

THE *y* *in* *y* OUR
MAN is
Silent

Book 2



YVONNE MAPHOSA

**THE Y IN
YOUR MAN IS SILENT
Book Two**

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*For my FAMILY, for their undying support and endless love.
For the FIERCE at heart who choose love every time, who are not
afraid to try again*

*For my tribe, my friends, my readers and all those who show me
love.*

*For my labmates, you guys show me love everlasting and you give
me life. I hold all of you dear to my heart.*

*For Chikamnele, thank you for the awesome covers, I couldn't ask
for a better friend and designer .*

BOOK TWO

*I love him not just for the way he dances with my
angels but for the way the sound of his voice silences
my demons*

One

We have forgotten all about Ghana. We are back to playing video games, watching our movies and doing the best we can to be good parents to Peter and Paul. I'm playing the good wife although I'm not wifed yet. I cook every day, read bedtime stories to the kids and regularly service my addict of a fiancé. Life is good. I haven't decided whether I want us to get married in court and that's it or if I should have a small beach wedding or have a destination wedding or if I should go all out and have a huge wedding right here. I'm yet to think about it.

Elik wants a wedding because he says he wants to see me walk down the aisle in a white dress. It's complicated though because of our families. Plus who will be my bridesmaids? I don't have friends. It's stressful so I'll put a day aside and think about it. It has to be after the baby though.

We had to rush to the doctor the other day because I was having cramps but it turned out to be nothing. The doctor said it's normal and the baby is perfectly fine. Then Elik was asking the most random of questions and silly me joined him and we made the old man uncomfortable.

"Doc, can I have sex with her till the due day?" Elik asked and I laughed.

"Actually Doc you prescribe sex every day for pregnant women, right? Please tell her it will help her give birth better. She doesn't believe me", Elik asked looking serious.

"Doc, please prescribe something for his brain. I think he has a short circuit somewhere in the head".

"Which head?" Elik said.

"Both", I said and we just couldn't stop laughing.

"Please prescribe a daily dose for her, please", he said.

"Prescribed or not, you know you'll be getting it baby".

I felt sorry for the poor doctor. He looked at us unsure what to say, I guess wondering whether to prescribe seeing a psychiatrist or not. He said yes as long as I was comfortable we could have it till before birth and we could have it any way we desired.

Oh by the way! Elik and I are having a boy. I'm so excited I can't wait for him to get here already so we can spoil him rotten. I've even started buying baby clothes and thinking up names. I could call him Elikplim Jnr

but I'm worried that I might be cursing my child and he grows up loving women like his father? I don't want that. Komla's kids are happy and they haven't once asked about their mother. Elik thinks maybe I should let them call me mummy instead of aunty but I don't know. I don't mind what they call me. They could call me Fierce, I wouldn't mind really. We get along very well and Elik thanks me almost every day for taking care of them. I'm a natural at this mothering thing.

The twins will be going to an elementary school in Rondebosch for Grade R when schools open. The fees are R240 000 per student per year! So we're forking out R480 000 in school fees and that's excluding the school uniforms, sports uniforms, numerous extracurricular activities and unnecessary school trips. It's a lot for kids doing Grade R! When I sat Elik down to say I'd found a school, I was scared he would freak out about the fees. But he just said, "Is that the school you'll like them to attend?"

I said, "Yes. It's a good school and it's close to the new house so I'll be able to drop them off and pick them up without suffering through traffic. And they will learn much more than just school knowledge. They'll learn life skills, manners and how to be outstanding members of society. They'll also have more opportunities in terms of discovering their talents".

He said, "Alright. Just tell me how much is needed and give me the account details, I'll make the payment".

It was a huge relief and I can't wait for the first day so I can dress them up in uniforms and take photos of them for my wall. Elik has to be there on that day. It's a huge step.

When it comes to being loved and supported I know Elik and Lumka have got my back any day. I'm moving to a new house in Newlands so Elik and Lumka came with me. It's not like we'll do much anyway, we'll just be telling the movers were to put the furniture. That doesn't need three people but Lumka insisted. I think he has a girlfriend down here! I haven't seen the house yet, Elik kind of took care of all of that. The kids were already in Cape Town with the helper and I went back to Joburg to spend some time with my man without the kids around. We get to Cape Town around 9 pm and head down to Seapoint. My plan is that Lumka will sleep on the couch, then Elik and I will sleep with the twins since Peggy will be using the other room. Lumka reminds me that there's something called a hotel but just because he phrased it like that, no hotel for him! He's sleeping on the

couch! He doesn't fight me. Apparently, this pregnancy has made me very mean so they're all scared of me. I don't think it's true. I think I'm very nice.

We get to the house and I tell them I'll go and check on the kids. I'm sorry but I'm going to wake them up. I miss them so much and I can't wait till morning. I switch on my bedroom light and I swear I'm going to kill someone today. What the hell! Peggy is sleeping in my bed with a man. Thankfully they're not doing the nasty because I don't want to see that. Peggy gets up and she jumps out of bed when she sees me. She's wearing a nightdress. Who dresses up when sleeping with their man? I always assumed all women sleep naked when sleeping with a man! I was wrong I can see.

"What the hell!" I scream and Elik comes running and all I hear him say is "Yho!" before he leaves the room. I quickly go to the other room. What has this woman done with my children? She moved Peter and Paul from my bedroom to the other room and they've been sharing the bed with two other kids that I don't know! Oh hell no! I wake the twins and they're so sleepy shame. I need to scream at people now and I can't have them witnessing that. I don't believe this!

"Bhud' Lumka can you please take the kids to the car, Elik and I have to take care of this". Gosh I'm so mad! He doesn't argue. He takes the twins and grabs the car keys on the counter and goes. I didn't want them to see me going crazy. I storm into my bedroom and find Peggy still trying to put a dress over her nightdress. The man is up too now and is wearing boxers. In my Egyptian cotton? Oh hell no!

"What's this Peggy?" I scream at her.

"I'm so sorry madam. Please madam", she stutters badly.

"Get your things and get your person and your children and get the hell out of my house!" I say. "Oh but madam. This is a mistake. I'm sorry. Please", she says.

"I'm giving you 5 minutes to disappear from my house otherwise I'm calling the police! What the actual hell!"

She let a stranger into my house. There are two kids here! I specifically told her no visitors when I'm away!

"Please madam", she begs. And why is this man still in my bed!

"And wena? Get out of my bed right now and get out of my house!" I yell at him. I can't believe there's a full grown, hairy man in my bed! He

jumps out in his boxers and I actually chase them out of my room like goats. I have a bit of my mother in me after all. Who knew!

Elik is standing by the door the whole time doing nothing! I'll deal with him later. Why is he here then if he's not helping me with this eviction? The man is waking up the children and Peggy is still begging me with her "I'm so sorry madam".

"Peggy, take all your stuff and get out of my house now!" I'm not playing with her.

"Everything? Then I would have to come back with my clothes tomorrow?" Why do people love playing dumb?

"Come back where tomorrow? You're fired! Get out!"

I hear Elik laughing a little. What's so funny here? This woman disrespected me! She moved her boyfriend and two kids into my house! I hadn't told her I'm coming because why should I? It's my house I can come and go as I please. She was sleeping in my bed with her man! *Sies!* How disrespectful! And she made my kids share the bed with kids I don't know! I want all of them gone. Elik doesn't say anything. This man! They finally get everything and I usher them outside. Peggy! This woman pushed me to the limits. Only because they have children with them, I'll call an Uber to take them to wherever they are going. I'll sort out her salary tomorrow, I have no desire to have CCMA on my back.

When they're gone, I turn to Elik.

"And wena? Why did you just stand there?" my voice is still raised.

"What did I do? You had everything under control madam", he laughs.

"You want me to throw you out as well? You know I'll do that!"

"But we're outside! How will you throw me out?" he has that goofy smile on.

"You think I'm crazy ne? You think this is funny? You'll sleep outside today, you'll see".

"I'm sorry madam!" he imitates Peggy. Yerrrrrr! I need to walk away before I strangle him to death. I see he thinks this is funny. Peggy and that man in my bed! Just great! Now I have to change the bedding in all rooms. I can't believe that woman! People really mistake my kindness for stupidity.

