy Mandy, the Nxumalo’s are here because your father...” that’s my mom she doesn’t finish the sentence. I just keep quiet I’ll wait for them.

“Your parents took a loan from me 15 years ago and when they couldn’t pay me back, they made a promise that when you turn 21

they will marry you off to my grandson” Mr Nxumalo tells me.

I’m sitting here hoping it’s some kind of a sick joke. I mean my parents have been trying to hook me up with people for money. That’s why I kind of ran away after Grade 12. I decided to stay at res only came home unannounced and leave the very same day. Besides I had to work otherwise we’d live in a 2 room shack forever.

“Is this one of your annoying jokes mom?” I ask my mom. I see tears in her eyes.

Why is she crying? What kind of parents make promises like that? Are they even my real parents?

“I’m not marrying him” I tell them pointing Ayanda. “And I’m not leaving” I tell them and I walk out with the plan to run away and never look back.

I can’t marry an arrogant ass. I walk out the gate. But there are men in black carrying big guns. *What have my stupid parents done?* All the neighbours are peeping through their windows. I try to run but I can’t outrun these men. They stop me I scream my lungs out with the hope that someone will call the police or be brave enough to help me but none of that happens. My parents

run towards me with worried faces but I know they are not worried about me. *Some parents we have.* The guards take me back to the house. My head hurts from all the screaming and fighting. I'm still screaming when they put me on the couch.

Mr Nxumalo is still smiling at me, if I had a gun I'd shoot that mouth I don't need his stupid smile right now. Ayanda is typing on his phone like nothing is happening.

"Mandy stop it" my mom screams at me. I see Ayanda flinch.

"Don't you dare" I tell her. I'm very respectful but right now I feel like slapping the shit out of her. Never felt like that before. I need to come up with a plan. I need to get myself out of this mess right now.

I need to think and I can't with my parents looking at me with pleading eyes like I'm suddenly God. *They can't do this to me.* My heart feels heavy when I think about my dream job. I worked very hard to get that job and now this? I feel tears in my eyes and for the first time ever I can't hold them back. Here I am weeping like someone just died and my parents are looking at me like I just popped another head. Mr Nxumalo walks towards me and gives

me a warm hug, I can't help it I need one. Ever noticed that when you are trying to console someone who's crying they cry some more. This is what I'm doing right now.

"It's okay. I know my grandson doesn't seem like a good person but marrying him won't be such a bad idea" he tells me. I just shake my head. I really don't want to marry him. *Oh I have an idea.*

"I think I can find a way of paying you guys back without marrying *him*" I tell them with a smile wiping the tears using the back of my hand.

"You see I found a very good job, so we can work out installments and how long I'll be paying" I tell them smiling feeling on top of the world I mean I came up with a solution 4 adults couldn't come up with.

"I wish it was that easy" Mr Nxumalo tells me.

"Mandy if it was that simple we wouldn't have made this promise in the first place" my mom tells me.

“How much does he owe?” I ask Mr Nxumalo

“Just listen to your parents will you?” that’s Ayanda.

“So he can talk. I don’t want to marry a bastard like you” I tell him.

“The feeling is mutual I don’t want to marry an undeveloped child like you” he tells me typing on his phone. I’ve been called ugly and plain all my life but it hurts each time someone says that. But I don’t cry I just keep quiet.

“How much do you owe them?” I

ask my dad again. “I’ll pack your

stuff” says my mom.

“I don’t want you near any of my stuff” I always tell her that I don’t want her filthy hands on my stuff.

“Dad I asked you a question” I turn back to my dad.

“I owe them a million” he says that like he owes them one hundred rand.

“What did you even do with the money?” I ask him. God why don’t I have a gun, I’d shoot him right now.

Stupid father.

I might as well marry Ayanda how long is it going to take me to repay loan with interest when it takes people 20 years to pay their bonds worth three hundred and fifty thousand. I've never been so angry in my life. I'll find a way to get back here as soon as possible. I know Ayanda has more important things in his life than to look after me so I'll have to find a way because right now I don't have a choice. I go to my room to pack. There isn't much to pack really my things are stored in 4 boxes. I was planning to buy a wardrobe when I get paid. The first 2 medium boxes have my clothes and shoes the 3rd box has my novels, and then the 4th is a shoe box it has important documents like my ID, qualifications and pictures. I won't ask them for help I'll just take the boxes to the car they are not that heavy after all. I take the first 2 boxes to the car. There are 4 black Mercedes SUVs. One of the bodyguards comes forward with a sincere smile. He tries to take my boxes I shake my head, he opens the boot of one of the cars. I walk back to the house to fetch the last 2 boxes. I take the

book I'm currently reading *Angels and Demons* by Dan Brown. The very same guard who showed me where to put my boxes shows me the car I should get in. I take the book and get in the car. After some time Ayanda gets in the car and sits next to me focusing entirely on his phone. I'm hungry.

That's what I find strange about myself. No matter how hurt, angry or stressed I am I get hungry while other people lose their appetites. We've been travelling for 3 hours now and my stomach grumbles, but I can't really ask Ayanda for food now can I? So I continue reading, this book is too interesting.

"What are going to eat?" Ayanda

asks out of the blue. "I don't know"

I answer him honestly.

"So you want me to beg you, when you're the one with a grumbling stomach?" he asks. I just ignore him. I'm just not in the mood to talk.

"Suit yourself" he tells me when it's clear that I'm

not going to answer him. My stomach grumbles

again. *Gosh.*

“I’m going to buy you food because that sound is annoying me” he tells me.

“Bova, can you buy my usual times two” he hands Bova a debit card. *Sure* he nods I’ve been focused on my book didn’t see the guy sitting in the passenger seat in front of me.

We drive for like 10 minutes then we stop at some garage. Bova gets off. Few minutes later he comes with two burgers, chips and 2 cans of coke. He gives me one of the meals. I thank him he just nods. I love food I can’t help but sing and move my feet and head when I’m eating. After 2 minutes I’m done eating. Bova and Ayanda are staring at me and the driver is laughing. Okay this is strange why are they looking at me like that? I’m not full and Ayanda hasn’t touched his food.

“Can I also have your food?” I ask him. You see I may hate him but right now I need food and from now on he’ll be the one feeding me.

“Sure” he replies and he gives me the food and again after 2 minutes I’m done they are all laughing at me.

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After 7 hours of traveling, the longest journey of my life we enter some hotel.

As soon as the car stops Ayanda gets off still typing on his phone not looking back. Bova and the driver help me with the boxes. We enter a very huge parlor.

OMG this is not a hotel it's his house. What does Ayanda do for a living? He looks very young, but then again looks can be deceiving.

I just follow Bova and the guy who was driving, I think Bova called him Siya. We go to the second floor, we pass more than 5 doors.

Bova asks me to open one of the many doors at the end of the long passage. I'm guessing it will be my room. I open the door

Bova tells me to enter first. My God I've never seen such a

beautiful room with expensive looking furniture. This room is

bigger than my house back home. At the center there's a queen

size bed well I'm guessing, with pink covers, pink carpet, and a

white 2 seater couch by the wall and a very big watch facing the

bed. It's so beautiful, but I don't like pink I like black. I think the

person who was preparing this room thought I'm a 10 year old

girl. *Kanti* I'm a grown ass. I'm amazed by such a big and beautiful

room I don't see Bova and Siya leaving, they seem sweet pity I

can't say much about their boss. I run across the room and jump at the bed, it's so soft no squeaky sound from the springs. *At least my jail is better than home.* There's a door across the room I walk to the door it's an en-suite bathroom my God such beauty.

There's a bath tub, toilet and shower with transparent glass and another door. So many doors I walk across the room to the door it's a walk-in closet with so many pink clothes *urg.* I leave to fetch my boxes and store them in the closet. I'm very tired never travelled for more than 2 hours in my whole 21 years. I take a quick shower and I change the clothes into a black skinny jean and vest with socks. I walk to bed I look at the time it's 4:45pm. I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. I've been sleeping for like 5 seconds when someone barges into the room. *What happened to knocking?* It's Bova.

"The maid came to tell you that supper will be served in 15 minutes but she knocked there was no answer, so we thought you escaped after the stunt you pulled back at your house" he tells me smiling.

"No I was just sleeping. I'm too tired it's been a long day" I reply. Tears sting my eyes when I think about tomorrow and my

graduation day in 3 months. The most important days in my life.

"I think you should accept your life here, because you're not going anywhere. There are guards in every corner and there'll be guards everywhere you go. Don't try anything stupid you won't like the consequences. Between you and me your husband to be is a very dangerous man and he has no mercy" he tells with a smile but the warning in his tone is loud and clear.

What have my parents done?

I just nod, I don't trust myself enough to hold back the stupid tears.

"Come" he holds the door open for me. We walk down the stairs, the house is very quiet you'd hear a pin drop. We enter the dining room there are about 20 people wearing black suits they all look so buffy must be the guards Bova was talking about earlier. They are sitting around a big table with white table cloth and plates with food. People are ready to dig in but they are waiting for someone. Maybe they are waiting for me. This is great, I take the closest empty chair but the guy sitting next to me points the chair next to Ayanda. I move to that sit, he's typing on his phone. I wonder what's so interesting. He has changed he's also wearing a black jean and vest that shows off his muscles.

"I saw the room it's beautiful thank you so much, it means a lot" I tell Ayanda. He freezes for a moment then he nods. I wonder why he nods a lot.

I see everyone eating. I'm too hungry I dig in and when I raise my eyes everyone is staring at me.

This is strange are they seeing a female person for the first time?

I'm done and everyone else is still eating except for Ayanda he's busy typing. I'm not full, I eat a lot my dad always complains about that when I'm the one who buys food.

"If you won't eat again, can I have your food?" I whisper to Ayanda, I'm very loud but I don't know why people are so quiet. He nods and pushes his plate towards me still typing on his phone.

Who the hell is he texting all day?

I thank him and eat when I'm done I stand up and I start tidying up. I'm a bit of a neat freak. I always clean after myself. I wish I could say my parents taught me that. I can't remember what they taught me. All eyes on me.

"Why is everyone looking at me like that? I'm tidying up not stealing the plates. Some of us know that we have to tidy up unlike you lazy asses" I tell them leaving the room. I return to find Ayanda laughing.

"Eeh guys where is the kitchen?" I ask them, but before they can give me directions an old and fat short maid in a grey and white uniform appears out of nowhere to help me with the plates.

"You don't have to do that. We will take the dishes" she tells me.

"No, I can't expect you to cook and wash the dishes for me. I'll help" I tell her. And for the first time, Ayanda is looking at me not his phone. She directs me to the kitchen. Okay if I said my room is beautiful it's because I didn't see the state of the art kitchen. All white wall units with gold handles, a long island, biggest fridge I've ever seen, dish washer and microwave. This house is very beautiful I hope I get to see the rest of it tomorrow. I put the plates by the sink and I return to the dining room to take more plates, there's no one. After taking everything I tell the maid to go sleep I'll wash the dishes, she doesn't want to even when I tell her that I'm not here to steal her job she won't leave until Ayanda tells her to. She quickly rushes out of the room. I look for dish washing liquid I find

it in the cupboard under the sink, I can't use the dishwasher and I doubt Ayanda knows how it works. I wash the dishes for 30 minutes after I finish everything I tidy up and go to sleep.

Finally it is time to sleep but I can't, all the events that took place today come rushing into my mind and I can't push them at the back of my head any longer. My heart feels heavy *but you know what I'm done crying over something I have no control over* I tell myself. And now I feel like I didn't fight enough to stay. I feel guilty. 40 minutes later I'm still tossing and turning, I'm tired but I can't sleep, these thoughts are going to keep awake all night. How am I going to tell my boss that I won't be coming to work when I don't even have a phone, I was mugged a week ago after I got a call informing me that I got the job. I've been using my mom's phone for emails even though she complained endlessly but she's the one who borrowed the money I was going to buy a phone with. I always dreamed of being independent you know the kind of woman who change her own car tyre but because of my parents the dreams I worked so hard to achieve are just thrown away just like that, now I have to depend on Ayanda even for the smallest things like my underwear and live in this beautiful jail. I don't think

I'll ever forgive my parents. Finally I can't keep my eyes open I look at the clock in the wall it's 23:57.

Chapter 2

My God I must have been very tired I've never woken up so late in my life. It's 10:15am. I'm so embarrassed, I quickly make the bed and I take a quick shower. I look through my box, I wear a blue short and white vest with white pumps. I tie my hair into an untidy ponytail. I quickly rush down the stairs. Bova wasn't lying there are guards in every corner of the house. I greet everyone I don't see Ayanda looking at me, down the stairs. I don't know what to say to this guy. He's wearing all black again today. A black denim jean, vest and black Nike sneakers. This guy is very tall. He's 6'9 with pitch black hair and beard. The most handsome guy I've ever seen pity I can't say the same about his attitude it stinks.

"Good morning. How are you this morning?" I ask him.

"Morning. I'm good thanks and how are you?" he replies he's not typing on his phone today I wonder what's up.

"I'm still tired but okay thanks. How did you sleep?" I ask him.

"I didn't sleep, but thanks for asking" he replies. "And how did you sleep" he asks.

Shit this guy is really handsome, he doesn't look like he didn't sleep.

“Very good thanks but I slept late” I tell him. I turn to leave but I can’t remember where the kitchen is.

This house is very big, I’m going to get lost more often

“I know it’s late but have you eaten?” I ask him. He smiles showing his deep dimples, I’ll call him

McDimples.

“No, I haven’t. I’m not hungry. But you can go ahead and eat the kitchen is right this way” he tells me like he heard my thoughts about getting lost.

I thank him and walk to the kitchen. There’s no one I don’t know where to find anything. I rummage in the cupboards until I find bread. I make an 8 slice cheese and butter sandwich. I sing throughout the meal, I take my plate to the sink and wash it. I don’t see Ayanda and his guards looking at me through the window and laughing.

I can't sit around and do nothing otherwise I'll go mad. Maybe I can clean the yard or cook supper but it's still very early. It's 11am. I go upstairs I don't know where and how Ayanda spends his day maybe he works from home. I continue reading the book, I wanted to buy to clothes, a phone and laptop yesterday. I sold my old one when my mom borrowed money from a scary *mashonisa* (money lender) and he kept threatening to sell the fridge, microwave and TV for his R3 000 and those things cost over ten thousand rand and I bought them. I miss my music, I can't concentrate on the book, thinking about the job I was supposed to start today. I feel tears in my eyes but like always I push them back. There's a knock on the door. I tell whoever to come in. It's Ayanda, he's no longer wearing the clothes he was wearing 30 minutes ago. He's now wearing a black denim jean and shirt, white vest and rebook sneakers.

This guy sure knows how to dress. It's like he's tryna show off his summer wardrobe shem

I hear him laughing, he's not typing I

wonder why he's laughing. "I'm here to

take you for shopping” he tells me.

“Oh yeah? I need a few things. Do you want me to change?” I ask him.

“No, if you don’t want to” he tells me. I stand up and fix the bed cover put the book at the bedside table fix my hair. I tell him I’m ready to go. He leads the way, I follow him out. We walk out the door there are so many expensive cars in the parking area. This guy is loaded the garage is not big enough for the cars. He gets in the driver’s seat, I get in the back. He drives to some mall. I’ve never been to Durban before, it has always been my dream destination. This one time some girls from class in Varsity asked my dream destination I said Durban they laughed at me so hard it hurt but I kept quiet. They are from rich families they’ve been abroad. He finds a parking spot we get off, we are walking towards the mall entrance when a very beautiful girl calls Ayanda’s name but he just ignores her. But still she runs towards him, I walk slow to give them space, don’t want to hear what she has to say to him.

“Phangisa” Ayanda tells me. (Hurry)

The girl is still talking I feel bad for her, I wonder what happened. If only she knew that he has a new girlfriend he has been texting all

day yesterday, probably the whole night too since he said he didn't sleep. Reminds me some love quote I read just last week.

“You know you’re in love when you can’t fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams”

I don’t know if it’s true or not, never had a boyfriend it used to hurt me so much but I learnt to accept that I’m not beautiful and guys don’t care about my personality. I hurry towards him, but I still walk behind them, I don’t want to invade their privacy. The girl finally gives up. I walk besides him in uncomfortable silence, I’m really curious but I need to keep quiet.

“Can I go inside” I ask him when I see a Capitec branch, I need help with my daily limit I need money real quick so I can buy the stuff I want.

He just nods. I walk inside I hope he doesn’t move because I don’t have a phone how will I call him or how will I get home? Even though it’ll be my chance to run away I won’t run away. Bova’s words keep ringing in my mind, he will find me and I won’t like it. Luckily there’s no queue I get immediately. I always wanted an iPhone but I can’t afford it so I’ll stick to Samsung. When I leave the bank, I find him standing by the door just looking around.

“I’m done. Thanks” I tell him.

“For what?” he asks really surprised. “For waiting” I tell him and he nods.

Nod one more time I’ll chop that head off.

I hear him laughing, why is he laughing? This is like the second time I said something in my head and he laughs unless I OMG. Unless I said that out loud.

“What do you wish to buy?” he asks out of the blue. “Laptop and phone” I tell him. He nods.

I see a MTN store, I ask to go inside, he nods he’s typing furiously on his phone.

I go inside I see an affordable Samsung phone and laptop. I talk to one of the consultant he tells me to wait for 5 minutes he goes through some door with the sign “staff only” I decide to stand in the queue, I look around for Ayanda he’s sitting in one of the couches, I’ve been concentrating so much

on the stuff I needed didn't even notice that the atmosphere changed as soon as Ayanda walked in. *What's with this guy?* The guy returns and tells me that I'll get the stuff when I get to the counter, I just nod absent mindedly. When I'm the third person on the queue Ayanda walks towards me to and gives me a black card.

My God a black card what does this guy do for a living?

"Thanks but I'm sorted" I tell him showing him my card. He looks a little surprised and he nods going back to where he was sitting. The girl behind me asks if I'm his girlfriend, I honestly don't know how to answer that. I just shake my head. The queue is moving faster.

"Are you his sister then?" she asks again. I just ignore her. There's an empty counter when I'm about to go to the counter the cashier stands up and goes through the staff only door. I stand on the queue. A new girl comes in and yells.

"Next" I walk to the counter, she tells me that I need proof of residence since I'm buying a new sim card. I call Ayanda when he looks up I wave him over. He stands up and walks towards me. I

tell him what the cashier just told me, she's busy checking him out the nerve. He tells me that he will use his ID and proof of residence I nod. After we're done we walk out.

"Do you need anything else? Clothes? Bags? Shoes?" he asks me.

"No thanks. The closet back at your house is full, it's enough for me thanks" I tell him, he nods. My stomach grumbles.

"Where do you want to eat?" he asks me

typing on his phone. "I don't know, what

do you suggest?" I ask him.

"I can eat whatever you want" he tells me.

"I've never eaten in a restaurant before" I tell him, he looks up from his phone when he hears that. The look on his face, he looks shocked like I just told him that Vusi Kunene is not handsome and he can't act.

"Did you like the meal I bought you yesterday?" he asks me.

“If it’s okay with you, we can eat at your place rather than wasting money on food when there’s so much food at your place” I tell him. I don’t like eating out, not that I can’t afford to but I like saving plus I had to build a house from scratch at home so that R30 made a big difference, maybe I’m strange but that’s how it is for me. He tells me we can go.

“Aren’t you here to buy something?” I ask him. “No” he replies.

“So you wasted your petrol on me?” I ask him surprised. My parents would never do that for me. He doesn’t say anything instead he walks towards the exit door pays for the parking ticket and leads me to the car. Few minutes later we’re at his place. Three maids and a bodyguard walk towards us, I take my stuff close the door greet them and walk towards the hotel he calls home, I really can’t wait to start using my phone. I have to think of something I can do to earn some money.

“You’re back so early, what’s up?” I hear Bova asking Ayanda, as I run up the stairs.

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“She only bought a phone and laptop and paid for them” Ayanda tells Bova.

“You’re lying” Bova replies really surprised. When Ayanda’s grandfather forced Ayanda to take her out for shopping they all thought she’s going spend his money but nope not this girl.

“She’s not different alright but maybe she’s trying to act all independent and innocent in my eyes. You know how poor people act when they marry loaded guys” Ayanda tells Bova when he sees him smiling at this information.

Bova is done telling him that not all women are like his mom. This girl might be different the last time he took one of his casual girlfriends for shopping he spent almost R10 000. Maybe this one is different.

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We came back after almost 1 hour 30 minutes. I’m hungry I hope everyone is. I look at the clock it’s 1 in the afternoon. I walk to the kitchen, I bump into Bova at the bottom of the stairs. There’s no



one in the kitchen I make another cheese 6 slice sandwich, after eating I wash the plate. I look

through the cupboards so I can prepare supper. I'm going to cook my favourite meal dumblings and beef stew with vegetables. I look for the dumbling ingredients, I enjoy working so I sing. I'm singing my favourite song by Sam Smith Lay Me Down as I mix the dumbling dough, while waiting for it raise I peel and chop the vegetables and chop the meat after defrosting it in the microwave. Dumblings take longer so I cook for almost 5 hours. At 6:30pm I'm done, I don't know how to set the table so I'll just go with what I know. I plate the food into big dishes I go to the dining room to put the plates, later I put the food. People will have to dish for themselves. I tell one of the guards that supper is ready he looks surprised, I wonder why. I walk to the kitchen to tidy up, I hear chairs being pulled. I mix warm water into a big bowl and I take a clean and dry dish cloth so they can wash and dry their hands before eating. There are about 22 people around the table, I start with Ayanda, and he looks surprised.

*And why is everything about me surprising?*

I go to the kitchen to put away the bowl and dish cloth. When I walk back to the dining room Mr Nxumalo is also here. I greet him and go back to the kitchen to fetch water for him, he smiles at me

and looks at the annoyed Ayanda. *Maybe they had a fight.* I pull a chair I was sitting on yesterday. Unlike yesterday today everyone around the table is talking and laughing, Ayanda is sitting here looking very angry, he still looks cute though. I join them dig in while singing and dancing with my head and feet. Today I'm full after eating I collect the dishes to go wash them. I notice that for the first time Ayanda has eaten, but he's typing on his phone. I peek through the phone, he's texting someone by the Sihle name.

"Who have you been texting all day?" I ask him curiously the room suddenly goes quiet like they want to hear the answer or something.

"None of your business" he replies annoyed.

"Is this the same person you've been texting yesterday and today all day?" I ask him even when he said it's none of my business. I just don't know when to shut up once I start talking and it annoyed the shit out of my mom, my dad just ignored me.

He gives me a glare that could even kill a corpse.

*What is he mad about?*

I continue taking the dishes to the kitchen to wash them and today it doesn't take longer. After 20 minutes I'm done I go to my room to set up the laptop and send an email to the editor. I feel guilty again for accepting this life, it's like I've been waiting for such an opportunity, but Bova's words keep ringing in my head. So I might as well as accept this life my parents chose for me 15 years ago. *Some parents we have*, you know I have read about such stories but never though it could happen to me. I set up everything, I don't know what to say to my boss. I'm typing and deleting I don't know who to ask for help. I'll send the email tomorrow let me sleep.

### **Chapter 3**

It's been a week since I sent my boss an email, I don't know if I should call her that or call the email a resignation mail or what. But whatever it is, I sent it and she hasn't replied. I've been cooking a lot lately, but I hardly wash the dishes because the old maid thinks I'm here to take their jobs, even though I tried to explain a million times. I haven't seen Ayanda for the past 3 days and tomorrow is my birthday, I want to go out and buy myself

something, but I don't know what. I don't need anything right now, maybe I can take myself out for the first time after all I'm turning 21. Oh yes I'll also buy myself a book, I don't really like eBooks they are tiring at least a hard copy will be good for me. I'll need a book shelf by the couch, but I don't know if I need Ayanda's permission or not. I haven't seen Bova either I've been eating with the guards and there's always deafening noise no wonder Ayanda doesn't want anyone talking. I think I'll bake myself a cake, haven't baked one for the past 3 months. I baked one for my ungrateful mom she told me that I should've given her money instead of baking a "stupid" cake. I was so hurt. I love birthdays, I'll bake a cake later today then go out for shopping tomorrow. There's a knock on the door, who might that be. I tell the person to come in. It's Bova.

He hands me the phone and tells me it's Ayanda. My God what does he want? We hardly talk what am I going to say to him?

"Hello" I answer.

“Hello to you too, I won’t be home tomorrow for your birthday but I asked Bova to take you out. Hope you’ll have a good one” he tells me in one go. By the way he’s talking it’s clear that it’s a revised speech I wonder who told him to say all those things.

“Okay thank you, I will” I tell him. He hangs up. I give Bova the phone. I look at the time it’s 2 in the afternoon. I take my laptop with me downstairs I use it to play music when I cook, today I’ll be cooking and baking. I cook rice, grilled chicken and gravy. After 2 hours I’m done. Now it’s time to bake the cake. I’ve never baked a big cake before, so I use YouTube. I look for the ingredients I mix them then I bake, I take longer almost 5 hours. I forgot about supper until a guy called Bozza asks if it’s ready.