Lumka comes in with Elik and the kids. I just have enough time to kiss the kids and apologise for disturbing their sleep. They're so sleepy though shame so I have to change their bedding first and put them to bed.

"Sisi why don't we just check into a hotel?" Lumka says.

“He’s right baby. Don’t worry about this. There’s the Winston Mansions down the road, I can make a call”, Elik says.

I stop what I’m doing and put my hands on my waist and look at them.

“I see what’s happening here! You Elik, with your 4-bedroom house and you Bhud’ Lumka with your 5-bedroom house, you think my house is not good enough for you, ne?”

They look at each other.

“You know what. Go to a hotel. It’s fine, go”.

“Well, this couch is very comfortable so I think I’ll sleep right here. I don’t know about you Elik but me I’m good here, I don’t want to go to a hotel”, Lumka says.

“Me neither. I want to sleep right here with my baby. Actually I need to help her make the bed right now. Come ma, let’s go make the bed and sleep”, Elik takes my hand.

They are so full of it it’s not even funny! I get Lumka blankets and Elik tries to help me make the bed but I tell him to go and stand there by the door, isn’t that’s what he does best? He didn’t help me with Peggy. He just stood there so he should go and stand there some more! He laughs a little. I honestly don’t see what’s funny here! I struggle to turn the mattress and I’m too proud to ask Elik.

“You need help madam?”

“What does it look like?” I snap.

He helps me and I actually let him help me make the bed. I’m still upset with him though. Why was he laughing and why is he calling me madam? He’s making fun of my scene with Peggy. If he calls me madam one more time I’m throwing him out! I check on the twins, check that the windows are closed and everything. Everything is fine so I can go to bed. Lumka is sleeping on the couch and he’s on his phone but the T.V is on.

“Should I switch off the TV for you”, I say nicely.

“Oh no please. I don’t want to hear you and Elik. Leave it on all night”, he laughs. Why is everyone laughing at me today? And if only he knew that his friend will be getting none for a very long time he would switch off that TV and sleep! I shake my head and go to bed. Elik is in bed already and on his phone.

“Move over. You’re sleeping on the far end today”, I push him.

“Why? What did I do?”

“You know what you did”, I’m not playing with him.

“I didn’t do anything madam. Can I sleep in the middle of the bed please?”

I take a pillow and throw it hard at him. He’s so annoying!

“You so cute when you’re mad”, he says. Aaaagggghhhh! He’s driving me insane. I get out of my clothes and sleep at the edge of the bed.

“Switch off the lights Elikplim”.

“But baby you were standing right there by the switch”.

“Elik!” I turn to face him.

“I’m sorry baby. Ok let me”, he gets out of bed and gets the light then turns his side lamp on.

I’m lying here and I’m mad yes but I want him to hold me but I can’t ask because I’ve been going off at him this whole time.

“You awake?” a silly question really.

“No, I’m fast asleep”, he says.

See, today he’s really trying me. I kick him on his leg hard and he says fine since I’ve decided to be a football player, he’s going to sleep at the other far side of the bed. That wasn’t my intention.

“I know what’s wrong with you”, he turns and faces me.

“What?” I growl, not in a nice tone. He starts playing Akon and he rolls towards me and we spoon. I can’t help laughing as he sings along. *‘You Want Some’*. Really? But it’s making me blush so bad. Half the time I think our relationship is based on great sex. But then I remember that that’s just the cream on top. Love is our foundation, the things we’ve been through together strengthen us, the twins bring us closer together, the pregnancy makes us love each other even more and because we have so many things in common, we just enjoy being with each other. He’s right though I could use some.

Ok fine. I know I said he can’t hit that tonight but I mean he’s already right here and his hands are already teasing me so he might as well. I turn to face him because I think I’ll automatically get some but no I’m made to apologise for being mean and for shouting at him and I’m told to beg for it if I want it. I do all that and I’m blushing like a bride. I can’t believe he still makes me blush after all these years and I get those butterflies in my stomach and his touch still makes me want to get a little bit closer to him. He’s the best thing that ever happened to me and I truly love him.

“You’re beautiful”, he says. I blush.

“I love you baby, with all my heart”, he says. I blush some more.

“So you want some?”

I nod more vigorously than I intended.

“So can we do that one that I like?”

I blush some more but giggle and get out of bed anyways.

“You can’t drop me though baby”, I say.

“Have I ever dropped you?”

Lumka was right to leave the TV on.

We finally moved to our new house in Newlands. Like I predicted, Lumka and Elik did abso-bloody-lutely nothing! I’ve no idea why they were here in the first place. They just shared a beer by the poolside and kept saying they had pressing business issues to discuss when I asked them for help! I directed the movers all by myself. I’m sure the talk had nothing to do with business from the way they were laughing. So this house is mine. Not his! Apart from buying it and providing his finances for furnishing it, what else did he contribute? It took almost a week to get the house to exactly what I wanted it to be. It’s big and furniture had to be bought and all that stuff.

Elik hired an interior decorator without telling me but they did an excellent job so I wasn’t angry. I never once dreamed I’d ever own a house with 5 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, a long driveway, three garages, a swimming pool and a garden. For once in my life I feel rich. I feel like this is it, I’ve made it in life. When Elik asked “Do you like it?” I thought ‘*Boy, what?*’ How wouldn’t anyone like this? Even the air blows cooler and fresher this side of town. And I kid you not, the roads are washed. Like a truck goes by at night and sweeps the road and washes it with water! Wow! It’s nice living with rich people. I mean I have manicured trees and a guy whose only job is to clean the pool and keep the lawn green! I love that the kids get to play and run around outside. They have their father for that. I’m here busy being pregnant, I can’t be running around.

The neighbours are a nice older couple. They brought us a casserole with macaroni and cheese. How cheesy! Now I don’t know whether I return the casserole dish empty or if I’m expected to make something as well. Just great! They had to gift me with stress! The cottage at the back is a full 2-bedroom house! It will take time for me to get used to this house. I’m still overwhelmed. Just 10 years ago I was sleeping on the floor in a mud hut and now I’m cruising in Newlands. Village child it’s possible. I wish I could

say it's through hard work but well, Elik is hard work so technically I worked very hard for this.

Elik is around a lot these days. He flies out to Zambia still but always comes back. He's busy shame and is still trying to regain my trust. He left his phone strategically right next to me the other day after he had been going on about "I'll just make your name my password. That way I can never forget it". I got the hint and I could tell he wanted me to go through it. I didn't though. I choose to take his word for it when he says he'll come to me with problems and not find a girl to make him feel better. We're in a happy place so why go digging in a graveyard and expect not to find skeletons? I might be stupid but trust me I'm not stupid. Besides, I have too much on my plate as it is, I don't need stress.

The kids started school. Gosh, they're so cute! They speak well and Elik thinks I'm doing a good job with them. Sometimes I don't think so but I'm trying my best. You should have seen how the other parents looked at me at the opening PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) meeting. One actually had the audacity to say they wanted parents of the children and not siblings to which I said "That's exactly what I am. I'm probably your age but well, what can I say, good genes". Black doesn't crack! I think I've become rude. She's probably twice my age but she doesn't know that. They were all judging me for being young! Like is that even a thing? Too young my foot! They're just old and sour. It's sad that Inflation isn't here. My mother wouldn't let him. I don't see how she's letting her hatred of me deprive Inflation of a better future! I try very hard not to think about my mother because it never ends well for my heart. Her words still haunt me. I've found myself almost sending her money but just end up sending it to my aunt instead. I'm so used to sending money home I feel like I lost a huge part of me when that was taken away from me. So my aunt and eldest brother are my new beneficiaries. I miss my mother so much though. She wasn't perfect but she was my mother and she was always funny and there were times she used to encourage me and actually show me love. I wish I could just get on the next plane home and beg for her forgiveness. I'm going to have a baby soon and I wish she could go through this journey with me. Until then, rest in peace mum.

I called her once in a moment of weakness but *hay cha*, she's really done with me. She didn't even say anything. Just hung up like I was an annoying person trying to sell her a phone contract. I'm a ghost to her. Then

I called my father and he gave me a whole history and cultural lesson about the weight of my mother's words. Apparently, what she did has been practiced over generations and it's believed that uttering those words is the same as casting a binding curse. He said I can never talk to her again and shouldn't even try. He says the only way the 'curse' can be broken is if my mother and I make peace and what's that he said? We must eat ash? (*Sikhumelane umlotha*). I'm not eating ash, I'm sorry. He said he'll call a family meeting so they can discuss the way I disrespected everyone and appeal to my mother to forgive me. He actually said that! He blames me! Him too? They've all turned against me that easily? I told him not to bother with the meeting. I don't need anyone's forgiveness. I'm Catholic these days. There's a whole confession room with a booth dedicated to forgiving sins. If I need forgiveness I'll go there, thank you.

Yes, I'm going to church now. Surprise surprise! Well, I went once so far and I intend to go next week again so I think I can confidently say I'm a believer now. I chose the Catholic Church because it's not hectic and no one is screaming at me in church or trying to exorcise me or making me feel guilty for not offering. It's quiet, it's chilled and there's a set program for the mass. I don't have to spend all day in church. And the priest was very nice and looked like he was from somewhere in the past, from the era of crusades, in that dress or robe he wears. They make the priests young and hot these days, it's ungodly!

I tried convincing Elik to join me in my newly found faith and he said he doesn't have to go because the Bible says if the wife goes to church she's representing the whole household. I don't know which Bible he reads. To be honest, the only reason I go to church now is for the kids. I need them to go to Sunday school so they can grow up with a moral compass of sorts. The last thing I wish upon them is to end up lost souls like the men around them. And why exactly Komla hasn't come for her kids, I don't know. Ok I know she can't enter South Africa but she could call me you know! It's like she just abandoned them and is alright with that. Some mothers don't deserve to see heaven.

They are growing up and maybe when they turn 18 and can now travel alone maybe they can go to Ghana and ask her why. In the meantime, they'll stay at school. Thankfully the school has a bus so I don't have to wake up and drop off the kids or pick them up. Life is going in the right direction. Being pregnant sucks though. Can't I have this baby taken out of me and

put in an incubator for the remaining months? I feel like I'm carrying 5 kgs with me and it's exhausting!

Now I'm all the mother the twins know. I couldn't manage on my own so I got a new nanny, Elizabeth. This time I had strict requirements and had interviews and forced Elik to sit in them. I was bad cop and he was good cop. I won't go through what I went through with Peggy! And now that we have a big house it's better because she gets to stay in the back house. She's really good at this whole cleaning, cooking and taking care of children. I like her but we'll see. As long as she does her job me and her won't have a problem. I set boundaries with her from the word go and made it clear that our relationship is purely professional.

Besides babying the twins and Elik, I have to baby Kofi as well. He's back in Germany finishing up that Masters. I think he's not taking the Elik not being his brother situation too well. We can't end a conversation without him asking if Elik hates him. Aren't we all scared of being hated by Elik? He doesn't just hate you, he deletes you from his life and wraps your coffin with a bow. You are dead to him. They're good with Elik still. Maybe unlike before but I believe with time they'll get there. I'll make sure of it. They're my boys and I want both of them to be alright.

Anyways, I'm back to going to campus every day. Although my thesis was submitted for examination I still have research to do. It's not just an exam mark that makes a doctor. There are research outputs expected, I have to convert my thesis to at least four journal articles. I haven't published anything in the past 6 months. It's bad. It's pretty hot these days but I'm wearing boyfriend jeans and jerseys all the time. I'm hiding my stomach. It's quite embarrassing being with child seeing that no one knew I was dating then I turned up engaged to a married man then now I turn up pregnant! Nope. Not happening. And these guys can't tell I'm pregnant? How blind! Ndivhu just said I'm gaining weight. How rude!

I felt awkward the first time I walked into the lab. Like, I thought they didn't like me anymore. But I was wrong. It was as if I never left and we were all hugs and it just feels like old times now, minus me asking for money of course. So the Chemical Engineering PhD foursome is back again and my days are brighter.

Ndivhu is still Ndivhu. He has on the type of haircut that looks like he was at a barbershop then there was a power cut so they couldn't finish. I wonder what he said to the barber to describe what he wanted! I can't even

describe it but I've seen some football players with it.

Then Brain, brainy Brain. He broke up with his girlfriend Osh. He says she's been cheating on him their whole relationship and he actually was the side nigga doing main nigga duties. *Hay shame*. He's a nice guy, he doesn't deserve that. But that's love for you. It kicks you in the nuts when you least expect it.

Then Bunke. My hoodie-wearing tall glass of water. He's exceptionally nice and is back to madaming me and making me laugh with his Pidgin English. His actions make me believe that I left a huge impression on him and maybe deep down he thinks we'll go back to the good old days. He was always a placeholder anyways, keeping me company until the rightful owner of me came to his senses. A tenant can't really complain when asked to move out so the owner can move in. It's just the way it is. He gave me the best academic gift ever and he presented it as an insult coated in chocolate. I accepted nonetheless and gave him a long thank you hug. His words were,

“Despite what you think, I still care a lot about you. So while you were out there making one bad decision after another, some of us were busy with research. I've written two papers this far and I put your name on them because should you decide to come to your senses and maybe apply for a postdoc fellowship, you'll need publications to back you up”.

I could have flipped and shown him the middle finger but I thanked him instead. It's the best thing anyone can do for you at an academic level. I forgive his insults because he knows not what he speaketh. He also can't tell I'm pregnant? Or are they all pretending not to see? Whatever, I'm just glad things are back to normal. It's our last few months together.

Their theses are back already. Been back for a while now and they're just waiting for graduation. I'm a bit jealous but I know I did this to myself. They were focused when I was busy running after Elik, helping him mess up with his family, messing up with my family, playing sweet stepmother and getting pregnant. The fact that I even finished in the first place is a miracle. It makes me sad though that they're done and I'm not. Ndivhu's thesis from the examiners looks perfect. Too perfect if you ask me. I'm utterly shocked. I guess I shouldn't have judged him so harshly. At least for the guys graduation is guaranteed. As for me, I'm still hoping the copies of my thesis find their way back before the library cut-off date. I congratulated the guys though, with a smile on my face and since I'm moneyed these days

I gave them like a grand each to go buy something nice. And they took it!
Bloody hypocrites! They were bashing me not so long ago but are going to
enjoy the fruits? Hypocrites!

Two

I make it to campus around 10 am. A bit late but it's not like I'm rushing for anything. I say good mornings and complain about everything as usual as I make my way to my desk.

"Prof is looking for you madam", Bunke says.

What now! Let me go and find him while I still have energy. It's my thesis! All three copies are back and Prof was waiting for all of them to get back before he could give them to me. I actually let out a young victory shout. YAY! I'm relieved, happy, emotional, excited at the same time. I passed! I actually made it! I'm a Doctor, ungraduated yet but still a doctor! I'm so over the moon. My first thought is to call my mother. She's been waiting for this day longer than I have. I'm about to dial when I remember that I forfeited that privilege a while ago. I can't share this news with her or any news for that matter. I call Elik and he says he never once doubted me. And he says our wedding is going to be lit because that's the day Prof Nkrumah will wife Dr Nkrumah. That made me smile ear to ear. I'm easily charmed.

Well, I might not be slaying on my graduation day because of this growing stomach but I'll have the time of my life. I head down to the cafeteria window and ask for a chip roll and a can of Coke Zero. Food always was my best friend and since first year, a chip roll and Coke Zero have been my food of choice. Back then it was all I could afford and now it's just a loyalty thing. They have sentimental value. This was my life before Elik came along and introduced me to champagne and lobster. I head to my bench and sit there watching students walk by. These ducks are still here!