“OMG I’m so sorry, been concentrating so much on baking I forgot about food. I’m so sorry” I tell him while I’m running around the kitchen trying to find the plates and bowls. He helps me set up the table. They all gather around the table, I leave them I’ll eat when I’m done. When I’m done I’m too tired to do anything, so I go straight to bed.

I’m waken up by a vibrating phone. It’s a message from an unsaved number. Who might that be at 6am? I’ll read it when I

wake up. I need 30 more minutes. I close my eyes and wake up an hour later, there's an incoming call from an unsaved number.

"Hello" I answer sleepy.

"*Mntanami unjani?*" that's my dad. I tell him I'm tired and ask why he's calling where he got my digits. I'm so annoyed. I feel like hanging up, I hope he didn't call to spoil my day.

*Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to you*

My parents sing over the phone, they sing so beautiful, they've never sang for me before. I thank them with a smile and tears. Such beautiful voices, I suddenly miss them so much. I'm still mad at them though, what they did to me is cruel but I guess I can't stay mad at them forever. I thank them and hang up before they can say anything more. I read the text I received.

*Happy Birthday*

*enjoy Ayanda*

Okay this is so unexpected, but still it puts a smile on my face.

*Thank you so much it means a lot, enjoy your day too \*smiley face\**

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He reads the text thinking there's something about this annoying girl she thanks him for all the little or stupid things. No one has ever thanked him before even for a stupid birthday texts. Maybe she's pretending. That's how his mother was until she got married to his father and when she left he couldn't bear the pain and committed suicide, such a coward.

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I always look forward to my birthday especially when I got the job 2 weeks back. I mean life was going the way I had planned it. I landed my dream job and I was going to find a flat. I usually take a long bath on my birthday but today I don't feel like bathing, so I'll just take a quick shower. I walk to the bathroom take a quick shower and I wear one of the white dresses I find in the closet. I tie my hair into an untidy ponytail. I make the bed, take a shawl and head to the couch, I'm so emotionally drained. I didn't try harder to escape, I gave up and I feel guilty. I hope no one will call



me today I don't feel like talking. I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow.

I wake up when I'm roughly shaken by a very big and hairy hand. I rub my eyes before I open them it's Bova. He wants to take me shopping. I tell him I'm too tired to do anything he can go out without me. But he won't take no for an answer. I feel so emotional right now, I didn't want to stay awake and think of the plans I made that were ruined the day before they all came true. I say no until he gives up and leaves the room muttering the word "stubborn" under his breath. I stand from the couch to lock the door I don't want to be disturbed. I fall back asleep as soon as I lay back on the couch.

I wake 5 hours later, someone is banging at the door.

"The fuck are you staring at. Go tell Bova to give me the spare key to this room, and I swear if this kid escaped I'll kill all of you"

Ayanda barks.

I decide to go open the door and save the poor people's job.

“The fuck is wrong with you?” he barks. I’m not in the mood and I’m too tired. I walk over to the couch and I fall asleep while he’s talking. I’m waken by a very hot slap. He slaps so hard I feel dizzy and see stars. I’m trying to push back the tears but I can’t. I try to stand but he pushes me down the sofa so rough. I’m scared never been a victim of violence before.

“What are you staring at? Don’t you have anything better to do with yourselves? Do I pay you to stand around like that?” he barks at the guards standing at the door.

I’m too speechless to say anything. When he asks why I hadn’t gone out Bova like he told me, I don’t answer him he smacks me again so hard I fall off the couch. I can’t take this anymore. But I can’t scream for help no one will come help me. So I just cry the whole time. I need to pee so I don’t know what to do whether to go ahead or tell him. Being the stubborn person that I am, I just stand and walk towards the bathroom. I lock myself inside I pee and sit on the toilet seat long enough for him to bang on the door. When I don’t answer he threatens to break the door but I don’t do anything I just sit. And then *boom* the door is on the floor. I’m being dragged by my hair. Bova runs towards us but Ayanda

punches him so hard in the nose before he can say anything. He falls on the ground with a thud. Ayanda drags me towards the steps and out of the house, leaves me there crying. I don't know what to do, the guards standing outside the door are staring at me with pity. I can't believe this is happening to me.

It's starting to get dark and chilly. I'm feeling cold so I have no choice but to ask for forgiveness even though I don't know what I did wrong. When I approach the house, one of the guards blocks my way and shakes his head. So what now I'm not allowed inside the house? I'll freeze to death. I try to beg the guards they just stare at me. I don't know what to do anymore so I go to the nearest corner they won't understand they are wearing jackets. The corner is okay but a little chilly. I want to fall asleep so hard so that I don't have to feel cold anymore or feel the pain in my head and face. Even though I hated home so much, I miss it I miss my parents no matter how annoying I got they'd never treat me like this. Yes my mom used to slap me a lot but it wasn't this bad actually it felt like she was tickling me compared to this.

I'm sitting with my knees up and my chin on my knees and hands around them. I'm staring into the space thinking about my

dreams to escape the current situation. The door opens, Ayanda walks out with the girl he was ignoring at the mall the other day. She's beautiful with a model like body. She's

wearing a pink dress, heel and she's carrying a pink bag. Maybe she's the one who chose my wardrobe she walks by like she doesn't see anything wrong. If it was me I wouldn't do this to her, even if it meant I was going to get punished I was still going to try and fight for her. Before I know it I'm asleep I'm waken up by a blowing wind looks like it's going to rain. Ayanda walks by again and doesn't look my way.

I fall asleep and wake up when the wind blows and fall asleep again. The pattern goes on until dawn. I'm still not allowed into the house and I'm so tired and hungry. It starts to rain and Ayanda appears and tell the guards to come inside but not me. I stay there the whole morning and afternoon until his grandfather arrives and tells me go inside the house. I don't want to go first even when he opens the door for me, I tell him I'll follow, I'm so scared that Ayanda will slap me as soon as I walk inside. My face still hurts. I walk right behind him when I don't see Ayanda I run to my room, I take a quick bath and run to bed I fall asleep as soon as I get under the cover.

## Chapter 4

It's been 2 days since the incident took place, I haven't gone out of the room. My head and face still hurt I have bruises all over my legs from being dragged down the stairs. I don't know why but I am so embarrassed to go out, the guards will either look at me with pity or laugh at me and I can't face both. It's 6 in the evening, been up for 8 hours it's either I sleep a lot or insomnia is my new friend. I'm looking for a new book to read to keep my mind off things. I have been thinking of escaping but if he did this to me for not going out what will he do next? He'll probably kill me. I can't forget what Bova said to me when I first got here.

*"I think you should accept your life here, because you're not going anywhere. There are guards in every corner and there'll be guards everywhere you go. Don't try anything stupid you won't like the consequences. Between you and me your husband to be is a very dangerous man and he has no mercy"*

There's soft knock on the door, who might that be. I want to keep quiet I want to yell and tell whoever to leave me alone but I'm scared. I always read stories about domestic violence and hate the women for being weak, but it's easy to judge until it happens to you.

*Between you and me your husband to be is a very dangerous man and he has no mercy.*

It's the old maid, she's looking at me with eyes full of sympathy I hate it. "Ayanda, said I should tell you to come downstairs, supper is ready" she tells me. "I'm not hungry" I tell her.

"You have to eat dear child. Plus you don't want him fetching you" she tells me whispering the last part.

Everyone is scared of him. I tell her to give me 5 minutes. I freshen up a bit. I'm not going to change. I'm wearing a blue skinny jean and black vest and socks. I don't feel like wearing shoes. When I leave the room I feel the guards' eyes on me, I walk to the dining room face down. I enter and greet everyone and sit down where I

usually sit. All eyes on me again. I sit down and force myself to eat. I don't like chicken mayo and that's what we are eating. I dish a very small portion because I don't want to be dragged outside because I refuse to eat. After eating I excuse myself I'm suddenly too tired. Bova asks if I'm okay I nod, stand and leave the room. I feel their eyes on me. I walk to my room lock and rush to the bathroom and cry. I hate myself for it, I never cried like this before. I used to push back the tears but now all I do is cry or sleep.

After 10 minutes of crying I wash my face and head to bed and sleep. I'm waken up by a loud knock on the door, I get off bed and rush to the door. It's the maid again, she's holding a tray with food. 6 slices sandwich, I'm not hungry I just want to sleep. When I tell her that I'm not hungry she tells me that Ayanda sent her to prepare the food for me and give it to me. Okay this is what a typical abusive guy does. They beat the shit of you (not that he did but still he slapped me more than once and dragged me by my hair all the way downstairs and left me there the whole night in a very cold weather) and then they bring you food or flowers and expect you to forgive and forget. I smile and take the tray close



the door and put the tray in the bedside table. It's 9am I don't feel like bathing but for some stupid reason I have to. I take a long bath, I sit in the bath tub until the water is cold. I force myself out of the bath tub, I'm too tired should've taken a quick shower but I have been taking

one for the past 2 days. I clean the tub and wear the clothes I was wearing yesterday. I make the bed and sleep on the couch.

I haven't been sleeping long when a big and heavy hand is shaking me. I jump as soon as I open my eyes and see Ayanda standing there remembering that I didn't eat.

*What if he's here to check if I ate?*

"I'm so sorry, I'm going to eat it's just that I was tired" I tell him walking towards the tray.

He doesn't say anything he just stares at me. I sit in the bed and force myself to eat again. I take longer usually I finish within 5 minutes but I must've taken more than 10 minutes. After I finish eating I tell him that I am going to the kitchen he nods like always. I half walk and half run to the kitchen. I don't see Bova following me. I wash the plate and dry and put it in the cupboard and dust off bread crumbs from the tray and put in the cupboard. I am just standing there looking outside when someone puts the back of their hand in my left cheek I jump and scream protecting my face when I look it's Bova looking a little worried.

"I'm sorry I didn't see you coming" I tell him and run past him tears

filling my eyes. I'm such a coward, been slapped twice but here I am screaming when I feel a hand on my face.

I wish I could go back home to my annoying parents. For the first time since I got here I miss them terribly. I pick up the phone do what I never thought I'd do. I call my parents.

"Mandy *unjani*" my dad answers. I hold back the tears.

"*Ngiyaphila*. I just miss you guys. Put me on speaker I want to talk to the both of you" I tell him. He says okay, then my mom's loud voice booms in the room. I put them on speaker too.

"Mama do you know about video calling? I want to see you guys" I tell them.

"Yes, I do" she replies, that surprises me. *How does she know about it?* "Okay I'll video call you just now", I tell her. I hang up and video call them. Seeing them makes me want to cry pack my boxes and head home. We talk a lot about what they have been up to. And I'm surprised when they tell me that my dad got a job, but he did because there's no one there to support them I feel guilty because I just stopped buying them food when I left home. For the first time I forgot how mad I am

at them. We hang up with the promise to communicate more often. I smile for the first time *since that day*.

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Seeing Mandy act like that broke the heart Ayanda didn't know he had. There's something about this girl, she's the reason he sits with everyone during supper. Everyone was surprised but seeing her sing and dance while eating is refreshing. He's never seen a lady appreciate food and ask for more. The casual girlfriends he had never cooked or ate that much. They didn't even know where the kitchen is they only know the way to his bedroom. She shows appreciation in all the small things and never criticizes, he had doubts when Bova decided to buy more pink stuff and she doesn't seem to like it.

He didn't mean to hurt her like that. He has anger towards women since his mom left that's why he uses them for sex and buy them stuff, that's what his mom wanted. His dad married a gold digger. He knows Mandy might be different and he hates that. What happened the other day was unplanned. He hates it when he tells a person to do something and they don't and what made him really mad is that she fell asleep while he was talking. The nerve of

this girl. He told her go out with Bova she didn't and now he was thrown out of a meeting because his annoying best friend and grandfather kept disturbing him and he couldn't afford not to attend. He had to cancel lots of other important meetings for this one and they know very well.

When they threw him out he was fuming and went straight home to be disrespected by Mandy.

Chapter 5

For the past 2 weeks the maid has been bringing my breakfast and lunch in my room and came back at 5:50pm to remind me to go downstairs for supper. It's a little cold today, I'm going to cook, and I can't stay in my room all day forever now can I? It's 12 in the noon, I walk downstairs to cook my favourite meal. I don't see Ayanda I don't want to play music and be dragged out again. No matter how much I try I can't forget what happened 2 weeks ago on my birthday, I was looking forward to

it. Cooking also keeps me sane and it keeps my mind off things. Because it's cold I'm going to be cooking my favourite meal again dumbling with beef stew no veges this time. I look around for Bova I can't find him either. So I'll just text Ayanda.

Me: Hey can I play music from my laptop I want to cook today if that's also okay

I hit send and he replies instantly like he's been waiting for my text. *A girl can dream ey. Ayanda: Yes that's okay.*

I know I got his permission but still I'm still cautious I hate playing music through my earphones. So I sing and dance I'm doing what I love.

Five hours later I'm done. I prepare the table and tell the guards supper is ready, I'm in the kitchen preparing water when Bova asks if I need help. I shake my head and take the water to the dining room giving the bowl to Ayanda first then everyone. They all dish up when they are done, I dish up for myself. I eat quietly no singing no dancing when I raise my head I see disappointment in Ayanda's eyes. I wonder what's up with that. I'm busy tidying up when one of the guards reminds me of the cake I baked the

day before my birthday. I even forgot about the cake the main thing I was looking forward to on my birthday.

“Oh My God, I forgot about the cake. But then again after what happened can you blame me?” I reply. The old me is back, I just don’t know when to shut up. I don’t even see Ayanda freezing for a moment.

“You can eat the cake guys. I no longer want it” I tell them suddenly feeling emotional.

For me a birthday is not a birthday without a cake. But NO thanks. I take the dishes to the kitchen, I don’t have the energy to wash them. I go to my room to call my parents we’ve talked for more than 6 times the past 2 weeks and I think we’re becoming close. I hate being here but at least something positive came out of the situation, I always wished I had a good relationship with my parents.

I need to send them money tomorrow. I’ll take a taxi, I have money in my purse plus I need some air. I’m not used to asking for help or permission from people or even receiving help but I have no choice. I take my phone to text Ayanda but then again I think I should learn to talk to him. So I leave the room and luckily Bova is

walking my way.

“The food was really nice. You’re a very good cook” he tells me with a genuine smile. I smile back. “Where can I find Ayanda?” I ask him, and he frowns.

“Relax, I’m not tryna kill him or something. I just need a favour” I tell him smiling. He laughs and directs me to his office and bedroom he’s in one of those. I thank him and leave, with the hope that he’s in the office. I knock on his office door no answer. *Shit* I walk towards the end of the passage downstairs. I knock on the door.

“Who is it?” he answers. “It’s Mandy”

“Come on in” he replies really surprised.

As soon as I walk in I’m transported to another world, Ayanda’s world. I can’t help but fall in love with the room.

There’s a 4 poster bed in the middle with a dark cover and pillows, a beige couch facing the bed a big watch a little like my room.

With a very big window facing some forest, a beautiful forest if there's such a thing. There are 2 doors opposite the window, it must be his bathroom and closet. He's sitting on the couch with his laptop on his lap his legs crossed at the ankles. He's wearing a black vest and jeans with no shoes. He looks so handsome.

"Such a beautiful room" I tell him looking around. "You have a good taste" I tell him.

"But that's not the reason I'm here" I tell him. He nods indicating that he's listening. But he's frowning at his phone. "Tomorrow I need to send money to my parents. But I don't know how to get to that mall" I tell him.

"Why don't you use the app?" he asks frowning.

"My parents don't have bank accounts plus I could use some fresh air" I tell him.

"I'll take you. What time do you want to go there" he replies still frowning at his phone. "No it's okay. I'll go there alone"

“I want to go with you”

he insists. “Okay how

about 10am?”

He nods, okay that’s my queue to leave. I leave closing the door softly. I go to bed.

I wake up at 9:20am *shit* I’m going to be late. I make the bed and take a quick shower. I wear my favourite clothes, all black converse all-star boots, black skinny jean and blouse and I tie my hair in an untidy bun like always. I finish at 9:55 and I rush downstairs. The guards thank me for the cake all the way downstairs. I wait for Ayanda by the steps and when he comes out of his room with Bova, he’s wearing the same clothes as me but he’s wearing a shirt instead of a blouse obviously when he sees me, he freezes for a moment and Bova has a huge grin.

“You look beautiful” they tell me in unison. I say thanks and I tell him he looks handsome too. He nods and leads the way. Today we are travelling in Audi SUV. He gets in the driver’s seat I get in the back, he tells me to get in the passenger seat. He drives off there’s traffic at the nearest freeway my God. The cars aren’t moving.

When I tell him that it's okay we can go back he shakes his head. How's the marriage going to work then because we are both stubborn? We sit there in an uncomfortable silence he looks like he wants to say something but then shakes his head and closes his mouth. I wonder. His phone rings and Sihle appears at the screen. He ignores it. They were texting each other day and night and now he's not picking up, I wouldn't say it's because I'm here don't want to play with my heart, but it's okay to dream. She keeps calling and he's not picking up. Ten minutes later we're still stuck and Sihle keeps calling.

"What's up?" I ask him. He looks shocked shit I am shocked too. Where's that coming from? "She won't stop calling" he tells me, I didn't expect him to answer me. I actually expected a slap.

"You'll have to answer she won't stop calling you" I tell him like he doesn't know. He just nods.

Sometimes I do things without thinking when she calls for the 50th time. I answer and a very beautiful girl appears on the screen, she's video calling.

“Hello girl. What’s up?” I ask after recovering from the shock.

“*Bitch* I don’t want to talk to you. I need to speak with my man” she tells me pointing Ayanda.

“*Bish*, your man? This is my husband to be so stop calling him or I’ll kill you” I reply and hang up.

Oh God someone please shoot me. What have I done?

I’m even scared to look at Ayanda he’s going to beat the shit out of me. After some time I look at him expecting to see an angry face but he’s laughing and I join him. I’ve never laughed since I got here.

“I’m sorry, I just wanted to stop her from calling. It’s annoying” I tell him once our laughter has died down. He thanks me which actually shocks me. I see his hand towards my face I scream, cover face and bend. I wait for the slaps to come but they don’t. When I look up I see hurt in his eyes.

“I’m sorry I wanted to put my hand on the head rest of your seat” he tells me. Gosh I’m so embarrassed I just nod. The cars before us move and 20 minutes later we enter the mall with him walking behind me, I feel bad. I deposit the money and I text my mom the pin. Seconds later I receive a thank you message from my parents. I’ve been window shopping for the past hour and a half. Ayanda keeps following me around and people keep staring at me.

Chapter 6

Ever since that day at the mall a month back. Ayanda and I kind of talk but I noticed he's a man of few words while I talk a lot. He's private, it took me a while to know what he does for a living, apparently he owns 2 5 star hotels in Durban and has shares in a radio station Ukhozi FM. He likes a very quiet place that's why the guards are always quiet when he's around. I used to hate a quiet place, I always avoided the library.

HEEEEEEEELP HEEEEEEELP

I hear someone screaming, I'm shocked and scared. I open the door and the guards are not there. I walk towards the steps. It's 2am and it looks like there's no one in the house. The person keeps screaming and I keep following the voice. I pass many doors I'm so scared yet I'm walking towards

the voice. I walk into a room lit in a candle there's a fat man chained in a chair. He stops screaming when he sees me.

"Please help me. They are going to kill me" he pleads. "Who's going to kill you?" I ask. I need to know first.

"I don't know who" he replies.

"How did you get in here?" I'm busy asking questions forgetting that the people he's talking about will walk in any time. He tells me to hurry the guards went out cause 7 others escaped. I can't think straight. There's a huge set of keys at the table in the far corner of the room. I hurry to fetch the keys. I try them all just when I'm about to give up, the last key opens the lock on the chain. When we turn to walk out the door I find Ayanda staring at me. He's so angry, I can't believe that it's the same guy that was laughing with me this morning, now I see why he walks into a room and everyone is suddenly quiet.

"Where are you 2 going?" he asks and Bova walks in shocked by me being in this room.

“I was just helping this guy. Why is he chained in the chair? What are you planning to do with him?” I scream at Ayanda, he flinches. Bova shakes his head as a warning telling me to keep quiet. But because I don’t know when to shut up I keep screaming insults at him. I yell enough to sting his ancestor’s ears. When he walks towards me I poke him and he loses it. He slaps me so hard I fall down and he kicks me in the ribs. I scream out in pain. But he doesn’t stop until I blackout.

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I open my eyes and I see a strange room my body hurts especially my throat and ribs. I’m in a hospital bed but this doesn’t look like a hospital. And then it all comes back. It’s Ayanda, I look around the room I see his grandfather and Bova whispering. I clear my throat, I’m soo thirsty. They jump and walk towards me.

“Finally, you’re awake” Mr Nxumalo smiles at me, wish he could stop smiling.

He’s the one who told me that his grandson is not that bad and here I am lying in a hospital bed. God knows how long I’ve been lying here. Bova presses some button and a nurse enters the room

and asks how I'm feeling. I tell her I'm fine, even though I'm not. I'm not used to discussing my feeling with anyone. She asks if my thirsty like *duuh* of course I'm thirsty dummy. I just nod and when Bova offers to help me drink water I try to scream but my voice comes out as a whisper. I close my mouth and shake my head furiously with tears falling down my face. Bova was there that morning and he said nothing. I don't want anything to do with them. I just want to go home. The nurse helps me, I must've been super thirsty because suddenly the water tastes very nice. The Doctor comes in 10 minutes later.

"You're awake, Mrs Nxumalo"

"It's Ms. Madondo Doctor" I correct him and he frowns at Mr. Nxumalo.

"Oh my mistake". He also asks how I'm feeling I just keep quiet I know I'm being rude but he knows very well that I'm not okay, why bother ask it's not like he cares.

"What is the date today?" I ask the Doctor I don't want to talk to Mr Nxumalo and Bova. "I don't think...." Mr Nxumalo begins but I don't give him the chance to finish.

“I asked the Doctor, not you” I reply rather rudely I know I can’t talk to an elder like that, but this man sold me fake dreams. He said his grandson is not as bad he looks, but here I am lying in a hospital bed and it looks like I’ve been here for days. He just smiles like always.

“Leave” I tell him, he looks startled at first until he sees that I’m serious. He leaves. “What are you still doing here?” I ask Bova, he also leaves.

The Doctor gives some pills and I fall asleep instantly.

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After 2 days they discharge me. I learnt that this room is inside Ayanda’s house. He’s here to help me get to my room. I don’t want him here I tell the Doctor but he ignores me and Ayanda gives me a threatening look. So I just follow the bastard to my room the steps are killing me, my feet hurt but I keep quiet. What I see when I open the door has me in tears, I can’t believe my parents are here.

“My baby” my mom walks towards me and gives me a hug. This is new.

“Ouch” I cry out in pain.

*It takes to be admitted in a hospital for some of us to get hugs from our mothers. Some mothers we have*

“Askies,” (Sorry) she replies.

“When did you guys get here?” I ask them, I’m so happy to see them.

We chat for more than 3 hours, don’t know when was the last time we talked like this with my parents. They don’t even ask me what happened maybe they are scared to ask me or they already know. I even forgot how funny my mom is. I laugh until my ribs hurt. Around noon the maid comes to my room to tell us lunch is ready downstairs. I don’t want to go but my parents force me to and I’m also going because I’m scared of what Ayanda might do. They always say it starts with a slap and it’s true. We walk into the lounge, we find Mr Nxumalo, Ayanda and Bova sitting waiting for us.

There’s food but I’m not hungry. So my parents dish up everything in the table, we all love food. They are eating but I’m staring at my hands in my lap. I really can’t look the 3 people in the room I feel betrayed. There’s another reason my parents came here, I know

them.

“*Makoti* (daughter in law) Mr Nxumalo starts. I don’t give him the chance to finish. The nerve of this old man. I tell him I’m not his daughter in-law I don’t care about their loan. I know I need to shut up by the way Ayanda is looking at me but I won’t, he’d rather kill me.

“Mandy, please listen...” my dad starts but he also doesn’t get the chance to finish.

“Don’t you dare, I’m here feeling like this because of the loan you took. If it wasn’t for you I’d be a journalist, living life to the fullest. So don’t start” I scream at my dad, my anger resurfacing.

*Stupid father, what kind of a father does that to his daughter.*

I feel like screaming to death. It’ll irritate Ayanda more and he’ll beat the shit out of me and kill me so I won’t have to live this kind of life.

“If it wasn’t for you, I’d be attending my Honours graduation next month. But here I am paying for your sins and loans. I’m the one who was beaten because I had the heart to help a person” I tell

them with tears running down my cheeks, I won't wipe them I don't have the energy. I'll need all the energy I have to survive in this house.