This PhD is the one thing that's truly mine. One thing Elik didn't give me. One thing I fought nail and tooth to accomplish. I'll drink to that. As I sit here reminiscing and thinking of could haves and might haves. I think of the now. I got Elik from another woman but if I'm being true to myself, do I regret it? The answer is a resounding NO. I don't regret Elik. Everything we went through made me who I am today. I lost so much along the way but I gained so much as well. So my universe remains balanced. I sound so sad when I should be celebrating. Sigh.

The most unexpected call ever comes through. I keep staring at my

phone, unable to answer, until it goes to voicemail. He calls again. It's Butholezwe, my medical doctor brother. This is a first! I haven't spoken to him in a very long time. I answer it this time.

"Butho?" I ask just to be sure.

"Fierce. How are you?"

We spend a good 3 minutes asking each other useless questions about our health, work, school and overall wellbeing. We both establish that we're fine and all is good.

"I heard what mama did to you".

I keep quiet. He's my brother but he abandoned me a long time ago. I used to look up to him growing up and used to write him letters back then. I loved him and always spoke highly of him but that didn't stop him from abandoning me.

"I'm sorry but I'm not shocked. This is umama we're talking about", he says.

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you think I never came back home?"

"I don't know. You forgot where you came from?"

My mother used to say that about him.

"Yes I forgot. I chose to forget. That woman is bitter and when I got married she disapproved of my wife and said things that made me never want to see her again. That was the last straw for me. I tried to impress her. When I was doing my internship, I sent her almost all my money and she just complained and complained and never once said thank you. It drained the life out of me. And the comments she would pass, I don't even want to talk about that". I had no idea!

"Baby sis look at this from the positive. She has freed you and can never hurt you again with her vile words. Don't be sad".

I can't not be sad. I lost a mother.

"I don't know how you stuck it up with her for that long! That's commendable!"

I keep quiet. She's my mother. I was willing to stick it out with her till kingdom come.

"Anyway. I called to say I'm sorry sisi and I was thinking, since now we're both outcasts maybe we could be outcasts together. I missed out on your life and I would like to get to know you again and be a big brother to you, if you'll have me".

“I would love that very much Butho”.

He has no idea what this means to me.

That was a pleasant surprise. Today is slowly becoming my day! I go back to the lab to be with my friends and to share that I'll be graduating with them after all. My life is a comedy though. I don't have girl friends and the only people around me are men. The only people surrounding me are Lumka, who happens to be Elik's best friend so if ever I break up with Elik our friendship will cease to exist. I have Kofi, same story as Lumka. His allegiance is with Elik. I have Brain, a guy who's wanted me for the longest time. How you build a successful friendship with such a guy beats me. There's Ndivhu, but I wouldn't call him a friend. He's just a lab mate that one. Then lately the one friend I hang around the most is Bunke, an ex who still thinks he can get into my pants. So my whole squad is a mashed potato with a lot of milk. Such a mess!

Elik is in Zambia at the moment and will only be back later tonight. When it comes to chasing that paper, he wins the race. I guess if you have a fiancé and two kids and another kid coming, you have to put in the hours. Besides, taking care of people is all Elik knows so he gets carried away sometimes. I told him he can stay there since he has another meeting in two days anyways but he insists on coming back. He says he doesn't want to stay away from me and my pregnantness and wants to be there with me. I don't buy that. I think he doesn't want me thinking he's with someone else there. Frankly, I forgave him completely and I'm so over that Ghana girl, whoever she was. If I'm being true to myself I know he might do it again and again and again. So why waste this happy time when I know stress might be coming?

The day just gets better and better. I'd thought of going out for dinner but I just remembered that Elik might come late so it's fine. I'll tell him to feed himself. The kids and I will eat whatever Lizzy feeds us. I quickly make all the corrections on my thesis. They aren't that many. It's clean and my plagiarism report was 2%. I didn't even know it could be that low! I can't say I'm surprised by the quality of my thesis. It was edited by Prof Elik Nkrumah himself with a fine tooth comb. Now it's ready for printing, binding and library submission.

I'm sitting on Bunke's desk and he's asking me silly questions like why am I always wearing a jersey in this weather! I never ask him why he's always wearing hoodies! So why is he asking me? I'm busy kicking him

and he's telling me a story about something that happened when he was in Florida. For someone about to be someone's wife, I'm too playful and right here my playfulness could pass as flirting. I don't know, I kind of like attention I guess. I'm staring at Bunke and thinking '*But he used to do me so good god damn!*'. He catches my eye and we hold the stare for a few seconds before I look away. Do I still have feelings for him? Can't be. That's my cue to leave. Elik and I are too happy for me to be doing this. Besides, I'm pregnant so even if I wanted a night of closure with Bunke I can't have it.

The kids are put to bed, Lizzy is gone to her cottage and I'm lying on the couch chatting to my brother Butho and trying hard to catch up. I'm dozing but I'm too lazy to go the bedroom.

"Hey", Elik wakes me and I don't even open my eyes.

"Move over baby, let's share the couch". I move but stay semi-asleep. He covers us with a blanket and squeezes next to me and puts his hand on my stomach. I'll see him in the morning. Let's see if I can get back to that dream of me having dinner on a boat with Akon.

The kids woke us up and asked why we were sleeping on the couch. I let Elik answer that. I spend the rest of the morning talking about me bagging that doctorate and trying to figure out what colour dress looks better under a red gown. Elik is happier than me. He says he's really proud of me and I inspire him. How exactly I inspire him I don't know because if anything, he inspires me. But obviously the universe wouldn't dare see me happy for long. It always comes around to remind me that it gave me Elik and can take him back anytime if it wanted. It's like being dangled on top of the fires of hell while looking up to the heavens. You have beauty right in front of you but you know a single drop will land you in the fires. It's madness.

It's mid-morning and Elik is taking me shopping because my clothes don't fit anymore. I'm becoming a hippo like Kofi predicted. I'm still a baby hippo though but a hippo nonetheless. He insists I look great but he says that all the time no matter how I look so he's not a trusted source. I keep complaining and whining about how pregnant I look right now. He says so what? He says I should be proud to be carrying a life inside me. Yeah. That's easy for him to say. It's not easy carrying the evidence of sex with you everywhere you go! I'm in the shower and taking my time when Elik opens the door and says,

“Babe. Your phone keeps ringing”.

“Answer it baby and tell whoever it is that I’ll get back to them in 30 minutes”.

I continue showering. I’m getting lazier and slower, even bathing takes me forever and a day. I’m still busy showering when I hear a smashing sound like that of breaking glass. Then another smash and another. It’s like someone is breaking things.

“You alright baby?” I call out. No reply. I quickly get the soap off me and jump out of the shower.

It takes me forever but I finish eventually. The living room is a mess. The tall mirror on the wall is broken! The TV screen is shattered! A big portrait of Elik and I is broken and lying on the floor. What happened here? I scream for Elik but nothing. I run out and around to the garage with just my towel on and my car is gone. We kind of have been sharing the Jeep because I insisted. I think we were just robbed and maybe Elik was kidnapped. I run back to the house and by the time I make it to the door I’m having a panic attack. I can barely breathe, my heart is beating fast, my palms are sweating and I feel light headed. I think someone took Elik.

I know I need to get it together and call the cops. I close my eyes and focus on my breathing until I can at least stand without feeling like I’ll fall face first. My phone is right there next to the broken portrait. Careful not to step on the glass, I reach for my phone then go to the bedroom. The screen is cracked, like someone threw it hard against the wall or something, but it’s still on at least. 10111 is the number I dial and I try to stabilise my shaky voice. I report a break in and a possible kidnap and a stolen vehicle. The operator says I must remain calm and must lock myself in the bedroom in case whoever broke in returns. I do the locking of the bedroom but the remaining calm part is hard. I need to call Elik. I open my chat with him. There’s a message from him thank God. I quickly open it with shaking hands and it says *‘Was he good?’*

What does he mean? Was who good? It’s probably the kidnapper, right? Texting with his phone? Are they asking if Elik was good when being kidnapped? But why are they texting me? It doesn’t make sense but a lot of things don’t make sense to me right now. I panic some more. Will they come back for me?

The cops are outside already! Three cars! Talk about fast response! This is Newlands, I’m sure each house has a designated policeman and car on

standby. I mean we pay the most taxes in this side of town. Elik does the actual paying but me and him are one so WE pay. I'm still wrapped in a towel and I tell the cops what happened. They ask me if there was anyone else in the yard and I say my helper is in the cottage at the back. Two of the cops leave and go to question her. The one asking me the questions doesn't seem to think there was a break in. He says with all the alarm systems, cameras and remote-controlled gate, it all doesn't add up. He says it's broad daylight and someone would have seen something and called the police if there really was a break in.

Duh! I'm someone and I alerted the police. What's he talking about! I try telling them that criminals are clever these days but they tell me they know criminals better than me! They think Elik and I were fighting! They don't even take a statement! I'm so upset I'm going to call 10111 again and ask for more serious police! They don't take me serious even though they can see I'm about to have a mental breakdown and can see the broken things on the floor. My man was taken here! I tell them that if anything happens to my fiancé, I'm suing the whole SAPS!

The ones who went to question Lizzy return and tell me to never make a prank call to the police again, it's illegal! They say Lizzy told them that she saw the man I'm describing as mine (her boss) leaving alone and getting into the Jeep and driving off! Lizzy is lying! Elik and I were cool. He was waiting for me to finish showering so we can go to the Mall so why would he just leave? And who broke all these things then? It doesn't make sense. The female asks me if I'm married! Like what has that got to do with anything. I say no with an attitude and she gives me back more attitude. Mxm.

"You know we have real criminals to catch ma'am", the talkative one says. I don't understand.

"Let's go. She did this herself and her partner drove away. You can see she's a bit psycho. These young girls and blessers! There was no break in or hijacking", the female with the stinking attitude says. I really don't understand and I'm in shock as they all judge me with their eyes and walk out.

There's a missed call on my phone from Jay. I didn't even hear it ring. I open my call log so I can redial Elik and there are five missed calls from Jay. So when Elik said '*babe your phone*' it was Jay calling? Oh shit. Oh that's bad. Really really bad. What did Jay say to him? I quickly go to my

WhatsApp and there are new messages that have been read. It just pieces itself up. Elik read a bit of my chats with Jay. So he wasn't kidnapped! I'm so dead. I've kind of been flirting with Jay since we got back from Ghana.

Not explicit flirting but more of *'Hey handsome'*, *'Nice profile picture'*, *'I miss you'*, *'Blushing emojis'* and subtle stuff like that. We WhatsApp call every now and then just to check up on each other. Nothing explicit really. Then today of all days he had to write *'I really enjoyed you that time. Can't wait to see you again!'*

Elik obviously assumed the worst when he saw that. I'm so screwed. My hands are shaking and I don't know what to do. I call Elik and the phone rings and he hangs up. I try again and it goes to voicemail. Can he please allow me to explain? I can explain. I call Lumka and he says he last spoke to Elik yesterday. I'm hysterical and he waits till I'm calm.

"What happened?" he asks. I tell him. I mention that maybe Jay called and maybe Elik misinterpreted the harmless messages. He laughs! Like do these people not know when to be serious?

"You called the police?" he's laughing at me. Honestly what's so funny here? Mxm.

"I'm serious. Elik's gone!"

"You say you didn't do anything with this guy, right?"

"I didn't. It was just harmless flirting. I swear". I need to be believed.

"Then find Elik and tell him that. He'll be alright. You really think Elik would break up with you over this? Come on now. He's just throwing tantrums. Well, except if you actually did something with this guy then Elik will find out one way or another. Then you're screwed yes".

I wish I had the same calmness he has right now. I know Elik would break up with me or probably cut off my head in the process. When there's another man involved he turns into something else I don't recognise.

"But nawe Fierce! Why would you leave evidence lying around like that? You delete these kinds of things!"

Is he saying what I did is fine? I just had to delete the messages? Such a friend he is!

"Bhud' Lumka. This isn't funny!"

"I know. Elik is going to kill you", he continues laughing at me.

I'll get him, he'll see. Is he really going to laugh at me when he can hear from my voice that I've been crying? I tell him I have to go.

I don't think Elik will forgive me. It's a miracle he didn't kill me

already. He's thinking I slept with someone else and he'll never forgive me. Who invented phones? Life was so much better without them. And this WhatsApp has always been an enemy of my relationships. I need to find him. I'll check the airport first. He might be headed back to Joburg or Zambia. I can't let him leave without explaining myself. He needs to know it's not what it looks like. When the Uber is here I run outside and the driver looks at me funny.

"Aaa. You're not dressed", he says. Oh sugar! I'm still wrapped in a towel. I ask him to wait and I go and put on sweat pants and a T-shirt and grab my falling-apart phone. The driver looks and me. I still have a towel around my head. I take it off and as we drive I try to dry my weave. It's far from dry by the time we get to the airport so I leave it to drip. That's the least of my worries right now. I think I left my mind at home because I ask the first security guard I see if he hasn't seen a tall black guy wearing all black. That question had me looking the fool. We're in Africa and the majority of the men are black!

I look like a hobo in these sweatpants and carrying a towel so I become a bit self-conscious and abandon the mission. It's pointless really. I go back home and I've been pacing and trying Elik's phone. I think I'm going mad. My eyes are swollen from crying and my face is puffy. I messed up big time. My phone rings and I jump but it's the school saying I have to come over because one of children has been in a fight. Like come on now! They're in Grade R of course they'll fight other children! Why should I go all the way there? I say I'll be there in a minute. I just powder my face and go.

The teacher looks at me like she understands why my children turned out to be wrestlers. I'm always on point when I come to the school and leave the other parents wondering how I have twins already in Grade R. But today I look like I was chewed and spit out by a donkey. Yeses. But I'm already here so let's go see which one of the twins is inspired by John Cena. Today of all days this had to happen. Elik is still missing so my mind is not all here. It's out there wondering if Elik is on his way to Ghana, or to Zambia or to Joburg or to a brothel.

I don't know how teachers of small kids stay sane. These little humans are too energetic! Apparently, the kid Paul beat up had made fun of Peter or something like that so Paul was just defending his brother. How the teacher doesn't see that as cute I don't know. I think it's super cute but obviously I

don't voice that out! Miss says Paul apologised and has made peace with the beaten child and they're cool now. So great! Wasted my time!

She says, "You need to teach them to resolve their problems by talking and not by violence". I smile and say I'm sorry and it won't happen again bla bla but all I'm saying is 'yeah whatever. They're kids let them be!'

I go back home in a bad mood. My time was just wasted. I must have called Elik a hundred times now but his phone goes to voicemail. As soon as the kids get back from school I quickly tell them I dropped things and they broke so they should stay far away from the glasses. I ask Peter to call his dad and tell him he's sick. I'm not going to discuss the fight Paul was in. Not today. I don't have the energy really and I don't think he did anything wrong to be honest.

"Please call daddy and ask him to come home sweetie. Tell him you're sick. Can you do that for me big guy?" I ask Peter and brush his hair with my hand.

"But I'm not sick", he says.

"Just say you are my love, please. Tell him to come home. I'll make you custard", I bribe him.

"Ok".

He takes his phone from his school bag and dials Elik. And Elik answers! So he really is ignoring me!

"Hi daddy. How are you?"

Man, these kids are adorable!

"Daddy. Please come home. Aunt Fierce said I should say I'm sick".

Wow! Just wow! And then he looks at me with that 'did I do well?' look! I want to pick him up and throw him in the bin. He looks so cute flipping those bushy eyelids over his beautiful eyes and that's the only reason I won't throw him away right now. It's like looking at a small Elik and my heart can't take it. I just start crying. I've always been careful not to cry in front of them but I can't stop myself today. It's too much for me. Elik left and I don't know if he will come back.

"Are you crying?" Paul asks. He's the quieter one that's why it was even more shocking that he's the fighter. I can tell them apart now. I had to learn since they're my children now and Komla hasn't shown interest in claiming them back.

"I'm not crying sweetie. Something got into my eye that's all", I lie. "But you look like you're crying", Peter joins in.

“No. I’m fine really. Come. Let’s go watch Naruto in the bedroom”.