~~

Like I said I know my parents, they came here for a reason only to find out later that they came for my wedding, imagine the shock. The meeting in that room was held because Ayanda "has" decided on a wedding date. It's 7 in the morning, we are getting married in 3 hours, my body hasn't recovered but I'm about to walk down the alter. I don't want to get married, I'm not ready. Like most girls my age, I had planned my special day in my mind for years now. And I'm very sad to say nothing planned today is what I dreamed of, except for no makeup and getting married to a very handsome guy. Ayanda hired a wedding planner, I always wanted to plan my wedding. I mean I was discharged 3 days ago after being unconscious for almost a week to the very same person who almost killed me. I wanted a traditional wedding not a white wedding, but then again it's about what Ayanda wants not me. My parents never fought for me during the meeting, they just agreed with everything Ayanda said the whole time betraying me all over

again. I'm sitting here fantasizing about my dream wedding to block out the negative thoughts. My parents have not only betrayed me all over again but they have failed me, the relationship we have built the past few weeks has been thrown down the drain just like that because they are too lazy to get jobs and repay the loan. I'm wearing a beautiful long white bob tube wedding dress open at the back, which was also chosen by Ayanda, he took the wrong career path he was supposed to be a wedding planner.

Before I know it it's time. My dad smiles at me but I don't smile back. He makes small talks but I ignore him never been a fan of small talks anyway. There are about 50 guests and all of them are Ayanda's friends and business partners. We are getting married at his garden, it's a beautiful garden. I walk down the alter. Ayanda looks super handsome in his slim fit navy blue suit my other favourite colour. He's smiling but I'm not this is not how I imagined my wedding day and we all know what's about to go down tonight. I'm not ready especially with an abusive guy, but I don't have a say. My parents told me that I have to know my place especially after today. The women are looking at me with envy, if

only they knew. Ayanda even chose 3 of his business partners or friends to be my bridesmaids without even asking me. My dad hands me over, I feel tears in my cheeks. I hear a lot of “*ncoos*”. These are not tears of joy. I totally zone out during the vows part, we didn’t write ours. I



always dreamed of writing a page long vows and saying them a big smile on my face, so when it's my turn I repeat after the priest. *Till death do us apart* this part makes me cry because I know that my husband will be the cause of my death. But the guests misinterpret my tears again. The kiss part scares me to death.

*I've never kissed a guy.* I feel like screaming, as if reading my mind he kisses my forehead. If I didn't hate him so much I was going to be happy. I always thought I'll like my kisses in my forehead. It's time for pictures and reception. We take so many pictures my feet are killing me, everyone is happy except for me. We leave for the reception at some room, I like the décor it's blue and grey. We dance and eat, it's time for speeches. Ayanda tells the guests that I'm too shy so he'll be the one delivering the speech I just fake a smile as if he's telling the truth. The whole room is now silent just the way he likes it.

"I'd like to thank everyone for coming, it means a lot to us" he smiles at me I just smile back so that it'll look like I feel the same. Then he continues "I thank her parents for giving me such a beautiful person to be my wife. She makes me a better person. Since she came into my life, I smile more often" I roll my eyes at

that, but the guests nod in agreement. I wish it was true. "I hope I'll make a better husband. I promise to be there for you whenever you need me. I promise to l" he stops for some time. "To love..."

Bova and his grandfather don't wait for him to finish they clap so loud and with wide grins on their faces. What's going on here?

"Can I finish" he asks smiling at them, they nod and stop clapping.

"I promise to love and cherish you" he finishes and he sits down.

We all clap, such a beautiful speech if only he meant every word.

After eating we dance so more, I'm bad at dancing so he teaches me. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves except for me. I

want all of this to be over. I hate my dearest husband. He tells me

that the honeymoon is postponed to next month he's currently

busy I just keep quiet it's not like he wants my opinion he has

decided. What's the point it's not like I have a say. We are

probably going to visit his dream destination. After the longest day

of my life we are done, my feet are killing me. I look at the time it's

5 in the afternoon, I'm sleepy but I'm scared to go to bed, scared

of what might happen. We wait for the guests to leave. Ayanda

tells me that I'm moving to his room as from today. This is an

indication that I'll have no say in the marriage. My heart feels

heavy, when we enter

his room, he shows me the bathroom the other room is his gym. I can't hold the tears any longer so I quickly rush into the bathroom I lock myself inside and weep.

## **Chapter 7**

It's been a week we haven't consummated the marriage and I'm so relieved. But we sleep on the same bed, and the past week has been uncomfortable for me. Never shared a bed with anyone in my life. But there's a first time for everything. My parents haven't left it looks like they won't leave anytime soon or they won't leave at all. I eat with everyone because I'm forced to but I just ignore everyone, even the guards. I'm so mad at them, Bova has been making small talks but I don't answer never liked small talk to begin with. Yesterday I was busy searching for freelance jobs. My husband may be loaded but I need to work for myself. I sent out my CV to 3 different companies around Durban, I'm not familiar with the place but I hope I get one of the jobs. Things have changed around the house, when I got married I expected my surname and marital status to change but lots of things have changed I no longer run my bath, do my laundry, wash my plate or

cook. I'm suddenly called Madam no matter how much I try they don't want to stop it drives me mad. I spoke to Ayanda about this, but he just smiled and kissed my forehead, which earned him a huge smile from me.

I learnt that he hates being ignored or being screamed at, and that's what I did the time he beat me. I remember how I hated it when women made excuses for their abusive partners but this is what I'm doing right now.

~~

It's been a month and my parents are still here I think they enjoy living in this house and being served. I got 2 of the jobs I applied for days after my wedding day. I'm a freelance copywriter and content writer for 2 big media companies in Durban. Ayanda was against the idea of me working but I told him I won't stop working I didn't study so hard to be a housewife of some rich abusive business man though I didn't say the "rich and abusive" part. I wouldn't dare.

I need to go to the mall today to buy some under wears for my parents, my heart broke when I saw their under wears no one

deserves to wear such things. Ayanda insisted on taking me to the mall and I wanted to go out alone. Been spending so much time with him I feel suffocated at times he

has become my personal body guard it's like he thinks I want to escape, I'm not planning to I don't want to die young. I'm walking towards the door when I see one of the 50 something year old guard following me with an umbrella. This is really annoying how many times do I have to tell them to stop? I can run the bath, cook, do the laundry and hold my umbrella.

I walk outside it's blazing hot, I hardly leave the house, I spend lots of time in the lounge with my parents or in Ayanda's office working. We also share his home office. When I walk down the steps the guard opens the umbrella for me. I mean I'm just 5 steps away from the car. I take the umbrella and tell him to go back inside but he won't. I need to call a meeting now. I indicate to Ayanda that I'll be right back using my fingers. I walk back inside I call a quick meeting, all the guards working inside the house, maids and chefs. It takes 5 minutes to get everyone in the lounge.

"Look guys I know, I'm now married to your boss but that doesn't mean you have to clean up after me. I can run my own bath, do my own laundry, cook, clean and hold my umbrella. So please stop following me around. I'll continue doing the stuff I did when I first got here, that doesn't mean you'll lose your jobs okay?" I tell

them. I'm really annoyed by their behaviour.

"But madam" it's the old maid calling me madam again when I told her lots of times to stop, didn't she call me little girl when I first got here before I got married.

"Who told you to call me that, didn't I ask you to stop? Please call me by my name. I'm Mandy by the way" I tell them and walk out in a melo-dramatic manor but I'm really angry these people are so annoying I mean they are old enough to be my parents or grandparents but here they are calling me madam. I was busy talking I didn't see Ayanda peeping through the door listening to what I had to say. We get to the car at the same time. We drive off to another mall, he's smiling all the way to the mall. I wonder what's up. We go inside I buy what I want with him following me around. He's so tall which makes it funny. Every time we step into a room it becomes quiet and he keeps offering his black card and I keep declining. My money is running out but at least I'm doing something nice for my parents and I'll be getting paid soon. Today I decide to eat out, we go to Ocean Basket his favorite and we have prawns and I enjoy them.

Three hours later we head home.



~

Every time I forgive Ayanda for being abusive he starts all over again. I thought we good and we had a good marriage not my dream marriage but still we were good, I'm getting to know him and I see that we have so much in common.

Ayanda left when we got home from the mall yesterday, he got a call from some guy telling him that he needs to get to one of the hotels as soon as possible.

Five hours later he comes home in a foul mood. So I try to stay as far as possible but my mouth is a greater problem. I wake up from the same hospital bed again but this time I've been unconscious for 2 full weeks. I wake to see my parents sitting by my bedside looking worried. I'm discharged a week later. I can't really remember what really happened this time around and no one is willing to tell me, my mom wants to but my dad keeps threatening her.

The violent attacks become so frequent the next 2 weeks. He beats the crap out of me and then later he comes to bed and snuggle up to me. I want to push him away so bad but I'm scared,

what hurts the most is the fact that sometimes he beats me in front of my parents and they stand there helpless. Even though they are the reason I'm here, but being abused in front of them really breaks my heart more than they abuse do.

Last night I went to ask him if I could go to Joburg for my graduation he refused I tried to reason with him but he beat the shit out of me. I wake up with a sore body, I go to the bathroom to take a quick shower and change I need to work on some document. When I walk back to the bedroom, he's sitting there with a tray with all food I like. I ask him to sit in the couch I want to make the bed, he walks to the couch I make the bed and open the curtains. I walk to the couch and sit there, he offers breakfast I refuse to eat, I'm not hungry he can beat me if he wants to but I'm not eating.

~~

Seeing Mandy like this really breaks his heart.

*If only she'd keep quiet*

He thinks to himself. His heart also breaks each time she won't eat and she loves food. Even though he won't admit to his best friend

and grandfather, he has fallen for this annoying girl against his will.

He's supposed to hate women but there's something about her. She's so selfless hearing her tell the staff the last time to stop cleaning after her made him smile. He can't help but compare her with his ex-girlfriends she's different in every way and he sometimes hates it. When she came to him the other day to complain that they clean after her like she's an invalid he was surprised because he thought she'll complain that they missed a stain on one of her clothes or something. He finds himself showing affection like kissing her forehead, this is so not him. He never snuggled with anyone not even after sex with his ex-girlfriends. What she asks him next breaks his heart.

~~

Ayanda looks totally zoned out but I need to speak to him about something really important I hope it won't lead to other violent attacks.

*"Uhm Ayanda can I ask you something"* I

ask him and he nods. Suddenly I'm not

sure if I should continue I'm nervous.

“Next time you feel the need to beat me please don’t do it in front of my parents” I tell him in a shaky voice. Like I expected I see his hand moving towards me, I protect my face and bend. I won’t scream because my parents will know what is happening. I wait for him to attack me but he doesn’t, I stay like that maybe he’s waiting for me to get back up. But what he does next, surprises me we both freeze for a moment. He’s hugging me, and I can’t hold back the hurt and anger I weep like someone just died. He hugs me tight and kisses my head whispering some things but I don’t know what. Mr Nxumalo, Bova and my parents come rushing to our bedroom and I see relief in their face when they see that he’s hugging me and they silently close the door behind them.

## Chapter 8

It's been 3 days since I asked Ayanda not to beat me in front of my parents and he hasn't beaten me at all. There's a new guy he hired when the old man who was holding my umbrella retired. I thought he was in his 50's but he's in his late 60's. We are sitting around the table eating, I try to eat when my parents are around I don't want to stress them more.

"Mandy, we are heading home in 2 days." My mom tells me out of the blue.

"So quick, why are you guys leaving?" I ask them sadly. I know they've been here for over almost 2 months, but I don't want them to leave.

"We've over stayed our welcome" my dad replies looking at Ayanda who is frowning at his phone. Just when I think he's changing he throws them out. The idea of having them around keeps me sane, what am I going to do when they are no longer around?

"Can't you guys move to Durban so we can see each other more often" I ask them. "No, baby we can't afford

hotels” my mom replies.

I don't want to eat anymore I ask him not to beat me in front of my parents he decides to throw them out. I just nod sadly.

“Don't be so sad, we'll talk more often.

~~

My parents just left my heart feels heavy, Ayanda decided to buy them plane tickets, never seen them so happy. I'm a little sad cause I was supposed to leave with them for my graduation day tomorrow. Their plane left 15 minutes ago at 8:15am. Ayanda decided to take me out on a picnic. We're wearing star black. I'm wearing a black pencil skirt, blouse and sandals, he's wearing a black short, shirt and gladiator sandals. There's so much traffic, I'm graduating tomorrow but I push the thought at the back of my head, trying to focus on the day ahead. I hope it's a beautiful day.

We've been driving for 20 minutes when we enter a very beautiful park. *Wow* I say under my breath this is really beautiful. He parks the car when I move to open the door he tells me to sit still. *What is going on here?* I'm nervous now, hope he didn't come here to kill me. He opens the door for while



trying to hold the basket and 2 blankets when I try to help he shakes his head. I smile and thank him. He holds his basket in his left hand he puts the baskets under his arm. He uses his right hand to hold mine. At first it's awkward but I let him hold my hand. We walk in silence and I smile for the first time in weeks. We find a spot under a gum tree. He lays the blanket and tells me sit down I do. He sits and folds his legs, he's tall and he looks funny when he's sitting in that position. I can't hold back the laughter.

"What's funny" he asks frowning.

"You look funny in that position" I tell him laughing some more. He just smiles at me, such a beautiful smile pity he doesn't smile often.

"I took you here because I wanted to talk to you in a different environment. Judging from your character I thought you might like a picnic" he tells me looking very serious.

"Okay, is it something I did?" I ask him when he doesn't continue.

"No, it's the bad things I did. Look this may be a little difficult for me I've never apologized or explained myself to anyone" he tells me I just nod, I nod a lot lately.

"I'm not proud of the things I did. I don't mean to be abusive I just realized some things since the day I met you. You see my mom left me and my dad when I was 5 and he committed suicide few days after her disappearance. So I hated women till you came along. Woman asked me out a lot, some of them sleep with within an hour of knowing me. For the first time I met a woman who didn't want me and that's you. I started to feel something unfamiliar for you, the day you cooked for us" he tells me looking very serious. He opens the basket and gives me the messiest sandwich I've ever seen but it's my favourite so I smile and take the sandwich. It's white bread, butter, cheese and eggs. He tells me he made the food and surprisingly the sandwich is very delicious I thank him with a huge smile.

Then he continues, "My mom used to scream at me for no reason and hear you scream at me brings back those memories and I just can't help it, it makes me angry and it reminds me of the reason I hate women. She'd starve me and ignore me even when I cried and when I told my dad when he returned from his endless long trips she'd say I'm lying and he'd beat the shit out of me. What I'm trying to say is that I'm sorry I promise to stop." he tells me.

"The other day I didn't scream at you, but you did beat me. Why did you?"  
I ask him.

"I was hoping you wouldn't ask me that question" he tells me and goes mute looking up for so long I think he won't answer.

"I just didn't want you being away from me, I have fallen for you and I hated myself for it and I hated you too because you made me break a promise to myself to never love a woman. I'm supposed to hate woman not fall for them. You were supposed to depend on me even for the smallest things" he tells me looking at his hands. I don't know how to respond to that.

"I love this sandwich, even though it's messy" I tell him smiling.

"I enjoy looking at you eat, the singing and dancing. I never ate with the guards but I did when you came along because I enjoy watching you eat. I also like the fact you don't eat small portions and you ask for more when you're not full. I don't remember one of my exes asking for more food no matter what. You're very different."

"Different how? In a bad way?" I ask him really curiously.

"You eat you enjoy food, you think for the next person. I'm just

mad at myself for not getting to know you better. I got to spend time with your parents they told me that you were supposed to start a new job the day after you came here. I also learnt that you have a BA Degree in Journalism you were doing a BA Hons in Communication Theory last year and that you graduating tomorrow. I've had casual girlfriends and none of them have any kind of qualifications they are after my status and money while you worked hard you even built your parents a house." We chat for hours and I really enjoy myself and I might be falling for him. It's time to head home, he tells me that he has 2 surprises for me at home, now I can't wait.

When we get home we are welcomed by the same guard I told him I don't trust and he brushed me off. This guy gives me creeps, I can feel him staring at me all the time. I asked Ayanda to move him outside he refused.

"Where's my surprise?" I ask him when we get home. He tells me to be patient, when we get to our room there's an orange knee length dress, black heels with an envelope, I look inside the envelope, there 2 plane tickets flying out tomorrow morning to Joburg.

"Oh God does this mean what I think it means?" I ask him really happy.

"Yes, I mean you only obtain BA Hons in Communication Studies once" he tells me smiling. I scream with joy and give him a hug, he freezes for a moment then hugs me back, and before I know it he kisses me. I've never kissed a guy before, I tell him he says no problem and he teaches me to and I feel stupid and a little uncomfortable. Before I know it I'm naked this is really embarrassing I try to hide but he tells me not to.

I wake up naked with a huge hand around my waist. My body is sore, but I just lay there, Ayanda is still sleeping. Never saw him sleeping before he looks peaceful and handsome.

"Stop starrng or I'll think you want some more" he tells me with his eyes closed. My God I thought he's sleeping. I fall back to sleep again and I wake up 4 hours later. We have a flight in 3 hours I hear water running in the bathroom, I'll use my old bathroom, I quickly wear my nightdress and gown and I open the door to go to my old room when I see the creepy guy. I try to ignore him but what he says makes me freeze.

"How was your first time" he asks laughing. I run to Ayanda I find

him wearing his bvd running a bath.

"What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost" he asks frowning.

"It's that creepy guy. He asked how my first time was" I tell him.

He laughs and tells me that it's written in my face that I just has sex and it was obvious that I was a virgin. Even when I insist that there's something about this guy, he just shrugs. He tells me to use the bath he'll use the shower but we need to hurry. 15 minutes we're both done.

We are wearing star black again after all it's our favourite colour. I know it might sound childish but I love it when we wear matching clothes. We are heading towards the car when Bova comes to give me a hug and tells me that he's proud of me. He hugs me so tight I feel like I'll suffocate, I feel the guy's eyes at the back of my neck.

"Bova can I talk to you for a minute" I ask him I need to tell him about the guard but Ayanda tells me that we need to run or we'll miss the flight, I try but they both force me into the car. I tell Ayanda about the guy but he tells me that if I insist they will run a background check on him but I know he's

just brushing me off. The flight takes 2 hours we arrive in Joburg at 10:20am with my parents waiting for us. I'm graduating at 2pm no time to go home and change I use one of the bathrooms to change while Ayanda is sorting out my gown, he refused to let me pay for it. I look so good in the dress. Ayanda keeps telling me that I'm beautiful and I like hearing that each time. We walk to the auditorium all the bitches on campus keep staring at my husband. We are ushered to the auditorium when I'm directed to my seat Ayanda pulls me into a hug and tells me that he's proud of me.

Graduations are super boring. The ceremony starts and our names are called, when it's my turn I look at my family Ayanda keeps blowing me kisses.

"Mandy Madondo, Obtained BA Hons with a distinction" I hear my mom saying all the clan names, my dad and Ayanda are clapping I'm so happy I almost cry. An hour later we are done. I walk up to them I receive more hugs, I hope things are always like this.

We head home using the car Ayanda rented we're leaving again today, I feel really sad but Ayanda needs to attend some important meeting and he doesn't want me far from him. Now this

is how I imagined my relationship with my husband. We stay for 2 hours, I leave them money for food and other needs. When we leave the neighbours are peeping through their curtains. I fall asleep as soon as we take our seats in the plane. I'm waken up later by Ayanda telling me we're at the airport we walk to the parking at the creepy guys is the one fetching us and he keeps stealing glances on the side mirror he makes me so uncomfortable. I'm telling Bova about this when we get home.

~~

For the past 6 weeks I haven't been feeling well, Ayanda even had to cancel some of his meeting to look after me, he keeps following me around and it's frustrating he won't let me do anything he even bathe me and he keeps smiling at me like he knows something I don't. Bova also brushed me off when I told him about the guard. Ayanda tells me that I'll find him in the dining room when I'm done, I'm putting my shoes on I refused to let him help me I'm not an invalid I'm just a little sick.

When I open the door the guard is there, don't even know his name and I don't care. He smiles when he sees me.

"How's the pregnancy treating you" he asks me giving me that creepy



smile again. I freeze for a

moment but then like always I ignore him and complain to Ayanda. I find him sitting with Bova when I tell them what the guard told me they laugh and tell me that he's not lying I'm really pregnant. My world spins for a moment, I suddenly feel dizzy. I can't believe this. This is not how I had imagined everything. I'm too young to be a mother. Ayanda did this on purpose. I can't even eat. I tell Ayanda that he'll find me in bed but I don't make to the bedroom.

## **Chapter 9**

Ayanda goes to bed after 3 hours, they have been talking about business, he wants to buy another building. But when he gets to their room Mandy is not there, the bed looks exactly how it looked in the morning. He walks to the bathroom maybe she's vomiting or she fainted in the bathroom but she's not there, maybe she's working she's a workaholic he walks to the study she's not there, he's starting to panic he walks to the library she's not there. He runs around the house looking for the new guard he's also not here.

*"Eeh boss he left 2 or 3 hours ago he said you sent him to drop off*

some package” Ayanda’s worst nightmare has just been confirmed. He calls Bova. He comes running and asks what’s up he’s never heard his best friend of 23 years panic.

“What’s up?” but Ayanda is too distraught to talk. The guard tells Bova what just happened. *Oh God Mandy did tell me about this guy and I brushed her off.*

Bova quickly runs to his office to run a background check and what he sees also confirms his worst nightmare.

~~

Before I can enter the bedroom, the guy puts some cloth on my mouth, the cloth has some chemical which makes me dizzier, and I’m thinking...

*Didn’t I warn Ayanda and Bova about this cree...* I black out I wake up but I can’t move I’m chained into a chair and the room is very dark. I’ve been kidnapped. I’m so mad at Bova and Ayanda didn’t I warn them about this new guard. I’m soo thirsty and hungry I wonder how long I’ve been unconscious. Someone open the door walks in and turns on the light. “Sleeping beauty is finally up” that’s a compliment I guess or he’s mocking me. The guy walks into the room with some men. I’ve never seen the faces before.

“You tried to warn your husband but because he doesn’t care about you he didn’t listen. I think he wanted you kidnapped.” He tells me smiling. I’m not going to say anything.

“Aren’t you going to say anything, I heard that you talk a lot. Must’ve annoyed that husband of yours” says one of the guys.

“Are you in pain?” he asks faking a heart break.

“Nah, she’s used to such things, the husband used to beat the shit out of her and made his mom the excuse” he tells them laughing.

“He has become a softie, taking his wife on picnics attending graduations. Been waiting for this day for years now and I couldn’t believe my ears when I was told that he got married” he goes on to announce once the laughter has died down.

I don’t know how to feel and I’m just going to keep quiet my mouth has put in me in so much trouble, if possible I want to leave as soon as possible. My stomach grumbles.

“Bheki her stomach is grumbling” the other guy tells my kidnapper. *Hmm so his name is Bheki.*

“She has to eat for the baby’s sake” he tells them while he’s busy typing on his phone.

“She’s not having that baby. I’ll kill both the baby and wife like he did to my family” says one of the guys. His voice has so much venom he must hate Ayanda so much. I don’t know if I should be

happy or be frightened by his statement.

Ayanda is cruel and abusive but I know he'd never kill a person especially a child. So I just keep quiet. They are busy talking amongst themselves and laughing. I'm so tired and hungry when I ask for water they tell me no. Instead of begging I just keep quiet.

~~

I don't know today's date or how long I've been here but it's been a week since I woke up and they keep serving me my favourite food I really don't have a choice I no longer have to think for myself only. I need to put the little one first. I'm still chained on the chair my butt hurts so much to a point I wept.

After 2 more days they unchain me and the first thing I do is to put the hand on my tummy.

"Have you decided on any names yet?" he asks casually as if we're best friends and it's normal for us to talk about such things.