“It’s ok to cry aunt Fierce. My teacher says it makes you feel better and it cleans your eyes and says when someone is crying we must give them a big hug. So are you crying? Do you want a big hug?” Paul says.

“I need a hug yes”, I admit. That’s so sweet.

They give me a hug. I don’t think it’s good that I’m crying on the shoulders of kids. I promised myself I’d never let them see me weak. I want to be their strength and show them only the good side of me. I want to be their guardian. And they too might be taken away from me if Elik is done with me.

I leave them in their bedroom watching Naruto from my laptop. They sleep alone now, Elik said he can’t afford to be coming home at night and find me in bed with the kids. They need to sleep in their own rooms. I tried to argue but he wasn’t asking really and his decision is usual final. I could ask Lizzy to come and clean up but either I’m embarrassed and don’t want her to see this other side of my life or I want to keep busy to stop from thinking. I tell her she shouldn’t come to the main house tonight. All I know is I need to clean up the glasses before someone gets hurt. It takes me forever and I battle with the broom through the tears. I have to keep cleaning though. When I’m done I do all the dishes by hand. All of them, I take them out from the cupboards, clean as they are and wash them one by one. I wash every plate, glass and cup in the house. After that I cook up a storm. When Elik comes home I need him to have food and to be able to choose what he wants to eat. For once I allow the twins to eat in the bedroom. The house is very clean but I clean it anyway from top to bottom. Then I do laundry. Anything that looks like it could be dirty, I throw in the washing machine. I just have to keep working. When I’m done it’s almost midnight and Elik is still not home and still not taking my calls. It’s pure blazing hell. Absolute torture.

I call Lumka and he doesn’t answer. I’m sure he’s sleeping at this time. I keep trying Elik and the phone rings until it goes to voicemail. I must have tried over a thousand times. I keep sending *‘I’m sorry’* and *‘it’s not what you think’* and *‘baby please come home’* messages. He’s online but he’s not opening my messages.

I eventually fall asleep on the couch but I’m up again at 3 am. I had nightmares of Elik putting me out and taking back the house, the car, the kids and his bank card that I use. I was left broke. Then my mother was

standing there laughing at me saying “I told you so”. I woke up sweating. He can’t do that though. The house and car are in my name and I have enough money in my bank account to keep me alive for a while. But this is Elik, if he wanted to he would find a way.

I don’t even want to think of what he’s doing right now. My best bet is that he’s with some girl but I have my fingers, toes and intestines crossed that this once, just this once, he’s not going down that route. I go through my messages with Jay and try and read them from Elik’s point of view. I keep rereading them and the more I read them the worse they seem.

‘Hey beautiful’ , Jay texted

‘Hey’ , I responded.

‘I can’t stop thinking about you’ .

‘Lol’ , I add three laughing emojis.

We chat some more. Then he says, *‘I love you Fierce. Can we talk about us please? You know that jerk is not good for you. You have to leave him. Please sweetheart’* .

‘Not today boo, please’ , I shut him down.

‘I want to be with you Fierce’ .

‘I have a man. Remember?’

‘So what? He’s not a mountain, he can be moved!’

*‘*Laughing emojis* Go study boo’* .

‘I’ll wait. For you I’ll wait’ .

*‘I’m dozing. Nyt and sweet studies. Chat tomorrow *kissing emoji*’* .

‘Goodnight sweetheart. I’ll take care of you I promise’ .

Well that’s not so bad, right? It’s suspect yes but it doesn’t scream cheating. I’m guilty of flirting yes but I didn’t really cheat. I didn’t sleep with him! I don’t know who I’m trying to convince here. Fine, in a moment of weakness I kissed Jay but I didn’t sleep with him so I only half cheated. Right? These are things I need to explain to Elik. He could have waited for me to get out of the shower and talk to me like an adult instead of breaking my things here. And Jay has jokes for days! What did he mean he’ll take care of me? Take care of me with that? With polony and bread on a single bed at rez? And drive me around in his friend’s car? You know sometimes guys say things they don’t understand!

I’m trying to be angry at Elik but it just keeps coming back to me worrying about him. I’m upset at myself. Even the way I behaved with Bunke yesterday was wrong. I think there’s a whore in me that’s suppressed

but just pops up at random times. I messed up big time this time. I'm this close to having a mental breakdown. I can't lose Elik.

I can't remember what I used to be like without him. I can't remember being alone and what life was back then. I'm not financially prepared to deal with life and bills. I've been pampered for so long and have had everything handed to me on a silver platter. Where would I even begin? I could get a job I guess like everybody else. But mostly, I'm not emotionally prepared to be on my own right now. He's been my best friend, my pillar of strength, my go to person, my lover and now my fiancé. I know I'm too dependent on him for everything and that's not such a good thing but it is what it is. Every memory I cherish is tied to him and every pain I harbour was shared with him. I'm afraid that I might lose him for good this time. How could I be so careless though! I should have chatted with Jay on SnapChat so that the messages would disappear! I'm foolish. I still can't sleep and I'm feeling a bit sick. My eyes are swollen and when Lizzy comes to wake the kids up and get them ready for school, only then do I sleep.

"Madam. Do you want coffee", she wakes me up with a gentle tap. Is she for real right now? Why the hell did she wake me up? Geez!

"You alright? You look... puffy", she says.

"I'm fine".

"Where's Sir?"

How is where Elik is any of her business? These are the kind of things that make me upset.

"It's just when I saw him leave yesterday, he looked angry. Then the police came around you know".

Why is she poking her nose into my business? Does she know I fire people quick quick?

"He's fine. Now let's not talk about it". See, I'm nice! I'll make my own coffee thank you very much. By the time I make it to the coffee maker, I don't want the coffee anymore. I go back to lying on the couch with my broken phone in my hand. I'm so not ok. I need something to knock me out.

I fix myself up a bit so that I don't look like a cocaine junkie. There's a pharmacy down the road so I walk down and tell the pharmacist that I have a bad toothache and would like some Mybulen painkillers. He smiles and says toothaches are a nightmare and gives the pills to me. Toothaches are only a gentle pinch compared to a heartache. These pills are meant to soothe my heart, even if for little while.

Three

I'm sitting on the couch with 5 pain pills in my hand contemplating and trying to do some quick Maths. I can't do these pills anymore, I learnt their side effects the hard way so do I really want to go down that road again? But they used to help me so much. I would sleep like a dead body. The only reason they almost killed me last time was because I mixed them with alcohol. So if I have them on their own I should be fine. I go through the leaflet and it says '*Safety in pregnancy and lactation has not been established*'. Ok so if safety hasn't been established that means unsafety hasn't been established also. I know how these pharmaceutical people work. To be safe they will just say 'safety not established!'

Ok I get that but what harm can once off do really? It's the dose that makes the poison after all. So this one time only. Now I'm conflicted. I want to take these pills so I can fall into a deep sleep and forget. On the other hand, I can't risk harming my baby. So I don't know what to do. Once upon a time I was addicted to pain pills and once upon a time I overdosed and had a miscarriage. But with all that information and my conscious yelling '*throw those pills away Fierce*', I can't. So they sit in my hand still. There's my baby growing in my stomach. It doesn't seem fair to poison him. What kind of woman does that? Then there's Peter and Paul to consider. They need me. I need to keep it together for them. They didn't know what to do when they saw me crying yesterday and they hugged me and all. So I don't want them going through that again. And Elik, if there's any chance of him forgiving me now, should anything happen to this baby then he'll never forgive me for real. This is hard. I'm still trying to decide if I should maybe take 4 pills instead of the usual 5 or maybe 3.5 when my phone rings. I jump. I was hoping it's Elik but it's only Lumka. Sulk.

"Is Elik back?"

"No", I respond grumpily.

"Where is he? His phone is off".

"I don't know".

"Schucks! I need to talk to him urgently. We have a crisis and I need Elik's brain right now!"

"I don't know where he is. I was hoping you would".

"Tell him to call me as soon as you talk to him".

“Ok”.

“Wait...You said he took your car, right?” he asks like a thought just occurred to him.

“Umm yes”.

“Then track it sisi. I gotta go”.

How didn't I think of this before? Seriously, I can be so dumb sometimes it's shocking! I can track my Jeep then I'll know where Elik is. I go to the App on my things-fall-apart phone and click on '*Location*'. The car is in Matjiesfontein! Where the hell is that? I click on '*Navigate*'. That's almost 3 hours from here. What is Elik doing there? I have to get there right now, but how? Eish. I put back the pills in their container and push them behind the cushion. I go online and rent a car and ask them to bring it to me. I'm not even going to change, I don't have the energy at all. I'm still wearing pyjama shorts and Elik's T-shirt from last night.

There's the kids though! I can't just leave but also I can't wait till after school then drive to Matjiesfontein. I'm pregnant and driving alone so I might not want to do that at night. Well they have Lizzy. I have to go. Maybe Elik's done with me but I'm not yet done with him. Damn you Jay! I tell her I'll be back soon.

“You don't look alright madam”, she says.

“I'm fine”, I snap at her. I just made her point. I'm far from fine but I can drive 3 hours I'm sure. All I need is a lot of Red Bull, dried fruit and water. I stop mid journey, my back is killing me. I can do this though. I have to do this. I need to get to Elik. I've left the greenery of the Western Cape and now it's just dry arid land of the Karoo. I keep checking my App to make sure the car is still there and it is. I don't know what to expect. I hope he's not with a girl there because we already have this to deal with so I can't be dealing with that as well. I can't be saying sorry and asking 'why Elik?' at the same time!

I'm in Matjiesfontein town but GPS says I have another 14 km to go. This place is like a desert. There's no life, only old buildings and a few cars here and there. I think I'm leaving the town and this looks like most beginning scenes of horror movies. I have to trust my App though. I leave the tarred road and join a gravel road so I have to proceed slowly. I think I'm entering a farm of sorts but the gate is wide open so I don't know. I end up at a cabin

near a small river. Horror movie loading. I approach slowly and the voice in my GPS says 'You've arrived'. There's my Jeep on the other side. Phew! At least. But doubt attacks me. What if he left the car here and left? What if he is with someone in there?

I pull up and get out of the car. It's quiet and peaceful in a scary way. The sound of the water flowing over rocks and falling on water is soothing. I stay by the bank of the river a bit to prepare myself and think of what exactly I'm going to do. Crying works all the time and Elik might feel sorry for me but that will mean the problem remains unsolved and he'll still hate me after the tears dry. I always preach talking about things and being honest so maybe I should practice what I preach. I knock on the door but nothing. I keep knocking but still nothing. Now I'm worried. I try the door and it opens. I'm not sure whether to get in or not. You know when you know your man is very generous with his body you might not want to just walk in unannounced. I can forgive knowing he did ABC but I can't forgive catching him doing the ABC! How would I ever erase that image from my mind? I don't know whether I should keep standing here or go on in or that's a stupid move. But me and stupid are best friends so I go in anyway. It's pretty neat for a small place with minimal furniture. There's a couch at least. I make it towards what I think is the bedroom. There are empty bottles of alcohol sprawled all over the floor and Elik is passed out on the bed. My heart just breaks. I did this to him, didn't I? I had one job, to keep him together, and I failed.

I stand there watching him and I can feel tears burning in my eyes. He's topless so I cover him with a fleece blanket and plant a kiss on his forehead. I want to sleep next to him but he's stinking of alcohol and it's making me want to throw up. Besides, I don't want him to wake up and panic and push me off the bed. I go to that couch I saw. I throw down the pizza box on it and drag it so that it blocks the main door then lie there. I don't want to wake up and he's gone! I can sleep a bit now. At least I found him.

I was very tired and when I wake up it takes a minute to register where exactly I am. Elik is standing there looking down at me as I sit up and rub my eyes.

"Fierce?" his voice sounds husky. He looks tired and isn't topless anymore. His T-shirt looks dirty but at least it's black so it doesn't really show.

"What are you doing here?" He doesn't sound too pleased to see me.

“Where’s the bathroom?”

He just points and I go there. I take the time in there to wake up and recollect my thoughts. I left the house looking like I’m going to bed. How am I supposed to seduce him now looking like this? If talking fails I might need to appeal to his weakness but I don’t think that will work looking like this. When I get out, he’s still standing where I left him and he’s not smiling at all. I see he moved the couch back to its position! I feel so small in front of him. I try to give him a hug but he steps back. Ouch.

“What are you doing here?”

“I had to find you baby”.

“I have nothing to say to you so you can go back now. How did you even find me anyway?” he sounds annoyed.

“Tracker”.

“Oh! Track your way back to Cape Town then. I need my peace”. Surely, he doesn’t mean that.

“Do you hate me?” I need to know before I start explaining myself.

“What kind of question is that?” he looks at me like I’m stupid. “Please. I need to know. Do you hate me?” I ask again.

“Hate you? Don’t ask me dumb questions. Now if you don’t mind. Get yourself back to Cape Town before it gets dark”. I swallow hard.

“It’s not what you think baby. Please let me explain”, I beg.

He looks at me and his eyes look like he’s ready to either cry or to kill me. I’m not quite sure. He sighs and walks into the bedroom and sits on the bed. I follow.

“Oh, you wanna talk? Fine. Start talking then. What are you waiting for? And don’t you dare think of lying to me”.

I keep quiet. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath and clenches his fists. What option do I have? I need to tell the truth because lies require more lies and it never ends well.

“Who is Jay?” he gets straight to the point.

“Some guy in Accra”.

“Awesome! My girl is a slut! We were in Accra for what? Three days and you already found yourself a man? Well done!” the sarcasm raw in his tone.

“No baby it’s not like that”.

“It’s like what then?”

I keep quiet.

“Speak dammit!” he shouts. He grabs me by the shoulder and for a moment there I really thought he was going to beat me up. He lets me go and starts pacing.

“Who is he? Do I know him?”

I nod.

“From where? Can you just speak already!” he snaps.

“He’s that guy from Shaka Zulu that came to us last time”.

He punches the wooden wall so hard I thought it would fall. I can tell he’s fuming. I’m sure this talk won’t end without him beating me up.

“So you mean to tell me that kid that I left you with has been sleeping with you behind my back? I left you with him Fierce because I trusted you. I knew that my girl, my woman, would never cheat on me. Boy, I was so wrong”. He picks up an empty bottle and throws it at the wall.

“No Elik. I didn’t sleep with him I swear”.

“You’re pregnant with my child Fierce but you went and fucked another guy? How the fuck do you expect me to feel about that?”

“I didn’t. I swear”.

He comes towards me and I’m thinking maybe I should pray before I die. I think this is what my ending looks like. He lifts my chin up so hard it hurts and looks me straight in the eye and holds the stare. I don’t know what he’s looking for in there but I keep looking back at him.

“Did you sleep with him?”

“No I didn’t”.

He sighs and I think he looks relieved. So he believed me just by looking into my eyes as I spoke? Alright, I can work with that. He walks out and slouches on the couch.

“Come”, he says. He sits and folds his legs on the couch. I get it though so I sit on the other end, fold my legs and face him.

“So tell me everything and don’t even think of lying Fierce. Everything! What’s going on between you and this Jay?”

“I had his number from last time. So now when we were in Accra and I found the condoms in your jeans and I knew you’d slept with someone else, I couldn’t be around you”.

I’m looking down and playing with my fingers. I feel so guilty and it’s embarrassing for me to say out loud what I did. Can’t he just forgive me without making me narrate my shame? Will he forgive me in the first place?

“Oh. So you went out to get your revenge? Is that it? Damn it Fierce!

You came back that evening and we talked and you let me fuck you knowing fully well that another man was all over you earlier!” he says. I don’t like his tone or his choice of words but I’ll let that slide for now. Besides, he’s the one who had slept with someone else the previous night not me!

“I didn’t sleep with him though!”

“Then what happened?”

I keep quiet.

“You know what, I’m not going to keep asking you questions and begging for answers. If you don’t want to talk, get out”.