I just keep quiet he walks towards me and he starts shouting saying he's talking to me and I need to answer but still I keep quiet he slaps me so hard I see stars. I quickly put my hands in my stomach trying to protect my baby. He keeps asking and I don't answer his hand keeps connecting with my

cheeks. This goes on for some time but still I keep quiet, I'm not going to discuss my baby with him, they'd rather kill me that's what they are planning anyway.

~~~

"You've been here for 5 months and your husband hasn't come to get you. He clearly doesn't care about you. And the baby, *oops* I forgot that you lost the baby" he tells me mocking me.

When I think about my baby, I feel tears running down my cheeks. It's been 5 months I lost the baby a month back. I hardly bath I only take a bath during my periods and I once took a long bath when I miscarried there was so much blood, Bheki put something inside the water. And they hardly feed me. Instead they keep beating me when they talk and I don't answer. They chain me most of the time. And I'm really starting to believe all the things they are saying about Ayanda, he clearly wanted me gone I told him about this guy for many times but he laughed it off and he hasn't come to rescue me.

"I think you should talk to your husband now" the same guy who said he'll kill me and my baby walks in dialing on his phone. So they know his digits by heart they clearly know each other. So the

whole park thing was just a game to him even Bheki knows about it, I can't believe how stupid and naïve I was.

"You bastard" Ayanda's voice booms in the room, he sound really angry but then again he might be acting.

"Here's your wife, do you want to talk to her" the guy asks.

"Yes" he replies. He tells him he needs to learn to be polite otherwise he won't see me. He keeps begging the guy and they laugh each time. He heads towards me his phone facing in my direction I see him and Bova looking at me. I haven't had a bath in 2 weeks and they look all fresh. I don't want to talk to him. He keeps telling me that he'll come for me and he keeps asking how I'm doing I just stare at him not saying anything. *How dare he?* Acting as if he cares.

"Time's up" Bheki announces walking towards me. "Please I need more time to talk to my wife" he pleads.

"Do you want to talk to him?" Bheki asks me. I tell him no and I can see the hurt and shock on his face, which makes the other guy happy.

"Why are you doing this Dave?" I hear him asking.

“I’m doing what you did to me 5 years ago. You killed my wife and our unborn child. I just killed yours too and your wife is next” he tells him. I can hear Ayanda screaming no and Dave hangs up. “Love, our maid just quit, I think we need to use this girl here” some woman walks in and tells Dave that. He shakes his head no but she whispers something. I see him smiling clearly liking the idea. The room stinks, I stink I haven’t had a bath in 2 weeks. They unchain me the woman tells me to follow her and I do. She gives me a bucket full of water and points me outside. I’m going to bath outside with all their guards looking? I try to beg her, I even go down on my knees but she kicks me so hard in the chest I stop breathing for a minute. I walk outside to take that bath. I need to so I just take off all the clothes and bath. All the guards run towards me the next thing I know they are all surrounding some of them are grabbing my private parts.

“Now boys I was going to let you have your way with her but you need to work now back to work” Bheki tells them.

I finish bathing and the woman brings me my new uniform with one underwear. I thank her after putting the clothes on she tells me to follow her she shows me around the house and tells me what is needed, I can do this, clean the house, cook, do the

laundry and iron.

~~

It's been a year since he last saw his wife. He has tried to look for her but he can't find her, it seems they keep moving around the country. Bova came up with an idea, to ask airport workers to look out for Dave and Bheki as soon as they see him they should notify them.

~~

I look at the calendar and I see that it's been a year since I've been kidnapped. We keep moving around the country and we use cars not planes because Dave thinks that's one of the ways Ayanda is using to find me, but I honestly doubt it.

I've been doing house chores and entertaining their guests, when Dave is not around they'd keep grabbing my private parts.

Chapter 10

Yesterday was our one year anniversary I wonder if Ayanda did anything special or even celebrate. Today we are in Cape Town we got here last night but Bheki and Dave are not with us, they have a deal they need to close. So it's just me and Kelly Dave's wife. She's a happy person when Dave is not home maybe she's also a victim of domestic violence. Today I'm cooking her favorite meal she hardly eats and it's strange of her to ask me to cook her favourite meal and sit with her. She's a bit of a loner. Maybe just like me she's the only child and doesn't have friends.

Been cooking for the last 5 hours, I dish up her favourite meal *papa* and *mogodu*. I hardly ever eat but today I'm hungry this is also my dad's favourite meal so I'll dish up my plate and go to my room to eat.

"You can eat with me today" she tells me when I'm leaving the room with my plate. That is a little shocking but I go back to the kitchen island and we eat in silence which has me wondering why she wanted to sit with me.

"It must've been hard for you when you found out that your husband is a mafia king" she tells me out of the blue. That shocks

me I almost chock the food in my mouth.

“I’m married to Ayanda Nxumalo” I tell her because I think she’s confusing me with someone else. “Don’t tell me you don’t know what he really does for a living, those hotels are just his way of keeping people out of his business. I mean you can’t be that loaded and never have a business people can see or else they will start talking” she tells me but I don’t think I’ve been really listening. I mean why would my parents sell me to a mafia king? Just like with Ayanda every time I forgive my parents something comes up again. *Mafia King* I can’t stop thinking about those 2 words and I can’t hear Kelly talking until she asks me something.

“Are you listening to me?” she asks. I shake my head no.

“I said tomorrow we’ll go to a movie at 9pm. There’s this movie I want to watch” she tells me and walks out of the room.

I wash the dishes and walk over to my room and for the first time in months I can’t sleep. *How could my parents do this to me? Their only child?* I keep thinking of my conversation with Kelly until I fall asleep.

I'm waken up by Kelly she hands me a phone. I'm hoping it's my parents but it's not.

"You need to clean my office, don't touch anything, don't use the phone I will know" Bheki tells me and hangs up. I hate it when people do that but what can I say? I'm his slave now. I wake up AND take a quick bath make the bed and begin with my chores after I've served Kelly her breakfast.

I walk over to his office after cleaning the house. It's a huge room with cameras almost everywhere. I walk over to clean just when I'm about to finish Kelly walks into the office and tells me that the electricity has just went off giving me some paper. **The electricity will be off for the next 3 hours** *meaning the cameras aren't working.*

When she leaves the room I quickly rush to the laptop at the desk I switch it on and it doesn't require a password, that's strange I mean why would he not lock his laptop maybe it's just a laptop nothing important is here but still I'm going to search through it and what I find shocks the shit out of me. Dave, Ayanda and Bova have know each other from childhood there are pictures of them together there's a video of them at a beach and Ayanda is dancing

and they are laughing because he's so bad at dancing which also has me smiling. I wish I knew this side of him the cheerful, smiley and playful Ayanda not the abusive monster I married. I continue searching until I find pictures with Dave and some pregnant woman she looks so much like Kelly but she's very short, so Kelly married her sister's husband, this is shocking I'd never do that to my sister.

This laptop has shocking news or secrets because what I see next is more shocking and I call Kelly forgetting that I wasn't supposed to snoop around Bheki's things. She comes running into the office and when she sees that I am using Bheki's laptop she takes her phone out dialing I think she's calling Dave I run to her and take the phone from her and quickly hang up and push her towards the laptop what she sees also shocks her. Her husband is gay and Bheki is the partner. After recovering from the shock she scrolls through the pictures some of the pictures they are lying in bed or kissing. We keep scrolling and seeing their pics together she looks shocked but not hurt, even though Ayanda has put me through this I'd go mad when I find out that he's dating someone else especially a man. When she's seen enough she sits down but I'm

not done yet, I go through the videos but I am more shocked if I thought Bheki's sexuality is shocking then this has Kelly in tears. Bheki is the one who killed Kelly's sister and her unborn child but I don't know he'd place the blame on Ayanda and now I

lost my baby too over what Bheki did. Kelly is crying besides me, I understand it's her sister. I'm busy consoling her forgetting that the electricity will be back on.

I take her to the lounge, she's crying. I think she has to tell her parents. She tells me that she needs to lie down and Dave calls she doesn't want to pick up but I'm scared what if he comes immediately I tell her to answer and lie. *She looks like she's good at lying anyway.* She answers I can hear her telling him that she's okay she was watching a sad movie and it got her crying. When she hangs up she tells me about her sister and how her parents forced her marry Dave, no matter how much she tries she can't bring herself to love him. She had a fiancé when they got married about 3 year ago. She also tells me how Dave tapped her phone so she couldn't call the guy. She tried to use an old maid's phone but she snitched on her and she was badly beaten, her car also has a tracker and she's not allowed to buy in cash she has to use the cards so that he will know what she bought, but I had an idea.

When I told her she smiled for the first in months and she has a beautiful smile pity she doesn't smile often like Ayanda. We take a quick bath she calls Dave to tell her that we're going to a mall she

needs new clothes she'll have her phone with her and she's leaving with me. Judging from the smile he didn't ask too many questions. But because everything is tracked even what and where she buys we have to come with a plan for her to withdraw cash we go to Edgars walk around take a dress to the counter but she doesn't pay for it she tells them that she forgot her bank card and asks the cashier to keep the dress for her she'll pay as soon as possible. We head to the ATM just after she withdrew cash Dave calls and ask why she withdrew from an ATM she tells him that the speed point paying equipment are not working and lucky for her he buys that story. We head to Edgars I buy a phone and she pays for the dress in cash. After buying the phone she dials her ex fiancé's digits he picks and her face brightens she talks to him for like 5 minutes telling him that they will be able to meet today in the afternoon she needs a favour. They are still talking when Dave calls she tells the guy that she'll call back hangs up and gives me the phone to call Ayanda what am I going to say to this guy? I'm so nervous but then I don't know his digits I'll call my mom. I'm going home soon. I dial her number.

"Hello" she answers.

"Mama" I cry when I hear her voice.

“Sipho it’s Mandy” she tells my dad in a shaking voice.

I hear my dad calling Ayanda and Bova they all come to the phone and they speak all at once it's hard to answer. For the first time in months I smile I even forget that I was sold to a mafia king by my parents. I wait for them to finish speaking then I tell them we'll speak later I might be coming home soon. They all complain when I refuse to tell them the exact date or where I am but Ayanda might try to track the location I was calling from that's if he cares even though I was happy to talk to them after so long but I can't stop thinking about their betrayal it cuts deep. I'm busy talking when Kelly pulls my hand, we're walking towards the exit. According to her Dave asked why she's standing at the same spot not moving. Shit this guy is something else. We get to her place after 1 in the afternoon she calls the ex-fiancé and they talk for an hour inside the pantry because they are no cameras there.

Chapter 11

We make a plan, Kelly calls Dave to ask for his permission to go watch a movie but he refuses and hangs up. We sit there in silence what are we going to do now? I can't call Ayanda and tell him our

current location it will make things worse there are guards all over this place. We're running out of options and we need to leave because Dave will be here in 2 days and we won't be able to run away then.

"What are we going to do?" Kelly asks me crying. I tell her I don't know, I can feel tears in my eyes too, I just want to go home. We sit there in silence both thinking of a plan to leave this house. I wonder where Kelly will go, what if her ex fiancé has moved on? Her phone rings it's Dave she picks up and they talk for more than 5 minutes which is really unusual I'm not listening to what's she's saying because I'm busy thinking of other plans of escaping here. She hangs up and tells me that we're leaving in 20 minutes we are going to the movies and we won't be back here ever again. I smile and go to take a quick shower I wear her black maxi dress and I comb my afro and I wear my black converse half boot All Star. We take Kelly's car Audi Q3 SUV, she tells me to call her ex fiancé and tell him to meet us by the mall and he should bring the equipment they were talking about. I call him and tell him, 10 minutes later we park by the mall Dave calls she tells her there's a road block he buys the story.

A tall and handsome guy walks towards us with a huge smile Kelly gets off the car and runs towards him and they hug for some time, Kelly says something to him, he nods and walks towards a VW car comes with some bag. He greets me and they both get in the back seat and later I hear a vibrating sound I look back he has cut some flesh on Kelly's left arm and he takes out something inside the wound it looks like a memory card apparently it's some chirp that helps Ayanda locate her whereabouts. We walk out to the guy's car I don't know his name because Kelly keeps calling him baby. When we get to his car we hear Kelly's phone ringing, she tells me to call Ayanda and tell him to meet us at the airport I don't feel like going back to *that* house again it'll bring back bad memories, but it's too late the guy has already bought us tickets to Durban. Ayanda tells me that he'll use his private jet because Dave has connections in every airport he should get here in 3 hours he'll also call his connections. I'm sitting at the back seat, Kelly is sitting in the passenger seat and her baby is driving, we get to the airport 30 minutes later and like Ayanda said there is a road block I call him he tells me that someone wearing a black suit will come to us but almost every guy is wearing black I tell him the number plate to make things easier, they are about to board the plane, what the

hell was he doing? Kelly and her man must really love each other because they are chitchatting as if it hasn't been 3 years since they were forced apart.

Twenty minutes later a guy comes but I have my doubts until he calls Ayanda and he tells me it's okay we need to disguise, the guy gives us 2 maroon wigs and very big spectacles we look like nerds. I hate the wig but I don't have a choice now do I? We walk to some room, 2 hours till Ayanda gets here.

The longest 2 hours of my life. I see Siya walking towards us, he talks with the guard and right behind him we see Dave looking around, he looks really mad. Siya tells us that Dave knows him he'll see that it's us, he tells us where Ayanda is waiting. Suddenly I don't want to see him and my parents.

Do you really want to go back to that house and see the people who betrayed you? The little voice in my head keeps asking, I must've been standing there listening to the voice in my head when Kelly pulls me to where Siya directed me. We walk like normal people but I can feel Kelly shaking besides me she jumps when Dave talks right behind us.

"What do you mean you can't find them?" he scream at the phone I feel bad for whoever he's talking to. We walk outside there's a

plane, Ayanda and Bova are standing by the steps. Ayanda smiles and rushes towards me he hugs me but I don't hug him back. How could he look so fresh,

clearly life went on for him while I suffered? He keeps asking me questions but I don't answer I don't want to talk to them. We board on the plane, they keep talking to me but I'm just quiet I'm too mad to talk. The hostess tells us to fasten our seat belts when I look out the window I see Dave running towards the plane but it's too late.

I must've fallen asleep I wake up to see Ayanda carrying me bridal style I can walk.

"Put me down" I tell him. He doesn't instead he keeps walking towards a car.

"Put me down" I scream enough to sting his ancestor's ears. People at the airport turn to look at us, he puts me down. I follow them behind I'm too mad I don't see my parents running towards me. They also hug me I don't hug them back. My mom keeps kissing me and I keep wiping where she kisses me. I see them frowning at me Ayanda included. There's a mini taxi waiting for us I can see one of the guards standing there so I walk towards the car, I get in and wait for the rest to get in so we can go, I need to sleep.

Thirty minutes later we get to Ayanda's house, I don't wait for the car to stop since I'm sitting by the door, I get off and rush to the room I was using before I was forced into marriage. I lock myself inside and I go straight to bed.

~~~~

Been inside this room for 4 days now. My parents, Ayanda and Bova have been knocking but I never answered. Ayanda threatened to break down the door but I don't care. Today I'm hungry and I can't ignore the grumbling stomach forever. I couldn't even sleep well I feel weak I'm even shaking. I take a shower and wear my black short and blouse with socks no shoes. I make the bed and go downstairs I'm washing my plate when a security guard walks in with Ayanda he's asking how I'm doing I keep quiet, he keeps talking I can hear the frustration in his voice. He takes threatening steps towards me I look at the gun in the guard's trousers belt, if he beats me I won't hesitate. He chokes me, I pull the gun quickly and I point it in his forehead I hear the guard gasp.

"So what are you going to shoot me? Can you even shoot?" he



asks in a cocky voice. There are some things my dearest husband don't know about me, like for one I'm a straight shooter. I visited a

shooting range more than 5 times I was going to buy myself a gun being a journalist is not really a safe career sometimes. I smile and point at his chest.

“Shoot me” he tells me laughing, I shoot him in the chest before he can even recover from the cocky laugh. I walk towards him the guard steps in my way, I point the gun at him he quickly runs out the kitchen.

“You still think I can’t shoot?” I ask my husband with the same cocky tone but my voice has so much venom I can hardly recognize it as my own. His eyes are showing the white thingy he’s not responding instead he has short breaths and he’s gasping. Bova walks in, looks at Ayanda and he walk towards me but I shoot both his legs. All the guards walk in with their guns pointed towards me but Bova tell them not to shoot. He’s in so much pain I can tell from his voice, Ayanda is lying on the floor still gasping for air and right now I don’t care if he dies or not.

“Didn’t I try to tell you about that guard” I ask Bova I’m standing above him. I point the gun towards Ayanda’s forehead, Bova screams NO, but I still shoot Ayanda but in the knees he gasps in

pain. I walk out the kitchen, my parents block my way.

“Don’t make me shoot you too” I tell them with the same venom.

## **Chapter 12**

It’s been a week since Ayanda woke up from the hospital bed in his house. He’s been unconscious for 3 full weeks. Bova is still using crutches. The hatred he has towards women has just got worse. Mandy stole one of his new cars Audi Q5 SUV and sold it at some car dealership for five hundred thousand a car he bought a week ago for eight hundred thousand. He blames everyone for making him believe that Mandy is different. He has contacted all the airports around the country he also put up her picture up on the internet with one hundred thousand sum reward but if only he knew that that will be a very big mistake because more than 50 people called claiming that they know where she lives. She has clearly planned all of this probably from the first day she met him and saw that he is loaded.

“Your wife is boss” Bova tells Ayanda laughing so hard you’d swear he wasn’t shot.

“She think is she’s smart. Told you she’s a bitch” he tells his best friend of 24 years, hoping the event that took place 4 weeks back will convince him that this bitch is just like his mom.

“I like her” he tells him still laughing as if this whole thing is a joke.

*I will find this bitch and I will kill her.*

And lucky for him he did find him after 2 hours of saying those words in his mind.

~~~

It’s been a month since I ran away from Ayanda’s house I know that when he finds me he will kill me but I honestly don’t care. I live in a flat in Durban I took his car, bought it and I bought the 3 bedroom apartment and I found other 3 freelance jobs same as the old ones I was doing before I got kidnapped. Ayanda and Bova hacked my PC and sent my old boss emails telling them I was kidnapped but when I emailed them it was too late they had already replaced me. I wonder how Kelly is doing. I’m sipping coffee, there’s a knock on the door. Who might that be because I don’t have friends and Ayanda is looking for me, I don’t even buy groceries myself I send one of the security guards. Maybe it’s one of the guards.

But when I open the door it’s Ayanda and Bova. Bova is smiling at

me like a proud parent and I can't say the same about my dearest husband. He yanks me by the top I'm wearing but you see I was waiting for this day so I quickly take the knife by the door and stab his hand. When he releases me I quickly push the door but he uses the other hand to block it and Bova uses some key to open the burglar. I quickly run into my room to fetch my gun. Like I said I've prepared myself for this day and before I can even shoot Ayanda shoots me first in the arm as a warning but he just declared war so I shoot him back in the shoulder while I'm falling. I'm lying on the floor when he walks over, I try to stand up but I'm not as quick as him he kicks me in the injured arm I fall back down I can feel the pain but I won't cry I'm done crying. I reach out for my gun and he quickly kicks it under the couch. I took self-defense classes but I'm not quick at this but I'll fight for myself, I'm tired of being abused by this monster.

"So you want to fight for yourself?" he asks me really angry. He's clearly not used to women fighting for themselves. But he has messed with the wrong girl. He gives me a chance to stand he swings a punch my way but I block him and kick his private parts so hard I hear him scream and I hear Bova

laughing, I run for my gun I pull the trigger but there are no bullets. *Shit*. He kicks me so hard in the chest I black out.

When I wake up the wound in my arm has been stitched, makes me wonder how long I've blacked out. I'm chained into a chair this brings bad memories, the kind of memories I tried so hard to forget, the memories that are the reason for my nightmares. I can't help but think about my baby and I feel tears in my cheeks just then Ayanda and Bova walk in.

"We are not so strong now are we?" Ayanda makes the comment walking towards me. I won't tell him. He unchains me but this is too much I'm not in the mood to fight, so if he wants to kill me then cool. I have nothing to live for. I just sit in the chair, I'm soo thirsty and hungry but I won't say anything because he's going to make me beg. He talks I don't answer which makes him very mad he starts beating me but I'm not going to fight back. I just realized that I had nothing to live for not even my parents or the baby. Once I think about my baby I can't help it, it hurts so much. I lost my baby in a similar situation. Once it clicks to him that I won't fight back this time he storms off.

“Here are the pain killers” Bova gives me some box and walks out clearly they won’t chain me on the chair. I take the box there are 12 pills and I drink all of them, I have nothing to live for.

Chapter 13

I don't know why I'm still alive.

I’ve been to this room for so many times I even lost count. My parents, Bova and Mr Nxumalo are sitting at my bedside looking all worried. Mr Nxumalo is not smiling today, I wonder what’s up. “You’re finally up. We were so worried” my mom tells me in a shaky voice.

“You shouldn’t be, I mean when you sold me to a mafia king what did you expect?” I ask them. I mean they knew that the Nxumalos are dangerous but still they made a deal with them.

“Don’t talk like that” my mom tells me but I’m tired of keeping quiet. “I have nothing to live for” I tell them.

“Don’t talk like that...” my dad replies but I don’t give him a chance to

finish.

“I have nothing to live for. I mean my parents sold me to heartless man I was kidnapped for more than a year no one tried to find me I had to find my way home. I lost my baby because of someone’s sins. I told Ayanda about the guard but he never listened, clearly he wanted me kidnapped. He beats the shit out of me for no reason but then what did I expect I’m here to repay the loan you took. What did you even do with the money baba” I ask my dad’. Like honestly what did they do?

“So I might as well kill myself and die a painless and fast death than to be killed by my dearest husband or his enemies. I need to sleep can you leave me in peace”

~~

Ayanda is scared of going inside the room his wife is laying in, he always stands at the door. The fact that he’s the reason she tried to kill herself doesn’t sit well with him, but he’s not a saint he has killed people before but for some reason he doesn’t want Mandy’s blood in his hands even when he vowed to kill her. There’s something about this girl even though he won’t admit to anyone not even to himself he admires Mandy, no woman has tried to stand up for herself, he used to beat his ex- girlfriends too but they thought it’s a sign of love. He always chose the stupid ones

because according to him that's how women should be, **stupid**. But this wife of his is brave and intelligent the total opposite of the women he wants. Hearing her tell them about the baby broke his heart. He also wanted the baby but he also knew Dave wouldn't let the kid live.

~~

I've been trying to sleep for the last 30 minutes but I can't, I wish I could read something to keep my mind off things. I press the button on the side table with the hope that the doctor or nurse or the maid will come. If I knew Ayanda would answer and come I wouldn't use it.

"You called for someone" he tells me when he walks into the room.

"Yes, but not you" I tell him, Bova also enters.

"Ayanda tells me Kelly told him you found something on Bheki's laptop about my wife" Dave also walks into the room like he owns it. I feel betrayed all over again, how could they bring Dave to the house after what he did to me. The hurt, anger and hatred that I have kept inside me just explodes, I cry so hard especially for my baby, I'm too weak to say anything. Ayanda holds me while I'm

crying. I need a hug, but still I can't believe I let him hold me.

“It’s okay” he tells me.

“No, it’s not. It’s your fault I lost the baby even when I got here you didn’t bother to ask about the baby” I tell him.

“I was scared to ask” he tells me. For the first time since I got here there’s tenderness in his voice. This is the person I fell in love with not the monster I married. I let him hold me.

I honestly have mixed emotions when it comes to Ayanda I insult him when he’s holding me when he sits down I ask him to hold me.

“I don’t want to see you” I tell Dave and he leaves the room.

“Mandy I’m so sorry I brushed you off that time you told me about Bheki” Ayanda tells me.

“That won’t change anything will it? Will your sorry ass bring my baby back will it undo all the things I went through?” I ask him I’m still angry but I still want him to hold me.

“I waited for you to come for me, but you never did and I’m sorry but I still believe all the stories Dave and Bheki fed me” I tell him pushing him away from me. Just then the doctor walks in, I’m so tired of seeing this man’s face and the sympathy in his eyes. He tells me I’m free to go. I’ve been here for 3 days now and I have a deadline, I don’t think I want to stay here anymore I don’t know if I

still want to stay married to Ayanda. I need some more sleep I tell him I want to go back to the flat. He doesn't want me to but I need to leave, this house has so many bad memories. He tells me to think things through, this is really frustrating. He takes me to his bedroom and everyone is sitting there, my parents, Bova, Kelly and her man. I'm so happy to see her.

"Kelly how have you been? You look so happy" she looks so happy and young she shows me the ring on her finger. I'm so happy for her, she's glowing.

"I'm so happy for you" I tell her she smiles back.

"Mandy we need to talk. Bova tells us that you want to move out" my mom tells me. Bova has been listening all along.

"I also don't want to stay married to Ayanda. I want to file for divorce and I don't want anything from him. I will continue working I can support myself" I announce. They all gasp like it's not something they expected.

"I know it's my fault" Dave announces when he walks in.

“You see one of the reasons I want to move out. This guy killed my baby but he’s always here even when I told Ayanda I don’t want him here he still allows him to enter this bedroom” I tell them pointing at Dave. I mean I told him how I feel about him.

“Please don’t go” my mom begs.

“What’s in for you? What kind of a mother are you, you know I’m not happy but still you want me to stay?” I ask her raising my voice the nerve of this woman. I feel like screaming my lungs out. If they don’t let me leave I’ll kill myself this time around. I don’t want to stay married to Ayanda I want to leave and never look back. I must’ve fallen asleep while my parents were talking I’m too tired to talk. I wake up an hour later Ayanda is the only person in the room he’s sitting there looking at me like he’s plotting something dangerous maybe he wants to kill me.

“Plotting my death?”

I ask him. “No, I don’t want to kill you” “But you did”

“I’ll admit I did when you left me for dead and sold my car” “I don’t want to

stay married to you”

He doesn't say anything.

“*Ungizwile?* (Did you hear me)” I ask him

“*Yebo* (Yes) but you're not getting a

divorce” he tells me. I can't believe

my ears I'm not asking him I'm telling

him.

“I packed your bag while you slept, we're going away on a honey

moon” he tells me. I don't know how to answer that, is this guy

serious?

“At a time like this, you're thinking of a honey moon?”

“You need to clear your head and I need to too. I think we should

deal with what you went through alone” he tells me. I don't know

what to say, I know I'll go to the honey moon whether I like it or

not. So I walk to bathroom.

“I'll bathe you” he tells me I'm too tired to argue with him and I

need to be taken care of. So I let him bathe me, when he touches

me I feel like putting all the things behind me and stay married to

him but then my heart doesn't want to stay. I have fallen for this

husband of mine even after all the bad things he did and put me

through. Now I understand why the women don't leave their

abusive partners. My heart is betraying me and I can't believe this.

Chapter 14

My parents seem happy, when we leave. I just want to rest. Ayanda still won't tell me where we are going and I need to work, I took one of his many laptops since mine is still at my flat. I am going to be working for the next hour or so it's not something big I just need to write about some business then I'm free for the next 2 weeks. When I get into the car I open the laptop lid but it requires a password so I need to wait for Ayanda who's busy giving instructions. My parents are standing by the door waving at me, I feel like ignoring them but then again I can't so I smile and wave back it's hard to stay mad when people are happy for you. Ayanda soon joins me but won't give me the password, when I tell him I'll miss the deadline he tells me it's what he wants, but he's too tired to stay up he falls asleep holding my hand. I take out my phone and use it I'm half way through when we get to the airport. He looks so peaceful and cute when he's sleeping. Without thinking I kiss his forehead and I let my lips linger there for some time. "Although I'd like us to stay like this, we have a flight to catch" I jump when I hear him talk. "I thought you're sleeping"

“That was 5 minutes ago. I just needed to close my eyes for a few minutes” he tells me getting off the car. When I get off he holds my hand, how am I supposed to type when my other hand is not free I need both hands.

“We’re going to use the private jet” he tells me. We go through some door and the jet is already there waiting. This is quite nice I always wanted to own a private jet when I was little but then again I never thought I’d afford it or even travel in a private jet. We get inside sit down, he buckles the seat belt for the both of us and hold my hand again. Even when we’re sitting?

“Gosh I’m not going to run away” I tell him frustrated, he drops my hand and then I feel bad then I hold his I hear him laughing. Before I can even stop and think I kiss his forehead. It’s just that Ayanda hardly ever laughs so hearing him laugh make me do things I didn’t plan.

“I should take you out more often, so I can keep getting the kisses” he tells me with his eyes closed. “You hardly ever laugh it’s nice to hear your laughter” I tell him honestly.

“Look who’s talking”

“I’m not going to reply to that” I tell him typing furiously on my phone. We are waiting for the pilot it’s been 30 minutes and

Ayanda is restless. I'm done with work. So glad I didn't miss the deadline.

“Mandy, I want to change and be the husband you dreamed of” he tells me out the blue. That caught me off guard I don’t know how to answer him.

“I want the fights to end. I want to let go of the anger. I want to smile and laugh more often so it won’t come as a shock to you each time it happens”. I still don’t say anything but it looks like he’s not looking for any answers because he continues.

“I read some papers your parents gave me and I must say I don’t even have half the traits you mentioned in the paper of what you want in a husband. I just thought we should try travelling since it’s on the list of things you want to do with your husband and I promised to take to a honeymoon and I didn’t. I also want us especially you to deal with the death of our baby” he tells me. I know what I want to say but each time my baby is mentioned I get emotional what Dave did is cruel I don’t think I’ll ever forgive him. There are things I want if Ayanda really wants to start over. I need us to move out of that house, I want him to focus on the hotels and leave the mafia life behind lastly I need us to stop fighting. But I don’t say anything, I fall asleep.

“*Wakey wakey we’re here*” Ayanda tells me. I wake up and rub my eyes. I don’t know where this is, Ayanda tells me we’re in Free

State. I always wanted to visit Durban first then Free State and then travel around the country before traveling to other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria. I smile and thank him. We walk towards some car we get in and drive to one of his houses in Bloemfontein. This place is really beautiful the whole time he's holding my hand and I let him. I'm too excited. The house is not that big, it has 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, kitchen, dining room and lounge. It looks great especially for starting a family. He's showing me around and the last stop is the master bedroom, I think I want to live here if Ayanda agrees. He suggests that we take a nap then we'll go shopping later.

We sleep on the couch he lays me on top of him with my head in his hard chest, it's uncomfortable at first but then I fall asleep. He wakes me up 2 hours later we take a quick shower together it's not really uncomfortable because he has bathe me. I wear a maxi white dress with black sandals, he wears a short and black shirt with black gladiator sandals.

He takes an Audi and we travel to the nearest mall. On our way to the mall we a beggar and Ayanda looks shocked but I don't know why. Then it hits me they have the same nose and mouth. My God this can't be his mom. He's staring at her not moving, then a young

girl around my age or younger walks over to her with a huge grin showing her money, I think it's the money people gave her they both smile. Ayanda is still not moving.

“Nokuthula Dlomo” he calls out the old woman looks around for the person calling her name. When her eyes land on Ayanda she quickly holds her daughter’s hand and they run away. Ayanda gets off and run after them and catches up to them. I see them talking and Ayanda points the car. I wonder what they are saying because his mom and sister look like they are crying they walk over. I get off to greet them, they smile shyly at me. I usually know what to say but lately I don’t. When Ayanda introduces me as his wife they both smile but they don’t say anything. I notice that they don’t know what to say to each other so being the person that I am I break the ice.

“It’s so nice to finally meet you ma. You must be Ayanda’s little sister. Would you guys mind if we got back to the house for a cup of tea, you guys have so much to talk about” I tell him and Ayanda quickly disagrees. Where’s that coming from now?

“We are going to the house, and you’re going to talk to your mother and sister” I tell him. He needs to let go of the anger or else he won’t change I’m also doing this for me, I can’t be his punching bag forever even when he had the chance to find answers, heal and let go of the anger and hatred he has.

“Would you be coming with us back to the house?” I ask them.

“I promised to take you out” Ayanda insists. *What is wrong with this guy?*

“Ayanda we’re going back home” I tell him.

“No, we’re not” he answers why did he call his mom and run after her if she’s going to act like this? I hate stubborn people. I push him towards the car and people are now staring at us I don’t even care.

“These people will think you’re abusing your husband” his sister tells me and Ayanda laughs at that comment probably thinking of the scars he has because of me. I didn’t even get her name how rude. “No, it’s okay” I tell her just in case she also thinks I’m abusing her brother. We reach the car I tell them to get in Ayanda will drive us home, he opens his mouth to object I’m guessing I shake my head no with pleading eyes and he gets in the driver’s seat and we head back to the house. It’s going to be a long and emotional day.

Chapter 15

As soon as we get back to the house Ayanda locks himself in the master bedroom. I've been begging him to open the door for the past hour, I honestly don't know what to say now. I tried all the pet names I know but he won't open the door. I'm confused now, why did he run after them when he's going to act like this?

"If you really want to beg a Zulu man use his clan name" his mom tells me.

Of course how could I forget? My mom does that when my dad is mad at her and he forgives her instantly. I smile and thank her, but that will have to wait. I decide to cook super quickly, I'm so hungry so I'll cook rice and mincemeat. His mom and sister are sitting at the bar stool in the kitchen while I'm cooking. They look a little dirty but I'm scared to ask if they need a bath. I don't even know if they'll sleep over or not I mean I can't decide alone. I may be married to the owner of this house but I can't take such decisions alone the least I can do is to see where they stay.

An hour later I'm done I dish up for the 2 of them my stomach can

wait I need to get Ayanda out of that room, he needs to eat.

"Ayanda, I'm begging you please open the door" he doesn't say anything but I can hear that he's approaching the door.

"Please" I beg him when he doesn't open the door. I wait patiently. After some time he opens the door and what I see breaks my heart. My husband has been crying. My God I don't know what to say or do. I go inside lock the door and I hug him so tight. I am a little short my head is just under his shoulder. I hold him so tight he tells me he can't breathe. Even strong men feel like that? We stand like that for a very long time until he tells me he's tired he needs to lie down a bit. I let him lie down and leave the room with the promise to come back later.

"How is he?" His mom and sister both ask me at the same time. They are busy with the dishes. His mom is washing the dishes and his sis is drying.

"My God you didn't have to do that. Ayanda is too emotional and too tired he's lying down a bit" I tell them.

"It's the least we can do. You're such a great cook" his sister tells me shyly. I smile and thank her.

Two hours later, 2 in the afternoon I haven't checked on Ayanda I was hoping he'd wake up and come to talk with his mom. I stand up and walk to the room to check up on him. I find him lying in bed awake but deep in thoughts he doesn't hear me coming in. I just walk over to him and lie in bed with him in silence. He'll talk when he's ready.

"I don't want them here Mandy" he tells me his voice so low I almost don't hear him.

"I think you need to talk to them at some point. I know you're angry at your mom but what about your sister?" I ask him. He can't punish her, she's innocent. But he doesn't answer me. So I just join him and sit silence.

"What do you think I should do?" He asks me.

"I think you should talk to her and hear her side of the story" I tell him. "Does it have to be today?"

"No, take your time. But I think we should drive them home" I tell him, I want to see where they live. "If I say no, will that make me a very bad person?" He asks me like he's not a bad person but right now is not the time.

"Yes, no, maybe I honestly don't know. But you need to answers and you need to deal with this anger you have. The fights and abuse won't end until you deal with your past" I tell him honestly.

"Can I have 5 more minutes?"

"Alone?"

"Yes, if that's okay" I stand and leave. I'm a little hurt though but I respect his decision. I find his sister watching TV his mom is just staring at the blank probably thinking about her son Ayanda.

"I'm sorry, I didn't get your name" I tell her

"Oh, Sindisiwe" she replies shyly,

My God she's so shy "How old are you?" I ask her

"I'm 20"

"You're still 19" her mom corrects her. "Turning 20 tomorrow" Sindi tells me.

"Oh wow I love birthdays" I tell her. I really love birthdays, I need to bake her a cake, hopefully Ayanda won't object.

"Come I'll drop you guys off" Ayanda tells them entering the room. I'm coming with. "I'll drive" I tell him.

"Thank you" he smiles weakly.

Chapter 16

We dropped Ayanda's mom and sister almost a week back at their place some shack not that far from here but they never allowed us in and Ayanda was happy with their decision. Ayanda has been moody, sometimes I have to use one of the guestrooms because he won't let me in the master bedroom.

Not how I had imagined my marriage and honeymoon.

I have to stay here by myself, sometimes he won't eat no matter how much I beg him to, and this is becoming stressful. I haven't heard from his mom even when I gave her my digits and I don't

want to call her because I'll come across as pushy but I really wish they'd talk to each other so they can heal and find a way forward.

"Good morning" Ayanda greets me walking into the guest room I have been using for the past 2 days. He walks over to me and he kisses my forehead, this is strange I hope he's in a good mood and I won't spoil it by bringing his mom up.

"Morning" I reply wondering why he's in a good mood. "I made you breakfast" he tells me smiling.

This is new.

"Thank you, let me take a quick shower" I tell him smiling. It's 6 in the morning, when did he wake up did he even sleep?

I make the bed and take a quick shower, I don't know what to wear, so I wear the blue mini dress I was wearing yesterday. Thirty minutes later I'm done I hope I didn't keep him waiting for long.

I

can't take his moods any longer. I find him in the lounge, he's lying in the couch totally zoned out with the TV on. I walk over and I lie on top of him in silence, breakfast can wait.

"Aren't you going to eat" he asks me after some time. "I won't eat if you don't"

"The food is enough for one person" "We can share" I tell him.

"Okay, hope the food won't send you to an emergency room" he tells me smiling.

I stand up and walk to the kitchen there's a plate with 8 slices sandwich bread with cheese, lettuce, polony, eggs and butter. It looks messy but delicious. I take it and walk over to him. I eat the 6 slices and give him the remaining 2, it's so delicious. When I tell him he thinks I'm lying.

"I've been thinking. I think I need to talk to my mom and hear her side of the story. You were right I think I need to talk to her so the wars can end. I really hate abusing you" he tells me.

"When do you want to talk to her?" I ask him.

"Today, will you accompany me to her place? If I call her she

might run away, that's if she hasn't." "Yeah, I will." I tell him smiling.

He tells me he needs to take a bath first and he walks to the ensuite bathroom. I follow him to make the bed while he's in the shower. I open the windows it's a little stuffy, at least there are no clothes lying on the floor. I hate cleaning up after people even though I've been cleaning after my parents for as long as I can remember. I walk back to the lounge and watch TV, I actually like watching TV but at home or at Ayanda's house I can't. My mom always has the remote in her hand when she's home so I decided to read.

"I'm done" he tells me walking into the room looking yummy like always. Today he's not wearing any black clothes he's wearing a mustard chino, white Reebok takkies and white long sleeve shirt. "You look handsome" I tell him. He smiles and thanks me.

We walk out hand in hand, I should get used to this.

When we get to his mom's place he tells me he's nervous I tell him I won't leave him here alone, *psssh* as if that will make him feel better. But honestly what do you say when a mafia king tells you he's nervous. Before we can knock his mom opens the door, looks

like she is going somewhere. She looks a little surprised to see us.

“Good morning come on in” she tells us. We enter their one room shack there is a table and single bed. I mean that’s the only furniture they have. She tells us to sit on the bed, Ayanda looks like he wants to say no but I shake my head before he can respond. We sit down. They are both quiet, they have so much to say to each other they just don’t know how to say it. Ayanda does not talk much *vele* so this is really challenging for him.

“Where’s Sindi?” I ask his mom I mean the silence is too much and too uncomfortable. She tells me she went out to buy bread, she’s probably on her way back. And then more silence, I can’t talk for Ayanda, he’s a grown man. I’ve seen what all of this has done to him but he’ll have to talk for himself I’m not a lawyer.

“Why did you leave?” he finally asks. Instead of answering her son, she’s crying. I don’t understand these women, why do they cry when they have to answer, this is a very simple question and she has the answer.

“I’m sorry” she replies.

“I asked what made you leave?” he asks her again. *Hai* this woman is going to annoy me too, can’t she just answer. I mean no one wakes up and decides to leave, leaving a 5 year old behind.

“Your father led a very dangerous life” she tells him. Ayanda

doesn't say anything probably waiting for her to continue. This woman is going to take forever to answer just a simple question.

"He was in the mafia. Like you" *eeh* she had to add that. It's clear that she knows about her son but never tried to look for him.

"He was always away, I'm not sure if you remember. But one day when you were a year old he left for 6 months and left his right man Leo to look after everything including you and me. Then one night after you feel asleep, I was in the shower when I felt someone joining me in the shower. I knew it wasn't your dad when I tried to scream he put his hand on my mouth and raped me telling me that if I try anything stupid and if I tell your dad he will kill you" she tells us. I can't read Ayanda's facial expression right now. This is not good news at all, I don't know if I should console her or what. Instead I nudge Ayanda and point at his mom using my head. He shakes his head no.

Heartless bastard.

"It's okay" I tell her rubbing her back while giving my husband my best nasty look he just looks the other way.

Coward

“The rape continued for years, when your dad wasn’t around I knew what will happen most of the nights” she continues. “When you were 4 years I suffered from depression like my mind will be elsewhere and you’d probably talk to me the whole time but honestly most of the time I couldn’t hear you. When you had just turned 5, I told your dad what has been happening he confronted Leo but being the smart person that he is, he denied everything and showed your father some sms’s he sent from my phone without my knowledge” she doesn’t continue.

“What did the sms’s say” he finally asks.

“Some of the sms’s said my husband is leaving tonight can we meet at our spot. And he’d reply from his phone telling me to stop the rubbish he doesn’t want me, he sees me as a sister and I am married to his best friend.” She tells him and sighs wiping the tears on her cheeks.

“So your dad told me to pack my rubbish and leave I tried to tell him it’s not true but he wouldn’t listen, he packed my stuff for me and told me to leave you behind” she tells him.

“He committed suicide when you left, your story can’t be true” he tells her frowning. Clearly he thinks she’s lying, I don’t know what to believe, but for some reason I know she might be telling the

truth. Just then Sindi walks in, I'm glad she didn't hear all the stuff her mom just told us. She greets us looks at her mom then us and she frowns.

"Show him the letters mom"

she tells her mom. "What letters?" I ask.

"The ones your grandfather has been sending updating her about you" she tells Ayanda. "Another is from our old neighbour, when the Leo guy asked them to spy on mom" Sindi tells us, Ayanda looks shocked.

"It can't be, Leo is..." he doesn't get to finish because Sindi throws the letters at his face. He looks startled.

"Leo is Bova's dad" he tells me once he recovers from the anger. My God I just hope I don't face the same situation with Bova, it's really hard to trust men lately and even women too.

There are many letters and pictures of Ayanda there are even pictures of our wedding day, no wonder his mom knows that he's also in the mafia. I wonder how much more she knows. He's starrng at the pictures not saying anything. I just put my hand on his back to remind him that I'm here.

"Can I keep these?" he asks his mom.

"Yes" she replies. He goes mute starring at one of the letters not reading. His phone rings, he takes it out and he frowns and he shows me the screen it's Leo calling. I've never heard of him before but then again Ayanda and I never dated. He excuses himself and he goes outside. I'm sitting trying so hard not to go to him when I hear him shouting, Ayanda hardly shouts, but I can't really make out what he's saying. He comes back after some time and he tells Sindi and his mom to pack real quickly. Sindi doesn't want to go, she's still mad at her brother, but now is not the time. Something huge is going on even if I can't really tell what's up.

"Nok'thula talk to your child. Leo has eyes and ears everywhere we need to leave before his people get here. But if she wants to die she can stay behind" he tells his mother. Ayanda is really something he's calling his mom by her name.

"How do we know that you're not the one leading us to his trap? I mean I saw his name on the screen when you showed her" she tells him pointing at me. So I'm just *her*.

"Sindi please" her mom begs, she's so damn stubborn like her brother. I hope Ayanda sees how hard it is to deal with a hard headed person like him.

"Just take your important stuff, we'll come back for more when it's

a little safe" Ayanda tells them, he's trying not to panic.

"Okay fine" Sindi screams at his face. My God this kid is really annoying, and I thought she's sweet. She can't disrespect my husband like that, she'll have to know her place.

"*Eeeh*, you don't talk to my husband like that" I tell her dead serious. I don't care that he's her brother. I see Ayanda and his mom smiling, this woman is not even mad that Ayanda called her by her name instead of mama. My mom would slap the shit out of me. She takes forever to pack. "You're not doing anyone a favour" I tell her incase she's forgetting.

"Whatever" she replies. I'm speechless once they are done we get to the car, Ayanda gives me his phone and tells me to call Bova and tell him that Leo is after us and we're heading to Welkom he needs to get there as soon as possible. I take the phone and unlock it, he has my pic as his wallpaper. I'm kissing his forehead on the picture who took this picture, I want it too.

"*Kau* what's up" Bova answers, I tell him what Ayanda just told me. He says *shit* and tells me to tell him that he's on his way to Welkom. Ayanda is driving like a mad man.

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According to google it takes about 1h 36m to get to Welkom from Bloemfontein but we got here after an hour. It's a very beautiful house, also not that big, men with big guns are surrounding it, Ayanda punches a code and it's my date of birth I grin like an idiot this means a lot. He drives in, get off the car we are welcomed by a very beautiful girl my age. When she sees Ayanda her face brightens and she jumps at him planting kisses all over his face. **WTF?** Ayanda is not saying anything. I clear my throat raising an eyebrow and giving him a look saying *care to explain?*

"This is Buhle, she's a family friend" he tells me smiling.

"So since she's a family friend I assume she knows you're married?" they both don't say anything. "And I assume you're the wife" she replies in a chicky tone.

"Don't make me shoot you" I tell her in the same tone.

"You wouldn't dare" Ayanda replies defending her. I think I stop breathing for a second. He's really picking her side over mine? I just leave them standing there. I walk inside.

It's a very beautiful house, Ayanda has taste, it's a little bigger than the one in Bloemfontein, and since Ayanda is busy entertaining the "*family friend*" I walk through the house viewing it. There are 5 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, 2 lounges, a dining room and a very

beautiful kitchen. I think I love beautiful kitchens, they seem to be my favourite room in the house. I decide to go watch TV while my blind or stupid husband is catching up with the *family friend*. I don't know if Ayanda doesn't see that Buhle has feelings for him or he's playing dumb.

"Your behaviour was uncalled for. That is Bova's sister" he tells me walking into the room with his mom and sister.

"Do I look I care who's sister she is?" I ask him. "I don't know if you're blind or stupid, can't you see that she has feelings for you?"

"Did you just call me stupid?" he asks he's angry and I don't care.

"Do I need to remind you that you were forced upon me?" he asks and I see Buhle smiling behind him. I don't have time for this. He was also forced upon me but I'm not going to say that. It's been a long morning already I need to take a nap. I walk to one of the rooms to take a nap, I lock the door and sleep. I am peacefully sleeping when there's a knock on the door, I'm not in the mood to talk to anyone. But still I need to open the door. It's Sindi and her mom.

"We came to check if you're okay" her mom tells me. I smile and tell them that I'm okay I'm just tired. I quickly fix the bed cover and pillows and walk with them to the lounge, Ayanda and sitting

with Buhle laughing so hard, I don't care that he has known her longer but he has never laughed like that when he's with me. I decide to walk to the kitchen and cook before I shoot someone. I'm busy cooking when Sindi joins me. She helps chop the vegetables while I prepare to cook chicken stew. The rice is almost done.

Thirty minutes later we are done. I set the table for everyone including Buhle. Sindi prays before we dig in.

"Hmmm there's so much salt and oil here you'll make us sick" Buhle tells me but I don't say anything I just continue eating.

"The food is delicious" Ayanda's mom tells me I smile and thank her. After everyone is done I take the plates to the kitchen but Sindi and her mom won't let me wash them I tell her mom to sit down Sindi and I will wash them. I make her a cup of tea while we wash the dishes.

"Why did you even agree to marry a plain and ugly girl" I hear Buhle asking Ayanda. She just had to raise her voice to say that. I can't hear what Ayanda is saying but I hear her laughing.

"She's being bitchie. Your food was very delicious" Sindi tells me smiling. I smile back once we are done, we go to the lounge to watch TV. I don't like soapies but Sindi and her mom want to

watch Generations so I just sit with them. They watch soapie after soapie and I'm sitting here listening to them argue about the characters how I wished I had this kind of relationship with my mom. At 10 I tell them I need to sleep I had a long day. I go to one of the guest rooms I slept on earlier. I'm tired and sleepy but I can't sleep, what if Ayanda also has feelings for Buhle why would he act like that. I'm trying to find answers in my head till I fall asleep. I wake up to see Ayanda carrying me bridal style.

"Put me down" I tell him he does. "Where are you taking me?"

"To my bed"

"Why don't you ask Buhle?"

"Is this why you slept here? You're my wife" he tells me as if I don't know. "I was forced upon you remember?"

"Suit yourself" he tells me walking towards the door like a model on a catwalk, slamming the door behind. He might as well break down the door. I go back to bed but because of him, I can't sleep *nxa* bastard.

Ever since Bova got here everyone has been acting weird around me, even his sister no longer disrespects I wonder what's up or they are scared of Bova? I walk into the lounge Buhle is lying on the couch, when she sees me she quickly sits up. I walk over to sit with Ayanda's mom, she has also been acting weird.

"Why is everyone acting like this?" I ask her. "We saw the video" Sindi tells me.

"What video?" I ask her.

"The one showing you shooting Ayanda and Bova" she tells me.

"There's a video? Who showed you?" I ask them surprised. No wonder Buhle is acting strange around me.

"Her brother did" Sindi tells me pointing at Buhle. I honestly don't know what to say. Why would Bova have that video in his possession?

I go to the kitchen to prepare supper since it's 4pm. Today I'm making a quick meal. I am making *papa* and mincemeat and cabbage. My dad's favourite. I'm cooking when I hear gunshots

outside, Bova comes running into the room with Sindi, her mom and Buhle. He tells me to go inside the pantry pull something like a switch pull it out completely and put my date of birth when it asks for a pin. I do that another door opens I let the 3 go first when I'm about to go, Ayanda pulls me kisses my forehead. And for the first time he tells me he loves me he doesn't wait for my reply and shoves me through the door and closes it. There are steps leading to basement, I never thought we have these in South Africa. That's why he said it's a safe house. There's a lounge, small kitchen and 2 bedrooms. This is a house. I'm really surprised. The last time I saw something like this was in the movie I watched about 4 back The Book Thief.

We've been here for 2 hours when Ayanda limps down the stairs. I'm still mad at him for the Buhle issue so I just stare at him even when his mom nudges me towards him. I just shake my head and continue watching TV, the *family friend* will attend to him.

"Buhle and Sindi can you guys excuse us we need to talk to Nok'thula" I stand to leave with them.

“You need to stay”

Ayanda tells me. “She

needs to stay” I point

Buhle.

“Mandy please...” I don’t even wait for him to finish I go to

one of the bedrooms to sleep. I am waken up by a very hot

slap, it’s Ayanda.

“What is wrong with you? I told you Buhle is a family friend” he

yells at me. I’m still shocked with my hand on my cheek. I won’t

say anything.

“I’m talking to you” he yells but I won’t say anything still, I’m tired

of Ayanda and his violent attacks. This is why I wanted a divorce to

begin with each time he doesn’t get his way with me he attacks

me like I’m some animal or his punching bag. But I’ve had enough

of this. One thing I learnt about abusive people is that when they

talk to you and you don’t answer they beat you and when you talk

back they also beat you, you stand and never move they beat you,

you walk away they beat you.

They always have a reason for the attacks.

“You promised to stop the attacks you know” I tell him sitting up but that was the biggest mistake. He drags me by my hair again, but instead of screaming or fighting back I let him and I know I’ll get a beating for being stubborn. And I didn’t have to wait long because he kicks my ribs now. He’s kicking me and calling me all sorts of names, I just close my eyes, I don’t want to see pity in their eyes. I hear his mom begging him to stop but he doesn’t. He beats me until I black out, nothing new.

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“You’re awake. You had us worried. Why do you stay with him?” his mom asks. I don’t have the energy to reply. Just then Bova walks in looking all worried. He asks Ayanda’s mom to give us a minute. When she leaves he asks how I’m doing. We talk for a little longer about what went down yesterday. He tells me his father is the one who was attacking us.

“I’m worried about you” he tells me. “I know you make Ayanda a good person, but I can’t stand around and see him do this you any

longer. We all know how these kinds of situations end up. So I was thinking, you can live in one of my houses until you decide to whether you want to file for divorce or not. Please don't take this the wrong way, but I think you should leave while you can before you leave in a coffin because this is where the whole situation is headed. Just promise me

you'll think about it" he tells me. Ever since I've been married to Ayanda this is like the first time someone has taken my side. But I still remember what he said to me the first time I came to live with them.

*I think you should accept your life here, because you're not going anywhere. There are guards in every corner and there'll be guards everywhere you go. **Don't try anything stupid you won't like the consequences. Between you and me your husband to be is a very dangerous man and he has no mercy***

"But when I first came here you're the one who told me to accept my life here or they'll be consequences. What are you saying right now?" I ask him.

"Look I may be in the mafia and Ayanda is my friend but I can't stand seeing you like this any longer, so I'll protect you" he tells me.

What is going on here? So Bova suddenly cares? Maybe they are plotting against me but then he might honest.

"I need to think about this" I tell him he leaves Ayanda's mom, sister and Buhle come in bringing me food. I smile and thank them.

Buhle and Sindi cooked it's so delicious my God. We just talk about random things, I can see that they are curious but I'm not in the mood to talk about what happened yesterday.

"We're going back to Durban tomorrow" Ayanda pops his head and closes the door after the announcement.

~~

Ayanda is really sorry about what happened yesterday but he'll talk to his wife later. Right now she might need time to calm down. Bova has been really angry at him yesterday he can't remember the last time has been this angry at him. It's true he doesn't deserve Mandy but because he's selfish he can't allow her to walk away. His heart won't survive that. Just like his dad and now he knows why he committed suicide.

~~

“We’re heading out in an hour” Bova tells us. There’s nothing to pack really we’ve been here for less than a week and our clothes are still in Bloemfontein. He didn’t even ask his mom if she wants to leave with us. *Controlling bastard.*

Chapter 17

As soon as we get home I pack all the stuff I came with. My laptop is also here. *Good.* I didn't buy this suitcase so I leave money for it. I quickly pack Ayanda is showing his mom and sister around so I hope I'll be able to escape. I pull the suitcase as I'm walking out it makes so much noise. So much for my silent escape everyone is looking at me not saying anything Bova smiles at me like a proud parent. As soon as I walk out the door Ayanda sees me he's so shocked. *Hahaha* he never saw this coming. I just walk by him like I don't even know him and I don't feel guilty. He starts to talk but I give him a very cold look that could even freeze the Vaal Dam. He walks towards me with an unreadable expression. And then he states the obvious *urgh.*

"You're leaving" he says in a defeated voice.

"Yes. I just saw that it's best I leave now in a good condition before I leave in a coffin really" I answer him honestly.

"What about me? What about your vows and our marriage" he asks probably with the intention to make me feel guilty or change my mind.

"I was forced upon you remember?"

"But you feel something for me don't you?" He asks. There goes my heart, traitor. I feel guilty now. "Don't you?"

"I did" I lie and I turn and walk away before my heart betrays me again.
Urgh traitor

I'm focused on walking out that gate but the next thing I know Ayanda is kneeling in front of me holding my legs I can't even move.

"Please" he begs me. He's really making this hard for me.

"Let go" I tell him he doesn't I end up screaming my parents and Bova run towards us. Bova pulls him away from me but he's holding on so tight. But eventually he lets go.

"What about us?" My mom asks me. *This woman.*

"You're the ones who took the loan. Now pay for it" I tell them and walk away.

I don't have a place to stay for now. I'm walking when a car parks in the pavement it's Bova. "Get in you'll stay at my place till you find a place" I smile and I get in. We drive in silence which makes me happy. After 30 minutes we enter some gate he punches the pin and we drive in. It's a beautiful house with high

end glasses.

"I can't stay. Call me when you need something" he tells me and drives off. I am welcomed by some shy young maid. She shows me around the house. It has a very big kitchen with brown wall units and silver handles as well as stainless steel appliances I love that, lounge, dining room and 7 bedrooms my God. I use one of the 6 guest rooms. It's a beautiful room everything is cream white with shiny brown wardrobe. I'm exhausted but I need to look for a flat ASAP.

I search for something affordable and I find a few. Two bedrooms 1 bath open view kitchen and lounge for R4800 I contact the agent and we make an appointment for tomorrow at 12. It's 8pm and I haven't eaten. I'm not hungry might as well have an early night. I take a shower and I wear my pj's but I can't sleep my thoughts keep drifting to Ayanda but I'm standing by my decision. Ayanda will never change and I'm glad I finally left I hope he won't come looking for me I took nothing that belongs to him well except for the ring I should return it but not now. For now I'll take it off.

I'm waken up by my alarm. I have work to submit so I start working on the document once I'm done bathing. My stomach grumbles when I'm half way through with the research but hunger will have to wait. I look at the time it's 10am I walk out of the room and head to the kitchen there's no one in sight so I make myself a bowl of corn flakes. I wash the bowl take my bag and head out I hope I won't get lost since I'm not familiar with the place.

I get there at 12 O' Clock exactly. I meet the agent and we go through the flat and I love it so we discuss the deposit and contract at 1 I'm done. I decide to walk to some mall since it's not far from here. I need a few things like appliances and furniture. I buy all the small things like ironing board, iron, kettle, toast, microwave but I don't have transport.

"Do you need help?" A familiar deep voice

asks me from behind. "No, thanks" I reply

without turning to look at him.

"But you need help" the cashier tells me like I don't know. I just ignore her, I take the trolley and put the stuff I bought inside might as well buy furniture so that I'll find a van to deliver once.

"Please let me help" he begs why is he even begging?

"Okay" I let him help me. "Can I take you out for lunch?" I just shrug I hope he won't ask to drive me to his place.

"Your mom hasn't stop crying" he tells me when we sit down at Spur. I don't say anything. I have nothing to say to that. She'll have to be strong. At least my dad isn't abusing her.

"You're not wearing your wedding band" he sounds sad.

"You're wearing yours" I reply a little happy that he's still wearing his. "Are you ever going to come back home?" He asks me.

"Are you ever going to change?" I ask him not realizing that I'm holding my breath until he answers.

"Yes" I just nod my heart is betraying me again. After eating in an uncomfortable silence, we head towards the exit he pays for his parking ticket and he drives me to Bova's place he enters the code and drives in but I stop him when he opens the door I don't want him to act all nice like he cares because I'll run back to his house. He looks a little hurt but he obeys. I take all the stuff from the car put them by the door and I come back for more. When I'm standing at the entrance I wave goodbye and he leaves taking my stupid heart with him but I'll have to stay strong. As soon as he changes I'm going back home. I know I said I'll file for divorce I honestly hope he doesn't get to that.

~~~

Ayanda gets home and he tells the family what happened. When he tells them she wasn't wearing her ring the hope in their eyes is replaced by fear. That's what he was afraid of when she left, but he won't sign any divorce papers he'll just give her time to heal

while he works on his temper.

~~

But it's been 3 months and he hasn't received any divorce papers at least that's something. Sindi comes up with a plan. They all agree to try it except for Ayanda. He thinks it's a bad idea but at least they are trying to help so he'll try. He dials her digits and when it rings he's relieved she takes forever to pick up probably debating if it's a good idea or not.

"Hello" she answers sounding like she just woke up. "Hello. Did I disturb you?" He asks sweetly.

"What do you want?"

"I called to say goodbye"

"Okay cool" not the answer they all expected. "Ayanda wants to commit suicide" Sindi announces.

"Oh great. Please send my love to my baby in heaven that's if you'll make there" she replies and hang up. The room is suddenly quiet not the answer they expected.

It's 10pm Ayanda called 3 hours ago and she's not here. It's not what they expected again.

~~~

I still love Ayanda I want to go see him but I won't. I wanted him to tell me he changed not that he's going to kill himself. I just hope he won't do it. I want to go home but if he doesn't change I won't go home. Me moving out was a way to make him change his ways talk to his mom heal so we can find a way forward.

"Koko" my new gay friend Katlego knocks on my door.

"I'm coming". I yell walking towards the door. I open with a very big smile but he looks a little scared looking around like he's searching for something or someone. We're very close he knows about Ayanda but I didn't tell him the mafia king part but I told him everything and I really felt like some burden has been lifted from my shoulders and I feel really free and he also told me everything about him. He was gang raped at the age of 14 and he was chased out at the age of 22 by his family but he said story for another day and I didn't want to push him.

"What's up" I ask him.

"Your husband told me to look after you. *Kahle kahle* he told me to spy on you. He'll give me 100 grand" he tells me looking a little guilty. Knowing my dearest husband he probably threatened him.

“Did you take the money?”

“No”

“Why not?”

“You’re my
friend”

“As your friend I say take the money. The fact that you told me means a lot. It means I can trust you” I tell him honestly.

“But...”

“There are no buts, you need the money. Take the money it’s your chance to leave Steven” I tell him. Steven is his abusive boyfriend he’s still with him because he needs the money sometimes he has to sleep with his 4 friends. *Imagine.*

“Right now you’re the only person that I can count on I can’t betray you like that” “You’re not betraying anyone.

Please take the money” I beg him.

“Okay. But your husband is such a cutie my God. The pics on your phone are not doing him any justice *yazini*” he tells me smiling. If it was someone I was going to get jealous but I trust Katlego. For some reason I trust him with all my heart.

“Who was he with?”

“Bova” he replies with a huge grin. “Is he married?”

he asks me still grinning. “Nope, never even met his girlfriend” I tell him.

“You lie” he pushes me lightly. He has a crush on Bova. But I never even pay any mind to his lack of girlfriend. Now that Kat has mentioned them, I miss them terribly.

I want to surprise them today or tomorrow.

~~

I am waken up by my alarm I take a bath and I wear a long maxi green dress with my white all-star boots. I take a taxi to town then to Ayanda’s place it’s a bit pricey if he behaves then he’ll have to drive me home.

Two hours later, I'm walking towards his house, I'm a little nervous though what if he has moved on? I pass the gate, I'm walking towards the gate when I see him sitting with Buhle laughing so hard. *Funny how I've never seen that side of him.*

"Having a good time without me?" I ask him. He's startled at first.

"I didn't know you were coming" he tells me with no smile. Thought he'd be happy to see me.

"I wanted to surprise you, but looks like I'm the one who got surprised" I reply. "What is she doing here?" I ask him pointing at Buhle.

"This is not your house" Buhle replies.

"What did you just say?" I ask her taking threatening steps towards her.

"What are you doing?" Ayanda asks me pushing Buhle behind.

He's defending her again. I give up. I walk out the gate with the hope that he will beg me but nope not my husband. I go back to the flat

with a heavy heart. The first thing I do is to cry my eyes out. After some time I pull myself together and for the first time ever I call Bova I need a huge favour.

“Hello. I heard you came over” he answers.

“Hey. Yes I did but that’s not the reason I came I need a favour. A very huge one. If you happen to have R50 000 lying around please borrow me. I’ll pay you as soon as I can” I tell him.

“Okya, sms me your bank

details I’ll send it” “Thank you”

“You welcome” he replies and hangs up. I smile it’s been a long morning. Let me take a nap.

Chapter 18

Ayanda knew that Mandy is going to file for divorce but he didn’t expect the papers 4 days after her visit. He loves Buhle as a sister nothing more and he doesn’t get why his wife gets mad. He’s also like a brother to Buhle and he knows for sure that she also loves

him as a brother and she's very protective when it comes to him.

"What are those" Bova asks when he sees the papers on Ayanda's desk. "Divorce papers" he replies.

"Oh"

"Is that what you're going to say?" he asks his friend.

"I have nothing else to say. That girl deserves better, she's young and I hope she finds someone who will treat her like the queen that she is" Bova tells him honestly. But the truth hurts. And right now Ayanda doesn't need this, he needs to go that flat and drag his wife back home.

~~

I just hope Ayanda signs the papers I want nothing from him.

Ayanda: Where the hell are you?

He got the papers. I knew he'd come running to my flat so I moved out yesterday, only Kat knows my address and where I am right now. Such a sweetheart he helped me move and unpack. I was hoping he'll move to this block but he refused.

Bova: You need to leave your flat we're heading there and trust me it won't end nice.

I read the text and reply.

Me: I'm not home. I'm at the Mall.

Been walking around at the mall for an hour now, bored to death I don't know what to eat. I'm walking alone when some cute guy my age approaches me.

"Hey, beautiful. Are you alone?" I nod with a smile. For some stupid reason I could use some company. I really miss Ayanda but I need to walk away from the marriage while I still can.

He joins me and we talk about general stuff when I hear a familiar voice behind.

"Walk away now boy" Ayanda tells the guy. He ignores him

probably because he doesn't know who he is or he doesn't know that he's talking to him.

"Just walk away if you know what's good for you" he tells him again in a low voice like he doesn't want anyone to hear him. I want to stand up for this guy but it won't end well so I just smile and tell him it was nice meeting him. He still won't walk away until he sees Ayanda's face, he quickly walks towards the exit. I sigh.

So now I can't have friends?

"How did you know where I was?" I ask him annoyed. "Your friend told me" he replies. Then he goes mute.

"Do you really want to divorce me?" he asks.

"Yes"

"Is it because I always defend Buhle?" he asks.

“It’s because you have feelings for her” I tell him. “I know it’s childish but you always defend her and that makes her disrespect me even more”

“So you honestly think you can divorce me? Just like that”

“This is a mall” I state the obvious don’t want him starting a war right now. “Just sign the papers please” I tell him. He looks a little sad.

“Can’t I change your mind?” he asks looking hopeful.

“No, I gave you too many chances. I can’t do it. How would you feel if I had feelings for another guy? If I said all those things how would you feel? I wouldn’t start on the violence” I reply him getting emotional.

“Okay then. I’ll sign them” he tells me. I don’t know how to feel but I’m happy and disappointed that he has agreed just like that. I was hoping he’d drag me home and demand that I stay married to him. He kisses my forehead lingers there for a moment then he says goodbye and turn his back and walk away Bova follows him.

~~~

*Yes I do, I believe one day I will be...* My phone rings I don't feel like answering but it might be important.

"Hello?"

"Hello, this is Phinda from Ndlovu Attorneys. May I speak to Mrs. Nxumalo" "Speaking. How may I help you?"

"I'm calling on behalf of your husband. We'd love to meet with you and your lawyer as soon as possible" Phinda tells me.

"Let me contact my lawyer and get back to you" I reply. We say our goodbyes and we hang up.

I contact my lawyer he's free today. I contact Phinda and we schedule a meeting an hour from now. I make the bed and take a quick shower. I didn't expect Ayanda to get back to me so quick. I wear a long black dress with black all-star *tekkies*, black shades and *doek* (head wrap).

~~

An hour later I'm at the given address standing with my lawyer he's busy chit chatting probably trying to help me. I'm so nervous I'm even shaking. The receptionist sends us to the boardroom. It's kind of full. My parents, Ayanda, Bova, Buhle, Sindi, her mom and Mr. Nxumalo are here and I'm alone with my lawyer. I greet everyone and sit down. I've always been alone, my parents never stood up for me like now they are choosing his side over mine and I need them.

"Good morning. I'm Phinda Ndlovu. We may begin"

"You can start since you're the one who filed for divorce" Phinda tells me.

"Oh" I didn't expect this. "Ayanda and I married in community of property..." Ayanda opens his mouth to say something but his lawyer stops him and I continue.

“But I don’t want anything from him. He worked very hard for everything he has, it wouldn’t be right to try and take anything from him. Even the clothes he bought me” I tell them. “I sold his car a few months back, I’m going to sell the flat and buy it back if possible, I just need more time” I tell them. My lawyer is so pissed right now.

“Are you sure” Phinda asks also shocked. I nod.

“Then that’s it. Ayanda do you want to say anything?” Phinda asks him. He shakes his head he looks disappointed and defeated.

“I’ll just pay for her legal fees” he tells Phinda.

“No, thanks. I’m sorted. Are we done?” I ask. I need to get out of here real quick. They nod. I just stand thank them and I leave.

*This is it.*



My lawyer follows me and the rest of the crew. He gets into his car and drive off. I'm standing at the taxi route waiting for a taxi. Ayanda and the rest of the family pass me they don't even look at me, it hurts so much.

One hour later, I'm at my place. I cry myself to sleep.

~~~

I'm waken up my alarm. I have a deadline in 2 days, I just want to sleep but I have no choice I need to wake up and work. I make the bed, take a bath. I wear jeggings, long top with socks no shoes. I clean the flat 2 hours later I'm sitting at my desk with a cup of coffee typing furiously on keyboard. My thoughts keep drifting to yesterday's event. I have parents but I feel so alone.

Chapter 19

It's been 3 months since we met with our lawyers. Our divorce was settled in 3 weeks I guess it helps having a loaded ex-husband, I know he pushed for the divorce to be settled. I miss

him but I'll have to be strong. I managed to sell the flat and buy Ayanda's car and you won't believe it, I got the same car from that dealership and I had some change to pay Bova, the lawyer and spoil myself. My parents haven't tried to contact me, I don't know if they're still at Ayanda's place or not. I guess I'll have to find out today as I am driving to his place to give him the car back. I didn't tell anyone I'm coming. I just want to see their reaction.

"How can we help you miss?" some guard I don't recognize asks me politely.

"I'm Mandy. I'm here to give Ayanda his car" he nods and opens for me. They must've told them to expect me. I drive in. Ayanda is sitting with Bova and Dave they are laughing so hard. I get off the car and walk towards them, seeing Dave still brings back bad memories for the first time today I don't regret divorcing Ayanda. How could he allow Dave into his house after he killed our baby? I clear my throat.

“Hey Mandy, you look beautiful” Dave tells me. I don’t reply I just greet everyone. I’m too emotional right now.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Bova asks me. Ayanda is sitting there staring at me like I just popped another head. Tears are running down my face. I’m wiping them but they keep coming. *Stupid tears.*

“I came here to give you your car back. Thank you for giving me enough time.” I give Ayanda the keys and walk away. He doesn’t say anything instead Bova offers a lift but I tell him I’m okay. I walk out that gate and away from Ayanda for the last time. I glance at him for the last time and he’s laughing at something again. I’m not going to cry tonight, I’m still young I’ll find someone else, soon I hope.

Even though I promised myself that I won’t cry, I cried myself to sleep when I got home. The fact that he let Dave back to his house and he ignored me makes me very sad.

~~~

“You see if I listened to you guys and went for anger management classes I wouldn’t have lost Mandy” Ayanda tells Dave and Bova

really proud of the progress made. He has built a relationship with his mom and sister, what makes him happier is that Mandy hasn't dated anyone even though it's been 2 years since they last saw each other. He wanted to stop her that day but he couldn't. He wanted to change first and now he's going to get her. Take her back home if she'd want to.

~~~

I can't wait for next year to graduate. I'll be done with my Masters in 4 months. I can't believe it's been 2 years since I last saw or heard from my parents and Ayanda. But life goes on. I know Ayanda has been watching my every move because I can feel someone looking at me but when I look around there's no one. Even on campus. I made friends. Kat cut ties with me about a year ago because Steve told him to. He also abandoned me when I needed him most but it's cool. It's Tuesday my classes end very late and I have been busy with my assignments, so it means I have to use Uber even the drivers know me now. When I walk out of campus there's a familiar car by the

gates. Ayanda gets off the car and he approaches me. He still looks yummy he's wearing a blue jean, white sneakers and shirt. I'm wearing a beggy jeans, boots and hoodie.

"Hello, beautiful. I'm Ayanda" he introduces himself. I'm so hurt, he can't recognize me? I feel tears running down my face. I haven't cried in 3 months I was ready to let go, but here he is pretending not to remember me? *The hurt*. I walk past him towards the Uber, I can't do this.

"Mandy, wait" he takes my hand. I yank my hand back.

"So now you know I'm Mandy. Didn't you just pretend you don't know me?" I ask him crying. *Stupid tears*.

"You took that the wrong way..." I don't wait for him to finish I get in the taxi but the driver won't move. Fuck I forgot that Ayanda does that to people. I see him paying the driver he's grinning like an idiot and nodding to everything the bastard is saying. *Wow I feel betrayed*.

"Mandy you know I hate explaining but anyway I will" he tells me in a soft voice. "I introduced myself because I want us to start over. I want you to marry me because you want to not because

you are forced to” he tells me looking anywhere but my face. This is really difficult for him. *And what did I say about my heart?*

Traitor. I’m speechless.

“Please say something. Anything I can’t stand the silence”

he says almost pleading. “What if I say no?” I ask him.

“I’ll keep asking you until you agree” he replies sounding dead serious. I smile it’s the answer I’ve been holding my breath for.

“I want the wars to end” I tell him honestly. I played this scene in my head for past 2 years but I didn’t plan like this. I wanted to make him sweat. “And I want you to laugh with me like you do with Buhle” I tell him and he scratches his head.

“Can I take you home?” he asks. I know he won’t say anything about the Buhle thing but I’m not joking. I nod.

“Where are my parents?” I ask him.

“Still at my place”

“They’ve been there all along?” I ask him shocked instead of working they decide to stay at Ayanda’s place. We walk towards his car he opens the door for me. I get in he walks to the driver’s side gets in he puts both our seat belts and he drives in silence.

“Why did my parents take that loan” I ask him. I

always wanted to know. “Mandy, I can’t tell you”

he replies.

“Okay, I don’t know how this is going to work out. I don’t want any secrets between us” I tell him. “You not being fair”

“Not being fair?”

Mina? (Me?)” “Okay,

I’ll tell you not now”

“Then drop me off and I’ll see you when you decide to tell me. Simple” I tell him when we’re at the gate of the complex. It’s not really far from UKZN Howard Campus. It’s a 20 minutes’ walk but

it's not safe after 7 and I leave the campus at 7:30pm every Tuesday.

“Okay, I’ll tell

you” “Okay, I’m

waiting”

“Not here Mandy, I’m hungry” he tells me. If he thinks I’m cooking then he’ll have to think twice. “I’m not cooking for you” I tell him.

“I’ll cook” I just nod and we get off and head to my apartment.

When we are waiting for the lift Kat passes me like he doesn’t know me. It hurts but it will pass. The lift is here, we enter and get off at the 5th floor. When we are approaching my flat I see Musa sitting at my door playing a game on his phone. We met the day my divorce was finalized at the Mall. I was walking around like a zombie I bumped into him like literally and we clicked only to find out that we are neighbours. He was planning on a surprise for his girlfriend it was their 8th anniversary and he found her in bed with his best friend. So we’ve been friends since then.

“Musa, are you okay?” I ask him.

“Yeah, I’m just hungry. I was hoping we’d grab a bite but you have company” he replies looking at Ayanda. He knows about him but like Kat I didn’t tell him the mafia king part.

“You can join us. He’s cooking” I tell him pointing Ayanda.

I thought Ayanda was going to be pissed but he’s not instead he’s smiling. We get inside, I show Ayanda the kitchen while Musa and I sit at the lounge.

“So are you going to fix things?” he asks. “I want to”

“I’m happy for you. I told you from that to fix things with him” he tells me smiling. He’s been a very good friend. He’s like the brother I never had. We are always playing play station or wrestling. He’s been showing me some defense moves.

“You still have feelings for him?” he asks. I shake my head, I’m lying.

“Liar” he tells me laughing. This is the guy that kept me going for

the past 2 years. He held me when I cried, held me throughout the night and to be honest I never had feelings for him and visa verse. He has a girlfriend he doesn't really trust, but I trust her so he said he'll keep her. He's the sweetest person ever. They met 3 months ago and I told her that if she dares hurt him I'll rearrange her face.

"Dinner is ready" Ayanda announces when he walks into the room with 3 plates of rice and mincemeat. The food looks delicious.

"Someone has been cocking for the past 2 years" I smile at him. "I wanted to impress you"

"I like him" Musa whispers nudging me.

We eat in silence, Musa washes the dishes and leaves with the promise to see me tomorrow. "The food was delicious. Thank you so much" I tell him, he smiles.

“Your dad took the loan because he was fired from his teaching job” Ayanda tells me. This is shocking, my dad was a teacher?

“Why? What happened?” I ask him.

“He slept with one of his learners and impregnated her 2 years before you were born. You have an older sibling and your father denied him” he tells me. My father has always been cruel, so my brother is 27 now.

“I have an older brother?” I ask him stunned and happy. I always wished I had a big brother. *WOW.*

“So there were so many court cases. Some of the people in the Department of Education said they’ll reinstate him if he paid them a million he borrowed the money from my grandfather. He was hesitant at first but your dad insisted. My grandfather did and after a week of making the payment, the Department said they don’t know anyone by those names”

“Wow, I’m speechless. What does my dad say about the kid he had?”

“We were talking about it with him last week. He wants nothing to do with the boy” he tells me. “Where is he?” I ask.

“In Cape Town”. Wow this is big. We go on to chat, he’s updating me about everything happening at his house. Before we know it it’s 3am and I don’t want him to leave.

“Don’t leave Ayanda” I tell him. He looks shocked he didn’t expect this from me. We head to my bed but still we continue to chat till 6am he falls asleep while I’m talking he must be tired. I take his phone and go through it. He hasn’t dated anyone judging by the texts unless he deleted them. He still has my pictures and my date of birth as his pin.

Chapter 20

For the past 2 weeks Ayanda and I have been planning to go to Cape Town to look for my big brother, I’m nervous and happy at the same time. We had to wait this long because he was busy with business, he bought another building so he needed to deal with a lot of paperwork. We’re

heading there in 2 hours I don't know why Ayanda insisted we head there at 5pm, Musa is coming with. *He loves things.*

I'm busy running around making sure I have everything with me. Musa and Ayanda are sitting on the couch laughing at something and playing PlayStation. Ayanda is leading 11-5 I'm so happy I'm glad someone is able to beat Musa.

"Time to go" Ayanda announces. I'm so happy I run out the door I forgot that I need to lock. Musa and Ayanda find me by Ayanda's car. We are using his private jet. Oh the look on Musa's face when he sees the jet is priceless. He's so happy he even hugs Bova and Ayanda and this is so awkward for them.

"Mandy please take pics. I want to brag on facebook" he's shouting and people stop to stare at us. I take so many pics I even complain. I don't see Ayanda taking pictures of me.

"Musa we need to go now" I complain. He keeps shouting "one more" every time. When we get inside he's super hyper. Like he doesn't know what to do with himself. It's a little refreshing seeing someone treating Ayanda like a normal person. All the way Musa is busy reading us comments and taking more pictures in between.

This is the longest journey of my life yet it took 2 hours. I'm out of the plane as soon as the door is opened. I hear Ayanda and Bova laughing behind me. There's a car waiting for us. We're heading to Khayelitsha.

Thirty minutes later we are sitting inside a very clean shack. The lady told us to wait for 10 minutes Luthando my brother should be home then. She keeps staring me and when I see Luthando's pictures I know why. We look so much alike, we look like our cruel father. A handsome man with the same face shape, eyes and nose as mine and my dad walks in. He looks super clean like he's not from around. He's wearing a navy blue suit and carrying a suitcase. "*Molweni*" he greets and shakes our hands. And when his eyes land on my face. I see shock and happiness I think.

"I'm Mandy Madondo" I tell him. He pulls me roughly from the chair and hugs me so tight like I'm going to run away and I feel his body vibrate, he's crying, I start crying too.

“I’m so happy to see you” he tells me planting kisses all over my face. I’m smiling like an idiot, we sit down but he doesn’t let go of my hand.

“I hope you don’t mind” he tells me shyly. I wipe his tears using my thumb. *I have a big brother. My God.*

“I don’t mind. I usually know what to say. I practiced my speech since I found out about you but now I can’t remember a thing” I tell him pulling him into another long hug. “I’m so happy” I tell him through tears.

“I’m also happy” he replies still crying. Musa is busy recording the whole thing. I wink at Ayanda I am so grateful for him right now. I need to catch up with my brother but he doesn’t seem free, Ayanda might be the problem.

“Do you need to talk in private?” I ask

Luthando he nods yes. “We’ll go to the nearest mall” Ayanda announces and the

leave. “Who are they?”

“The one who suggested that they can go out is Ayanda my ex-

husband. Dad took a loan to bribe the Department of Education and they ripped him off, he lost the job couldn't pay back the loan they made a promise that when I turn 21 I'll marry him." He gasps at this information.

"The one who was recording the whole thing is my friend. The only close friend I have. I met him 2 years ago when I divorced Ayanda. Then the other one is Ayanda's friend" I tell him.

"So dad really sold you?"

Luthando asks "Yes, he did.

But the marriage didn't last."

"How was it like living with dad?" he asks in a wishful voice.

"Just be glad you weren't raised by him. He's a terrible person. Always tried to hook me up with his drunkard friends I even ran away from home..." I don't even finish the sentence.

"Where did you run off to?" he asks.

“I went to study and I stayed there. He did nothing, we were so poor he’d refuse to get a job. I don’t know anything about them not even their families. I found out about his teaching job when I found out about you” I tell him.

“Tell me about yourself” he says holding my hand as if he was told I’m going to run away.

“I’m Mandy, I’m 25 years old. I live in Durban, I moved there when I was 21 to marry Ayanda. I’m studying towards my Masters in Communication Studies at UKZN. I’m graduating in 5 to 6 months, I’d love for you to co...” I don’t get to finish the sentence, my brother is hugging and planting kisses all over my face. It’s a really good feeling like my heart will bust out. I loved him before I even knew his face or name.

“What about you?” I ask him in between the kisses. His mom is quiet the whole time.

“I’m Luthando Myeza, your big brother” he smiles. “I work as a personal assistant of Buhle Communications in Cape Town, I started the job 3 weeks ago. It’s my first job. I really struggled to get a job. I’m a qualified computer scientist. I have Masters but I couldn’t get a job so I applied for this one and I got it” he tells me.

“When did you graduate?” I ask him already planning to ask Ayanda to give him a job. I know we just reconciled but this is my brother and I want to move to Durban with him.

“Three years ago” he tells me with a sad smile. My phone rings it’s Ayanda.

“Tell me when you ready to sleep so I can take you to the hotel” I tell him to hold on a second.

“Can I sleep here?” I ask Luthando and his mom they both nod with huge grins. I’m glad they agreed. I planned on sleeping over as soon as I found out we’re coming over.

“I’ll sleep over” I tell Ayanda. “But I’ll need a car if that’s okay” I tell him. He tells me he’ll bring the keys. Most restaurants are closed I want to take Luthando and his mom out.

~~

Luthando and I hardly slept we were chatting the whole night. We slept in his bedroom. He’s a neat freak so I guess I take after him. I learnt so much about him. I told him everything about Ayanda even the mafia king part even though I don’t know what he really does, I hope he’s not selling drugs

but anything done by mafias is never legal. Luthando very shy. I'm sad to say I'm leaving tonight. Tomorrow is Monday he's working. He doesn't like his job and his mom has cancer and doesn't have long to live. I don't want to be away from my brother.

"How about we cook

breakfast?" he asks. "You

cook?" I ask smiling.

"I'm a very good cook I almost went to culinary school but mom was against it. She actually wanted me to be a doctor, but I can't stand blood" he tells me shyly. I wake up and make the bed while he's preparing water for me. When I'm done, I sweep.

"Here we go" he give me warm water and a plastic bath tub. I take a quick bath, I don't want him preparing breakfast without me.

"That was quick" he looks up from his phone when I walk into the room.

"I didn't want you starting breakfast without me" I tell him, he nods and he takes food from the fridge.

Thirty minutes later, Luthando and his mom, Ayanda, Bova Musa

and I are sitting around the table eating. Luthando is so good. I'm busy singing and dancing with my feet and head when I hear his mom laughing. When I look up Luthando is so far away, he's humming and moving his head. My God so my brother also loves food. I'm staring at him, Musa is taking a video again today. We have so much in common.

After breakfast I take them shopping they refuse at first I beg them they finally agree but still they are not comfortable with the whole idea.

"We don't want you to pay for your father's sins" that's Luthando. *Your father*

"I'm not I just want to spoil you. You deserve it." We are at the nearest mall.

We've been here for 5 hours when Luthando's mom complains about being tired. They don't want to eat because I already spent so much. But still I buy them food at Spur they'll eat later at home. We get back to their place and their neighbours are staring at us and some of them gasp when they

see me. We've been chatting for so long I don't look at the time, until Ayanda calls to tell me they are on their way to fetch me. This is really sad.

"You have an assignment due tomorrow" Musa and Ayanda tell me in unison when I tell them I'll go back to Durban this weekend.

"You'll submit for me" I tell the three.

"Bova and I are heading to Joburg tonight,

Musa is working" "Musa I'll pay you for tomorrow please"

"You know I took so many days off and you saw the email my boss sent me last week" he tells me looking helpless.

His boss sent him an email pissed off telling him that being sick again will cost him his job. I don't have a choice I need to leave.

"It's okay, we'll talk the whole week" Luthando smiles sadly at me. I hug his mom and Luthando. I leave with the promise to return soon.

I am so grumpy on the way to Durban and they are trying really hard to cheer me up.

My phone beeps there's a text. I take my phone out from my pocket. It's Luthando I grin like an idiot.

Big bro: words really fail me at times. I'm so happy you came to find me. I always wished I had a little brother or sister. I love you little sis

His words warm my heart. I don't know how to reply.

Me: I always prayed for a big brother you have no idea how happy I am to meet you. Even though our dad is useless but he gave me the best gift I could ask for, a big brother. I loved you before I even met you or knew your name. I hit send and sleep.

Don't how but I wake up in my bed. I must've been very tired without realizing. I prepare for another long day on Campus. My mind keeps drifting to Luthando I'll call him during his lunch I can't wait to talk to him.

Chapter 21

I last saw my parents when I met with Ayanda's lawyer more than 2 years ago and Ayanda is nagging me to see them they miss me. *Miss me?* But I decided to go to his house he said he'll cook. He decided to borrow me the Audi I sold and bought back. He was actually giving me the car but I refused. I'm driving to Ayanda's house when Luthando calls. We talk every day at 6pm that's when he gets home his mom went to visit her family in the Eastern Cape, his granddad is sick they don't have a relationship because they disowned her. I also found out that my parents are from KZN but they relocated to Port Elizabeth when my dad got his degree. I learnt so many things. His family has a relationship with Luthando and they haven't seen my dad since Luthando was born. It has always been my wish to see his family and my mom's family. We talk about general stuff, I told him when I called him during his lunch break that I'm going to visit my parents. We hang up when I'm at the door. Luthando doesn't hang up without saying "*ndiyakuthanda vha?*" (I love you). At first I couldn't respond but now I do. God knows I love him more.

I don't knock I just enter I'm smiling thinking about Luthando but the smile is wiped off when I see Dave and Buhle. I don't say anything. I just leave and I call Musa to come pick me up. He comes as fast as he can, he finds me crying. He takes me to the car, gives me space to cry and when we get to my flat he asks what's wrong when I tell him. He gives me a hug.

"But seriously, are you jealous of their relationship?" he asks. "Whose relationship?" I reply playing dumb.

"Don't play dumb with me" he replies.

"I am" I reply hiding my face in his chest and it's vibrating, he's laughing at me. I don't see anything funny. Ayanda and Bova budge into my flat I'm busy cutting Musa's hair and we're laughing at something.

"So you don't knock? This is my place" I tell them.

"I'm sorry. I got worried when I was told you came. I was busy in the kitchen. You left your car" Ayanda tells me frowning.

“You know how I feel about Dave and Buhle yet you invited me to dinner with them? I thought I could do this but I can’t”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I don’t want you back into my life. You’re selfish Dave killed my baby he kidnapped me but he’s still at your house. Sorry Bova you’re a very good person but I don’t like your sister she’s mean and bitche. And I told you Ayanda about her. So today I saw that they’re very important people I understand really I can’t ask you to cut them out of life.” I see all three smiling. *What are they smiling at?*

“So I decided to cut ties with you since you can’t do that to them” I tell him and the smile is wiped off his face. Did he really think I’ll accept them? Never not in a million years.

“I told him about both Dave and Buhle but he wouldn’t listen”

Bova tells me, Ayanda elbows him in the ribs he squirms.

“Mandy I was hoping you guys would talk. According to Dave he instructed Bheki not kill the baby.”

“The baby? You referring to my baby like it’s just a baby? And you expect me to work things out with you?” I ask him. *Hhhe this*

bustard.

“I was really hoping you changed but you haven’t. I’m sorry but I can’t” I tell him getting emotional. The Dave name makes me emotional and sick. He killed my baby and Ayanda wants me to talk with him for what?

“Mandy please” Ayanda begs. “I can’t go on without you. I promise I’ll cut ties with them” he begs, but you can tell it’s not how he rolls.

“I can’t Ayanda. I tried I’m failing” I tell him and I go to my bedroom lock myself inside. After some time I hear them leaving. I fall asleep after an hour of tossing and turning. Tomorrow I want to sleep the whole day. I was going to ask Ayanda to help Luthando to get a job as a computer scientist so they can move here.

I wake up at 10am the next day. I take a long bath and make the bed. When I open the door Ayanda falls on his back. He didn’t leave?

“What are you doing here?” I ask him annoyed.

“I’m sorry about yesterday. I wasn’t thinking about how you’d feel, I just wanted to hear Dave’s side of the story and clear the air with Buhle”

“Please help Luthando get a job I want him to move here with me” I tell him. “Okay, I will. Do you forgive me?” he asks

“No” I tell him. I’m not playing hard to get I seriously don’t forgive him. “I won’t leave until you do”

“Then I’ll move out simple” I tell him. I’m planning to visit my brother I was going to tell Ayanda yesterday. My flight leaves at 8am tomorrow. I’m so happy Musa will drop me off at the airport, I can’t wait. Classes can wait. I need to spend time with my brother.

He doesn’t leave, I call Luthando during lunch and we talk for an hour and we hang up. I go back to sleep I wake the next day at

6am. I take a shower and pack. Musa gets here at 6:30 I'm so excited I can't stop smiling. We have breakfast at the airport and we chat about anything but Ayanda. It's time to leave I hug Musa and leave with the promise to call him as soon as I land.

By 12 I'm at Luthando's house he left the key under the carpet I open and put my luggage in his room. I decide to take a nap. I'm waken by my phone it's Ayanda I don't answer. I don't want to talk to him. I call Luthando we talk for an hour like always and I sleep. I'll see him in 4 hours, I can hardly wait. To kill time I decide to sleep.

"Sisi, I'm home" Luthando wakes me.

I hug him so tight. "I can't breathe"

he tells me laughing.

"Sorry"

"It's okay" We leave the room to prepare supper. We are cooking chicken stew and rice. We catch up even though we do that on the phone. We don't run out of things to say, I like that. He's a shy guy but he also speaks a lot. An hour there's a knock on the door. He

looks nervous when he opens the door and a cute girl my age I
think walks in looking nervous.

“*Sisi*, this is Anathi my girlfriend”

“Oh wow, hi I’m Mandy. So nice to meet you” I hug her.

“Nice to meet you too” she smiles but for some reason I don’t trust this girl something is offish here but I won’t say a word to Luthando right now. We eat in uncomfortable silence and her phone keeps ringing and she keeps declining the call till I raise an eyebrow like *what’s up*. She quickly switches it off but not without me seeing the name *hubby* on the screen. No wonder she’s nervous. I’m going to shoot this bitch she’s messing with wrong girl’s brother. I’ve known Luthando for less than a month but I am so protective, I’d shoot and kill for him. My phone beeps it’s Ayanda texting.

Ayanda: I found something for your brother. He’s expected to start next week Monday. I wish you told me you were going to see him.

Tell him for the why?

I stare the girl throughout dinner. She’s so uncomfortable, Luthando is also uncomfortable with me staring at his girl like this.

“I need to leave” she announces and bolts

out the door. “What’s wrong sis?”

Luthando asks me worried.

“She’s married. The hubby is the one calling” I tell him. He looks shocked and he frowns. But I decide not to bother him anymore.

“I have good news for you” I show him the message. He hugs so tight I’m the one who can’t breathe this time around. But I still love his hugs.

“I don’t know what to say. *Ndiyabulela* (thank you)” he tells me. I was so worried I thought he wouldn’t be happy, thought he’d be offended. We sit and watch TV he watches all the soapies like Ayanda’s mom and sister. We sleep at 11pm after I help him write a resignation letter so he can email it tomorrow. We share his bed, I want to make up for all the childhood memories missed. I’m so happy for him I fall asleep with a huge smile on my face I can’t wait for us to move to Durban.

~

It's true time flies when you're having fun. My ex-husband decided to come fetch us. Musa love things he didn't stay behind. We're leaving as soon as Luthando's cousin gets here. His mom decided to move back home to look after her dad since no one in the family can. Luthando is so happy, he's close with our grandparents and he can't wait to be in the same province as them. I can't help but be jealous. People always say I wouldn't trade so and so for anything but I'd trade my dad for a relationship with his family. It's time to go and Musa is out the door real quick he's so obsessed with Ayanda's private jet. Thirty minutes later we are boarding the plane. Musa is busy with pictures. He tells Ayanda how much he loves him who would introduce him to a private jet.

Never seen Ayanda so uncomfortable *hehehe*. Luthando is quiet the whole time, actually everyone is except for Musa. He doesn't get tired of taking pictures.

Chapter 22

I'm glad Luthando's resignation didn't come with complications. I felt bad for him it's like his boss wanted him gone already but that was good. I don't want Ayanda doing more favours for Luthando he's a mafia king after all don't want him forcing Luthando to pay him back by involving him in his mafia business. I honestly don't know what he really does. I think he kills people for fun or something. I think I need to ask him. Luthando is starting work tomorrow he's so nervous, I hope Ayanda's friends don't overwork my brother or make him feel like shit because I'll shoot them. I'm in the kitchen cooking when Ayanda joins us. He didn't tell me he's coming over. I wonder why he came alone, it's so strange when he's alone. I made grilled chicken, gravy and papa. I join them we eat and play play station it's Luthando and I vs Musa and Ayanda. We keep losing it's not even funny. We are busy arguing over the score when Luthando asks if I told my dad that he's here. I was hoping he wouldn't ask because my dad told me that he wants nothing to do with him. How do I tell him that?

"Yes I did. But he didn't say anything" I tell him.

“I didn’t want you to tell him” he tells me. I can’t say I’m shocked he’s still angry at him and I won’t tell him to make peace, he’ll do that when he’s ready. I don’t know how to answer that so I just change the subject.

“What would you like to do on your birthday?” I ask him.

“I don’t know, I’m broke I always wanted to go to Ushaka Marine” he tells me shyly.

“What makes you think I’ll let you spend money on your birthday?” I ask smiling. It’s clear he’s not used to people doing things for him. I know how that feels like but I’m taking him out whether he likes it or not.

“Since you like baking. You can come by my house since your oven is small” Ayanda suggests.

“If Dave and Buhle are still there, I’m not coming” I tell him. He doesn’t get the chance time to answer, his phone rings and he leaves without saying anything. I just watch him leave, I feel a little sad.

“I think you need to talk to Dave...” I open my mouth to say something but he shakes his head.

“So that you’ll be able to move on and forgive Ayanda and your parents. I know they don’t deserve your forgiveness. I can see that you still love him, I’m not saying he had the right to abuse you but he has changed. And guess what? He changed for you. So as your big brother I say talk to Dave, hear his side of the story” Luthando tells me. I love my brother but right now he’s talking bullshit. *Total bullshit*. I don’t mean to be dramatic but right now I feel like leaving Luthando here and going to sleep. My baby is still a sensitive issue but because I asked him to come live with me I need to pretend like I’m not angry when I am.

“I will” I tell him lying.

“You’re lying. But it’s your life, your choice” he tells me. “I can see that you don’t like what I just said. I just want you to forgive and move on” he tells me. I feel bad now.

“I’ll do the dishes” Musa tells me. That’s our unspoken rule. If I cook he washes the dishes and visa verse. Luthando and I see sit in silence I don’t know if it’s a good thing or not. He asks me to teach him how to play so that we win and I do. We’ve been playing for 2 hours when he tells me he needs

to rest. I don't want him to sleep yet because I'm selfish but I let him. Tomorrow is a very important day for him. Musa left after washing the dishes. I ask him to take Luthando in the morning he'll use public transport to get back home. I also decide to go to bed. Ayanda texts.

Ayanda: are you sleeping?

Me: No

Ayanda: Can I come over?

Me: Yes

Even though he annoys the shit out of me I miss him. Thirty minutes later he's here. He joins me, we don't talk we just stay in bed till I fall asleep.

~~

It's Saturday, Luthando's birthday. I'm taking him out to Ushaka Marine then later I'm taking him for dinner. Musa is coming with,

this guy loves things, but he has helped me a lot. I honestly didn't know what to buy Luthando but he suggested a phone and laptop. Ayanda has been scarce the whole week no message no texts. I'm not mad at him. He's the one who said he wants to fix things make me fall in love with him or something *bese* he goes mute on me?

Mxm bastard.

Luthando hasn't come out of his room yet. I walk to the room to wake him, if we're late Musa will kill me. But before I can even knock I hear him say *mkhulu* (Grandad). It's his birthday obvious they call him. I'm so jealous right now, I feel tears in my eyes. But I don't move away from the door.

"Don't forget that you're meeting Mandy tomorrow" Luthando tells *mkhulu*.

"We wanted to meet her as soon as you told us about her..." I don't hear the rest because I am so happy. I give Luthando 5 more minutes, we haven't ate. Musa is going to kill us. I'm so glad he gets along with both Luthando and Ayanda, it's a dream come true.

"*Sisi*, I'm done" Luthando tells me, Musa also walks in.

“Ready to go?” We nod and leave I’m so happy. It’s going to be an awesome day. I can’t wait for tomorrow.

It’s a little packed today. Luthando is so speechless I even had to remind him to close his mouth.

Chapter 23

We’re at Spur chatting when Bova calls me. I

answer at first ring. “Mandy, you need to

come home now” Bova tells me and hangs up.

Home where?

I call him he’s not picking up. Is it Ayanda or my parents?

“Guys we need to get to Ayanda’s place as in now” I stand up forgetting that I have to settle the bill.

“We need to settle the bill” Musa reminds me. I look around for our waiter I can’t see him. Luckily I remember his name.

“**LINDA**” I call out his name people stop eating and look at me but I don’t see him.

“Linda we have an emergency at home, I need to settle the bill

now” I scream. Even people from other restaurants are now looking at me. The guy hurries towards me with the bill. I pay and I apologize to everyone before running out the door. It takes 30 minutes from this mall to Ayanda’s place but it feels like 30 years. Something is not right. I’ve never heard Bova panic. We get to Ayanda’s place and the guards tell me to go to the hospital room. I don’t walk to the room I run.

Before I walk into the hospital room I hear the machines beeping. I don’t want to go inside I can’t see Ayanda like that. If something happens I want to remember him as a strong person but my parents shove me inside the room totally ignoring Luthando and it doesn’t seem like he cares. I walk in I see all kinds of medical machines attached to him there’s Bova and Mr Nxumalo sitting here looking all stressed. Mr Nxumalo looks like he’s been crying.

“How long has he been like this?” I ask them. “Monday night” Bova replies.

“And you’re only telling me now?” “You divorced him” my mom replies.

“Shut up” *bitch* I want to add.

“What happened?” I ask feeling emotional.

“He was shot by that Bheki guy. He asked us not to tell you he thought he’ll get better but the Doctor just told us there’s no hope. He said we should tell his family and friends to come say goodbye. He might not make it tomorrow morning” he tells me trying to be strong.

“I want to see him alone” I tell them.

“No we are not leaving” *what’s wrong with my mother?*

“Keep annoying me I’ll shoot that mouth” I tell her and they all leave because they know I will. As soon as the door is closed I rush to Ayanda’s side.

I hold his hand like they do in the movies.

“Ayanda you can’t leave me” I’m begging. “What about the promise you made? You can’t leave me when I never got the chance to tell you I love you” the machines make a sound and the lines are now straight I don’t have to have a medical degree to know he’s no more. I can’t believe he left me. The Doctor rushes in and states the obvious.

“He’s no more” I scream my lungs out. Ayanda can’t do this to me.

“Ayanda please don’t leave” I beg even when he’s no more. I regret all the bad things I said. I shouldn't have divorced him. If I could get one more chance with him I’d treat him right. *One more chance.* I find myself praying. I don’t remember praying. And God decides to grant me that one wish. The machines make a sound and Ayanda coughs. Oh My God.

I hug him till he coughs. I laugh through the tears.

“You came back for me? I promise I won’t leave ever again” I don’t make empty promises just then Luthando and Musa join us they both hug me and Bova joins us.

“What is he doing here?” My dad asks pointing Luthando.

“He is welcome here more than you. You can leave if you can’t stand him. You *bustard*” Luthando wants to leave. I tell him that my parents will leave not him.

“After everything I have done for you...?”

“Done for me? You must be joking. The only thing you did for me was to give me a big brother. I’d even trade you for him” I tell him.

“Ayanda you really shocked me. Once you recover we are getting married” I tell him dead serious. “I’m planning the wedding tonight”.

“We need to leave”

“Can you give Luthando his birthday gift? You know where to find it” I tell Musa. I’m sleeping here in this room.

“I’ll sleep here” I announce I want everyone out.

I just decide to tell Ayanda about my day how I heard Luthando

remind his granddad that we're meeting tomorrow.

"I really want to meet them but you come first now. I love you Ayanda more than you can ever imagine" this is like the first time I tell him this.

"I always wanted you to change and you did, divorcing you was the best decision I made. The abuse was too much and now I feel bad. If we were together I'd protect you" I tell him and he smiles at that. I want us to talk about the wedding as soon as he gets better. When I look up he's sleeping. I get scared when he closes his eyes like he'll close them forever I'm being selfish I know but I wake him.

"Please stay up. I get scared when you close your eyes" he manages a weak smile he shakes his head.

"You don't want to stay up?" He shakes his head. He can't talk.

“You won’t leave me?” I ask, he nods. I kiss his forehead and wish him a good night. I’m sitting here reading when I hear him clear his throat. I look at the watch it’s 3am. I help him drink water he tries to talk but the voice comes out as a whisper.

“Rest. I’m not leaving you again remember?” Someone walks in I see Ayanda grimacing I quickly look behind me thinking it’s Bheki, it’s Dave. I think about what Luthando said so I let him come in.

“Hello” I just nod I don’t have to talk to him right? He keeps talking I’m not listening I’m staring at Ayanda.

“I know I’m the last person you want to see”

“Look I didn’t leave the room because you’re Ayanda’s friend and that doesn’t mean you’re mine too” he shuts his mouth and concentrate on his phone. I don’t know where mine is. Ayanda clears his throat Dave jumps I give a cold look that could even freeze the Vaal dam. He sits down immediately.

Why is he here?

Ayanda needs more water. He drinks water and he drifts back to sleep. I look at the time it’s 7am I haven’t slept I need to leave, I’m meeting my grandparents. I wake Ayanda up to tell him I’m

borrowing the Audi I'm meeting grandparents he nods. I kiss his forehead, cheeks, nose and then his lips I tell him I love him and he should hang in there for me he smiles. I don't want to leave but I have to. I decide to take a shower here. I walk his bathroom take a quick shower. I choose an outfit from the clothes he bought. He kept them that makes me smile. I wear a skinny jean, blouse and boots. I take the car. Thirty minutes later I'm at my flat I find Luthando with 2 old people I throw myself at them.

"We're old people. Careful not break any bones" my grandma tells me laughing. "You look 40" I tell her honestly.

"You are so beautiful *gogo*" I wish I had her looks. I then to turn to *mkhulu* "I'm so happy to meet you. It has been my dream for as long as I can remember. I was going to track you down at some point" I tell them planting kisses all over their faces. I'm feeling emotional right

now. They both wipe the tears from my cheeks. We catch up. We talk a lot I even tell them about my marriage and how Ayanda died for 5 seconds and came back to me. I wish my kitchen was big enough so they can sit with me while I cook. I decide to cook 7 colours and beef stew with rice. Two hours later I'm done. My grandparents don't like my mom and she is from the same neighbourhood as them but unfortunately both families don't get along. We talk a lot about my dad's childhood.

He's the first child with 5 young siblings. Four boys one girl. I can't wait to meet them and my cousins.

"You're a good cook" my grandma tells me. We chat throughout the meal. I have so much in common with my father's side of the family. Now I can't wait to meet my mom's side of the family.

Imagine they are in the same town with them but they don't visit them how strange. Granddad hardly talks but he's full of jokes and they are very close with Luthando. It's time for them to leave I don't want them to leave they tell me I should drop them off then I'll see where they live so Luthando and I will visit. We drive to Hammarsdale, we chat all the way. We get there at 6pm. I don't stay long I decide to see my mom's family. My granddad gives me

the directions and I drive there. I knock and an old woman opens the door when she sees me she calls someone by the Nozi name an old woman comes running to the door the next thing I know I'm being hugged and kissed I can't help but get emotional. The kitchen is a little dirty but maybe they were about to clean. Nozi is my mom's mother and the old woman who opened the door is her little sister I hate my parents from separating me from the families they are lovely people all the years I felt unloved I know these people would've loved me to death. I stay for 2 hours, Luthando is working tomorrow I tell them I'll be back soon. They look disappointed but they hug me goodbye. I fetch big bro.

"Thank you so much for doing this for me" I tell Luthando getting emotional.

"It's the least I could do. Thanks for the gift you shouldn't have, you have done so much for me already" I smile I'd do anything for big bro.

When I get home I feel sleepy but I need to get to Ayanda I thought I'd be back by noon. I say goodnight to big bro and I leave. I find Ayanda in the lounge with Buhle she's crying.

"Hey" I greet Ayanda kissing his forehead. He smiles.

“I met both families” I tell him when he asks how my day was. I’m so glad he can talk.

“Never seen you so happy” he tells me. I tell him everything.

“Are you really going to ignore me?” Buhle asks him.

I stand to give them space. “Don’t, she’ll leave” he tells me pointing at Buhle. I can’t help but smile.

“What happened?” I ask when Buhle leaves.

“I found her naked in my bed. I love her like a sister but she misunderstood my feelings. She started to say things about being good in bed and stuff like that” he looks uncomfortable with the whole thing.

We are sitting staring at each other when we hear Buhle screaming we jump and head to where the voice is coming from we find Bova beating her with a belt so we just leave. I’ve never seen Bova this mad. I’m tired I didn’t sleep yesterday, we head to his bedroom and we sleep straight away.

Chapter 24

I wake up Ayanda is not in bed I quickly run to the bathroom he’s taking a shower. “You almost have me

a heart attack” I tell him.

“Sorry I needed a shower. It’s been a week since I had a bath. Go back to bed, I’m coming” he tells me. I think I should take a shower too. I walk to my old room and I find Buhle and Bova talking. So she’s using my old room? What’s wrong with Ayanda? We don’t talk for 2 years he decides to give someone else my room? There are so many rooms why mine?

“I’m sorry I just to take a bath and Ayanda is using his bathroom” I tell Bova and I walk into the en- suite lock the door and I take a shower didn’t bring change of clothes but at least I have Ayanda’s gown. I walk back to his bedroom the bed is made he’s lying in the couch.

“I thought you left” he tells me with his eyes closed.

“No, I decided to take a bath too” I answer him walking into the closet to take something to wear. I decide to wear a black maxi dress and matching underwear. Since he’s lying on his back I lie on top of him on my stomach. He winces, I totally forgot that he has gun wounds. I lie beside him. We fall asleep I’m waken up by my phone it’s Luthando. I pick up and we talk for an hour. My

family from

my father's side wants to meet me again this weekend. I'll sleep over on Friday then on Saturday I'll sleep at my mom's house. Ayanda's stomach grumbles and we decide to make lunch together this is how I imagined my relationship with my husband. We find Sindi and her mom they are so happy to see me and I'm happy to see them too.

"It's been what 2 years" Sindi comments.

"I'm so happy to see you guys" I tell them honestly.

"We heard about the wedding plans" his mom tells me smiling.

"Yeah we are getting married as soon as possible" I tell them and Ayanda smiles at me. They leave we decide to cook beef stew and papa just for the 2 of us. We cook in silence but I'm happy with that.

~~

I hate leaving Ayanda but I need to go to my flat to see Luthando.

"*Bhuti* I'm home" I announce when I get to the flat I find him and Musa in the kitchen they are laughing at something.

"Hey guys" I greet them. I help Luthando cook he's making lasagna

Mr. Photographer aka Musa is busy taking pictures and posting saying he cooked the food. He's obsessed with social media.

"Sisi I met someone at work" he tells

me smiling shyly. "On yeah tell me

more please" I'm so happy.

"Her name is Amahle she's the receptionist we met at the canteen and we just clicked" he tells me. I'm so happy for him. I hope she treats him like the king he is or I'll shoot her.

We talk about their day at work and I update them about Ayanda.

"Buhle doesn't know when to stop *ne*" Musa comments when I tell them what Ayanda told me.

"Tomorrow we are starting on our wedding preparations I want us to marry as soon as possible" I tell them.

“What’s the rush? Did what happened yesterday change your mind?”
Musa asks me.

“Yes. I’ve never felt so guilty in my life” I tell them honestly. I almost lost Ayanda for good and I don’t think I would’ve survived that. The violent attacks left my mind completely when he stopped breathing. I was going to blame myself no doubt even though I wasn’t the one who shot him.

“I’m going to kill Bheki” I tell them with so much venom it scares the shit out of me. They don’t say anything but they are so shocked.

“Are you coming with us this weekend” I ask Musa. “Of course, I am”

“How are things with Portia” I ask

“Things are great. I’m glad you talked me out of ending the relationship”

“It took you 2 years to get over that ex of yours? I even forgot her name” I tell him.

“But not long enough for you to stop crying over Ayanda” he tells

me smiling. It's the truth. I don't think I'd get over him that's why his 5 seconds death almost broke me.

"Sisi, are you serious about the Bheki issue?" Luthando asks me.

"You don't know what I'm capable of" not to sound dramatic the Bheki name brings so many bad memories. They know he was Dave's partner or still is you can't trust these mafia people honestly. Musa goes to wash the dishes.

~~

I've never spent so much time with Ayanda even when we were married now it's time to go see the families I can barely wait.

Ayanda is coming with he'll leave later. We travel to Hammarsdale around 7am after we dropped Luthando off he'll come with Musa after work. I'm so grateful for Musa. I bought groceries for both families I hope this won't be a problem. Now that we are here, I'm nervous what if they don't like Ayanda after what I told them. I'm usually private but lately I talk a lot. As soon Ayanda parks the car the whole family comes out. *Mkhulu* and *gogo* are the first ones to

greet Ayanda, they are all smiles happy to see him I hope. When it's my turn I hug them both so tight for so long they both complain saying something about me breaking their bones *hahaha*.

The next thing I know we are being hugged kissed by the whole family, it's not as big as I thought. I think all the uncles are here and my aunt and their children unless others are at work or school since it's Friday morning.

"*Gogo* and *mkhulu* this is Ayanda" I tell my grandparents.

"Such a handsome young man, if I wasn't old and ugly I was going to take him away from you" my grandma replies and winks at him. This is strange but I can't help but smile.

"You are beautiful and you still look young" Ayanda tells her "Did you hear that *mkhulu*?" a girl my age asks granddad "I'll kill for your grandma" he tells me smiling.

“That’s how I feel about Ayanda” *shit* where’s that coming from now? They all smile at me.

“Let’s go inside. We have cooked up a feast. Mama says you are a great cook I hope you’ll enjoy the food” my aunt tells me.

“I love food more than anything” I tell them. “I know I’ll enjoy the food after all you prepared it with love” I tell her.

We go inside there’s a buffet the food looks and smells delicious. I dish up everything on the table. We all sit down. I’m eating when the room is suddenly quiet but the food is too delicious for me to even look up. When I look at everyone they are all trying not to laugh.

“Did I forget something?” I don’t pray before eating.

“No, you’re singing and dancing” Ayanda tells me laughing.

“I used to eat alone from my office my whole life and when I saw her singing and dancing when eating I started eating with everyone” he tells them laughing. They all begin to eat since Ayanda doesn’t eat much we share his food everyone is eating and staring at me except for one person. A girl a little older than me. She’s staring at Ayanda it makes me uncomfortable.

“Do you need something”

I ask her. “No, why?”

“Why are you staring at him like that?” I ask her. “Like what?” she’s playing dumb.

“Don’t act dumb” I tell her. This is my man I’ll shoot her. “Feeling insecure?”

I open my mouth to fight back but I see grandma shaking her head. “I’ll shoot you” they all gasp. I continue eating. *Nxa stupid cousin*. “Mandy take that back” my aunt tells me. I won’t take that back.

“She’s stubborn like her father.” One my uncles comments looking disgusted. I ignore them for the sake of my grandparents.

“I’m sorry *gogo* and *mkhulu*” I apologise to them because I feel

like I disrespected them. We eat in an uncomfortable silence.

Time to wash the dishes I tidy up the table, Ayanda follows me to the kitchen I hear my aunt telling the uncle that said I'm stubborn like my dad that *ngimdlisile* these people are going to annoy me. I wash the dishes while Ayanda is sitting at the table. He hates washing dishes but I'm cool I'm used to washing dishes. Thirty minutes later I'm done we walk to the lounge I find my aunt and the cousin talking.

"She thinks she's all that. I'm hotter than her I'd take him any minute" she tells my aunt. "Beauty with no brains" I tell her. *Stupid girl.*

We walk out and I find my grandparents in the dining room with many letters. We sit down but I can tell they don't want Ayanda here and I think he sees that too because suddenly he has stuff to do when he said he'll be free all day. I don't want him to leave but he has to. I walk him to the car, I forgot about the groceries we take the food back to the house 2 of my male cousins help me and Ayanda they seem nice. Everyone is nice except the 3. As long as my grandparents are happy it's all

good after all this is about them. Ayanda is now sitting in the driver's seat. I hug him so tight forgetting about the gunshot wounds till he complains.

“I don’t want you to leave” I tell him, in a shaky voice.

When did I become so needy?

“I’ll be back Mandy. Please don’t cry” he begs I let go and he drives off taking my stupid heart with him.

I walk into the lounge my grandparents are now sitting there. Come to think of it we never really discussed my father’s disappearance and I know this is about him. So I sit down and wait for them to talk.

“Mandy I know you might have thought we abandoned you at some point” granddad tells me so unlike him to do the talking I see grandma holding back tears this must be hard for them and I’m not going to push I’ll wait.

“Your dad lived in East London as soon as he got his teaching degree. He is the most intelligent person ever you and Luthando take after him. We were so happy for him. To be honest we never liked your mom from the start but when he decided to marry her

we didn't object. They relocated to East London we communicated through letters he always wrote to us until the Luthando story, he didn't tell us anything we heard from your mother's family since she wrote to them and told them about the scandal. We went to East London we met the girl obviously your dad denied impregnating her but Luthando looks so much like him. We waited till he was born to see if it's his child or not as soon as he saw that it's his child he fled no one knew where he went until someone saw him in Johannesburg but we didn't know where he lived and your mom stopped writing. We heard about you when our neighbour saw you in Johannesburg." he tells me.

"When did he lose the job exactly because what you're saying and what Ayanda told me doesn't really add up" honestly it doesn't.

"He relocated to Johannesburg when Luthando was born but he still had the job." he tells me giving me the letters.

This means the Department heard about the story when I was 5 years because that's when he took the loan.

"I'll read them later"

"This is strange because for almost 5 years now my parents are living at Ayanda's place. Even after the divorce they stayed when I moved out" I tell them. They are in the same city as their parents but they never visit, it's been over 25 years now I think.

"Luthando told us when you want to Cape Town to find him." Grandma tells me.

"He also told us what they said when you went to see that boyfriend of yours" *Hmmm boyfriend? This is strange are we in a relationship?*

Me: are you my boyfriend? I never had a boyfriend before.

Ayanda: YES *smiley face*

I finally have a boyfriend *hmmm* this should keep my mind occupied. We go on to discuss general stuff. Granddad has gone to bed he says he's tired so grandma and I stay behind to talk.

"You really love that boy *ne*" she comments out of the blue. I

don't know how to answer that. "But he loves you too I can see the way he looks at you"

"I wasn't joking when I said I'd

shoot that girl" "Who?

Nothando?" I don't know her name

but I nod. "Can you even shoot?"

she asks laughing.

"I shot Ayanda in the chest and both knees later I stabbed his hand" I've never told anyone this but I don't know I feel like I can tell my grandma all of this. "I also shot his friend. I felt like shooting my parents more than once" I tell her honestly.

"Are you serious?" she asks really shocked. What if she doesn't trust me what if she doesn't want to see me again?

“I’m serious. The abuse was too much he’d beat me for nothing like this one time I was trying to help a man he chained” I tell her. I think I shared too much.

“I once stabbed your granddad because of the same situation. But it’s not reason enough you shouldn't have divorced him you should've stayed regardless of what he put you through. All women go through that all the time but we decide to stay because of the promise we made. If a man beats you then there’s something you doing wrong.” I can’t believe my ears. This old woman is losing her mind. Not all men are like *mkhulu* or *Ayanda*. My dad is a terrible person but he has never hit my mother that I know for sure. I’m stunned I don’t answer her instead I read the letters to pass time.

There are so many letters they wrote to each other once a month for 3 years. I can tell from the letters that my dad was their pride and joy. Their favourite child making them proud like that. Going to Varsity is still a big deal here. In most letters *gogo* and *mkhulu* are complaining about my aunt and uncles. My dad loved them

dearly but I honestly don't know what changed. After reading 15 I take a break there are more than 20 remaining letters. Grandma fell asleep on the couch I don't want to wake her so I join her but I sleep on the floor. I'm waken up by Luthando. I must've been sleeping for more than 4 hours now.

"*Sisi vuka* I'm here" he tells me. I wake up to see Ayanda smiling at me. We decide to cook the 4 of us. Musa hardly cooks I wonder what's up. We're cooking and chatting on the kitchen when the nasty cousin joins us. She just sits we are cooking beef stew, salads and rice. When we are done Luthando sets the table he's familiar with this place. We say the grace and we dig in more people are here now and Luthando is chatting with them and Musa too you'd swear he's the cousin not me but I don't mind. I talk a lot but I don't want to say anything right now. I don't know why but I feel like sleeping at my mom's side of the family. But at least I'm enjoying the food. I think Ayanda can see that I'm not feeling well because he mouths "Are you okay" I shake my head. I'll talk to him later. After supper Nothando won't wash the dishes the 2 cousins who helped me earlier volunteer to wash them. I don't know whose kids they are so I decide to help them.

“Yazi guys I didn’t get your names” I tell them.

“I’m Siyanda and he’s Anele. We are Mthokozisi’s sons. We are twins” I turn to look at them talk about not so identical twins. Mthokozisi is my annoying uncle who said I’m stubborn like my dad.

“How old are you guys?” I ask them.

“Twenty four” and we continue to chat, I’m enjoying their company.

Chapter 25

The twins are sweet. I share the room with them. They have 2 singles I share the other single with Luthando. We chat the whole night. They also don’t get along with Nothando she has a kid with my other cousin’s husband. *Wuu* I’d shoot them no doubt about that. There isn’t enough space for Musa so he went back to his flat. He looked sad I was going to sleep on the floor but there aren’t enough blankets. I fall asleep while waiting for Ayanda’s call he promised to call me. *Stupid boyfriend.*

~~

“You seem so eager to leave. Did we do something wrong?” my grandma

asks.

“No, I need more time with them too” I tell her and hug them goodbye. I hope this won’t make them fight even more. Ayanda hasn’t called and he’s not here when he promised. I walk to my mom’s house it takes 15 minutes. Four houses from my mom’s house I hear a woman singing, she sounds drunk. When I open the gate it’s my grandmom Nozi she’s so drunk. I hug her she smells like a tavern my God. I go inside it’s a pigsty even worse than last week. My mom takes after her family *sies*. I go inside I don’t know where to sit it’s so dirty. So I start cleaning. It’s a 6 room house three bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge and dining room. I’ve been cleaning for 5 hours. I’m almost done when Ayanda gets here, the twins accompanied him. I am so mad at him I wish he’d go back to wherever he was, they help him unload the groceries. I thank my cousins and give them cash.

“How are you?” he asks smiling. If I had a gun I’d shoot that sexy mouth. I just ignore him and I clean the last bedroom when Nozi decided to come help.

“I’m here to help” she tells me smiling.

“You wait till I’m done to come help me? Why don’t you clean the house to begin with when I told you last Sunday that I’m coming this weekend?” I ask her almost shouting forgetting she’s my grandma I’m too mad. I came all the way to clean her mess.

“Who do you stay with?”

“My husband and one of my sisters”

“But you don’t clean? It looks like the whole village lives here” I’m too annoyed. “I’m sorry”

“If you don’t clean then I won’t be coming here” I tell her. I’m so annoyed at Ayanda and her and it seems like I’m stuck with both. I go back to the kitchen to cook lunch since it’s after 1 in the afternoon. Ayanda is talking but I’m too angry to hear what he’s saying. I decide to cook mincemeat with vegetables and rice. My feet hurt don’t know she was the last time I’ve been standing for so long.

“I’m sorry. I got busy”

“Busy with what? Killing people?” I ask him. He gasps instead of answering.

“Don’t look so shocked. You’re a mafia king after all” I tell him. He

leaves the room he's angry and I don't care. After cooking I call them here to fetch their food. I'm not going to sleep here I don't know when they last washed their blankets, I'm going back to my flat.

"I haven't seen your mom since you were born" she tells me. I'm too angry to care. I continue eating ignoring her completely her sister is not here she went to visit her grand kids. My granddad is not back from wherever he went it looks like it's a secret since they won't say where he went. I wonder how he lives with such an untidy person.

"I'm no longer sleeping here. I don't know if I can after cleaning the whole house I doubt you guys have clean blankets. As soon as you clean your house I'll be back" I tell her.

I wash the dishes and head over to my dad's house ignoring Ayanda completely. I find Musa chatting with Luthando.

“Sisi you’re back”

“Yes. I don’t think I’ll sleep in that pigsty” I tell them.

“I need to go now. I need a

bath after cleaning that

house” “I’ll take you home”

Ayanda tells me. I tell him no

“Why are you angry?”

“Why am I angry?” I ask him in a low voice. I don’t think Ayanda has seen me angry and he looks uncomfortable right now.

“Didn’t you promise to call last night? Didn’t you promise to come over at 7am?” I ask him shouting people are now staring at us. I don’t care.

“Mandy” it’s Musa he has never seen me angry.

He's seen me broken and down but not angry.

"You are selfish" I tell Ayanda. Of course I got worried.

"Why didn't you call me then?" *Isn't that a boyfriend's job* but I don't say that out loud. He's my boyfriend he's supposed to call me not the other way round. I think I'll take a taxi. The twins walk me to the taxi tank.

Commented [HM1]:

Commented [HM2]:

"Sisi can we visit you" they ask looking anywhere but my face. I'd like to have them.

"Yes you can come tomorrow with Luthando" they smile and nod. I don't know if they are shy or they hardly know me. The taxi leaves they wave I wave back smiling.

Two hours later I'm at the complex Ayanda is waiting for me.

"You can't ignore me if you don't like something tell me". I still don't say anything I walk to my flat

and shut the door in his face.

~

It's been a week since I went to see both families and I haven't talked with them. I'm still mad at Zandi. The twins are enjoying their time here they clean and wash the dishes and watch TV the whole day. Because of them I now understand soccer. They are Kaizer Chiefs die-hard fans. I have a surprise for them Kaizer Chiefs is playing against Amazulu tonight I bought them tickets I'm going to Ayanda's place we are planning the wedding my parents went back to Joburg so we can start with the lobola negotiations. We'll have both Zulu Traditional wedding and white wedding. Ayanda decided to do things the right way my dad will start working to repay the loan and I'm happy with that decision.

~~

After planning the wedding for 2 months we're getting married in 30 minutes. Both families came my parents did everything they could to ignore them so far and they also not saying anything. Nothando and her mom are here acting as if we get along wanting to help with anything. I told them to sit down and wait. We are starting with the traditional wedding. I'm ready wearing *isidwaba*, white vest, white tommies and *isiqolo* bought by both

grandparents. I went to visit Zandi again and she managed to keep the house clean even met my 2 aunts and 7 uncles and their children, such a wonderful big family.

It's time for *ukugida* I chose eight of my cousins, four cousins from each families and they know what they are doing. We'll start with *umkhehlo* then *umshado* later then at 12pm we'll have our white wedding.

I practiced *ukugida* with my cousins they are so good while I'm not. People start singing and we go outside, it's so hot Ayanda is looking so handsome in his Zulu attire.

~~

It's 12pm time for my white wedding. I also chose four cousins two from both families, Portia Musa's girlfriend whom I finally met 2 months ago and Sindi are my bridesmaids. Bova is the best man, Musa and the twins and his 2 business partners are the groomsmen. Luthando is handing me over. The music starts I walk down the altar Ayanda looking super handsome. I let Ayanda choose the wedding dress and he chose a beautiful dress, he has a good taste. It's a bob tube like the last

dress very long with blings all over. When I stand to face him he sighs I wonder what's up. Luthando kisses my forehead and cheeks and he leaves.

Mkhulu my mom's dad is our

priest this time. We say our

vows Ayanda starts.

"I promise to love you and protect you all the time. You make me a better person. Words fail me right now. But every day I look at you and I think Dear Lord I can never thank you enough for this precious gift. When you first told your family you don't want me you had my attention for some reason it felt refreshing hearing a girl say that. You take care of me even when I don't deserve it. You thank me for the smallest things. Each day I wake up I love you more. You're my life" I squeeze his hand. My mafia king has always been a man of few words.

It's my turn and I'm getting emotional.

"I promise to love you and protect you. I also promise to never

leave you no matter what, you're stuck with me till death do us part. Any girl that looks your way I'll kill her (they all laugh). I'll shoot for you. I love you Ayanda more than you can ever imagine. I'll annoy to death but also I promise to love you to death. If it wasn't for you I'd never meet Luthando and my grandparents. Life was never the same without you. You're my life, my heart, my world, my king. I love you with your imperfections. I love the person you have become, I love the way you take care of me when I'm too weak to." I tell him getting emotional. I want to continue but words fail me right now, but ey I will spend my whole life honouring my vows.

"I know pronounce you husband and wife **again**" says *mkhulu* and everyone laughs. I look at my heart in a human form smiling down at me I smile back because his smile is contiguous.

.....**The End**.....

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