I drove all this way so getting out is not an option. I’d rather talk. I tell him everything from the time I left the hotel to the time we got to Jay’s room at rez. I keep looking down. I actually cheated on him and I feel terrible about it. He keeps quiet. I’m looking down but I can feel his eyes boring through me.

“You still haven’t explained what he meant when he said he enjoyed you?”

He’s calmer now or I think.

“We kissed”. I look up and catch his eye and I’m terrified. He’s far from calm. He’s boiling with anger.

“I’m sorry baby. I was hurt and angry and my emotions were all over the place. I’m sorry”.

“Did you enjoy it?” What? How do I answer that? Is that a trick question maybe?

“Oh well, umm, no not really”, that question caught me off guard.

“Was it good?” he asks. These questions though! How do I answer that? I enjoyed kissing Jay but how do I look at my man and tell him that?

“It was a brief kiss baby. Just two seconds. It wasn’t serious. He just kissed me from nowhere. I didn’t feel anything really”, I tell my first lie. He sighs.

“Maybe I should just buy you a one way ticket to Accra so you can go and be with your boyfriend. I think I should do that actually now that I think of it. I told you I wanna make you happy. So I’ll make you’re happy and send you to your lover in Accra”.

The fact that I know he would actually do it makes me jolt and sit up.

“No Elik. I don’t want to go there. I wanna stay here with you. I made a mistake and I’m sorry baby. Please forgive me”, I plead.

“Is that not what you want? Didn’t you and him agree that he should replace me? He went all poetic on you saying I’m not a mountain I can be moved! And that made you happy, right? So me and him share the same vision, making you happy. I’ll make you happy by letting you be with him”.

Well, I didn’t say any of those things. Jay did and I didn’t say yes. I just laughed! It will do me well to shut up though right now.

“Give me all his details. I need him found”.

I feel a shiver run down my back. I can’t let anything happen to Jay. I led him on and I can’t have him punished or worse killed for that. I can’t let that happen.

“Please baby. I know I did wrong but please don’t do anything to him”.

“Have you ever seen me do anything to anyone? Don’t be silly”. Is he serious or joking? I can’t tell.

“Give me all the information on him or get out”.

I keep quiet and I stay put.

“I’m not going to ask again”, he says. “But baby...”, I say.

“No actually, you know what. Get out. I’m done talking. I can’t look at you right now. Just get out”.

I thought we were making progress. Just great. Fine, I’ll get out. I’m still holding my keys anyway so I get out and sit in the backseat of the car. The tears fall. I need to decide right here right now. Do I go back in there and beg him or do I jump into the driver’s seat and drive away?

I’m too tired to drive so I’ll take a power nap. Besides, I need my emotions to settle down. It’s past 4 now so I’ll be up at 5 and maybe find a hotel close by to check in for the night. Cape Town is too far. For someone older than me, Elik is such a child! I get that he’s angry but he’s being unreasonable. I’ve forgiven so much of his cheating but he won’t let a kiss go? And the way he spoke to me! The nerve! Half the time I wanted to laugh. I can’t believe he’s so upset with me over a simple kiss. He treated me like I’m whore of the year! And I’m worrying for poor Jay. Since Elik can’t exactly punish me, he will want to punish him. I won’t let that happen though. Thankfully Jay isn’t his real name to begin with.

I can’t sleep. I keep feeling like getting back in there and going on my knees and begging him. I also feel like getting in there, picking up a beer bottle and hitting him with it continuously until he apologises for leaving our home. I also feel like staying right here, feeling sorry for myself, if only I had chocolate. Sleep is just not happening at all. The guilt won’t leave me

alone. I have to sit up, grow up and make hard decisions. I could choose to be as hot headed as him and drive away or I can be the bigger person and swallow my pride. First, I need to establish why I love Elik. I've been asked this question before and my answer is usually a short laugh and 'I just love him'. I have so many reasons though, some that only make sense in my head. But I need the ones that will convince me to stay right now.

He's my future husband. He wants to marry me. He's the guardian of my galaxy. Possessive and overprotective. He had a man thrown in jail and a woman deported and banned from the country for me. Now if that's not love I don't know what is. He talks. He opens up and he breaks down the walls. I need that. He tries very hard and trying is all I need. I'm kinda pregnant. And single mum things, nah. Not for me. I won't manage. I'm his saving grace (Or I think). I feel the need to save him from himself. He's a whole bomb of emotions, childhood trauma and mummy issues and could self-destruct if yours truly doesn't rescue him. We've been together for so long. I can't imagine finding someone else and starting from zero.

I can't remember what it was like before him. Every memory I have is tied to him. He's good and bad. Despite his cheating (which I've gracefully made peace with, judge me not) and sometimes his temper, selfishness, moronic behaviour, running away from situations like he did now and his lack of seriousness, he's a very good guy. He kind of walks that fine line in between good and bad with a perfect stride. I mean he's as good as Coke Zero paired with a chip roll and as bad as period pains. I love him. With everything in me, I love him. He's my exciting, wonderful, glorious, chaotic, stressful mess that I sometimes love to hate and hate to love. He's my heartbeat. In as much as he gives me heaven on earth, it's his hell that always draws me closer to him. Thinking is hard and so exhausting! I could sit here and justify why I shouldn't be with him or blame him for my fuckery. I have many excuses lined up for what I did with Jay. But bottom line, I cheated and I was sloppy about it so I got caught and that's that. I have to face the consequences like a big girl.

But he threw me out! That handsome jerk! This thinking business is really tiring. I might as well drive away and look for that hotel and maybe get some sleep. GPS says there's one, 16 km from here. I drive all the way to the tarred road then I make a U-turn. I can't leave like this. I feel so terrible and so angry and so guilty, I just want to talk to him. It takes me a good 30 minutes outside with the engine still running, deciding whether to

go in or not to go in. He was pissed earlier! Fine I'll go in. This is Elik. What's the worst that could happen? Technically, a whole lot could go wrong but whatever, he's my personal person and I'm not scared of him. Oh great, he didn't lock the door so maybe he wants me to come back?

I was never ready for the sight that's in front of me. I thought he would still be angry or drinking or throwing things around or punching walls. But he's sitting on the edge of the bed with his face in his hands.

"Elik?" I say softly. Nothing.

"Baby?" I say. Nothing. Oh man whatever, I lift his head up. He needs to man up and look at me. I already deal with tantrums from his children, I can't deal with tantrums from him as well! His eyes are red and he looks like his puppy just died. He says nothing and I keep looking at him. I want to hug him for a long time. I want to open up my heart so he can see how sorry I really am. I want to time travel and go back to the past and undo that afternoon with Jay. I want him to be alright. He's hurt and angry and it's my fault. He returns to burying his face in his hands and looking down. I walked in here meaning to give him a piece of my mind and call him out of his name and argue my case. I'm a relatively good girl. Next to him I'm an arch-angel and he has no right to make me feel this bad for just a kiss and chats. But looking at him, I'm at a loss of words. Guilt just consumes me.

"Baby. Look at me". He looks up.

"We need to talk about this. I need you to hear me Elik".

He nods. Wow. Alright.

"Go to the couch baby. I'll come talk to you just now, I just need a moment alone, ok?"

Wow! Who is this nice person here and what did they do to my angry Elik? I lift his face up and give him a kiss on the lips and thankfully he doesn't resist. He doesn't kiss back but he also doesn't resist. I need him to know that I still love him.

A couple of minutes later he joins me on the couch and we sit facing each other. He says now he's ready to talk and he promises to remain calm.

"Am I holding you back Fierce? Do you want to go and be with someone else? Am I standing in your way?" he starts.

"No baby. I want to be with you. I don't want to be with anyone else".

"That idiot of yours called me a jerk and you let him! That made me feel disrespected by you".

Well that's how he felt but that's not what it was.

“I’m sorry about that. The whole thing shouldn’t have happened baby. It meant nothing”.

“So why did you keep talking to him? I don’t understand! If it meant nothing why did you keep talking to him?”

Sigh. Let me break it down for him.

“I don’t have anyone Elik. In case you haven’t noticed, I don’t have family to talk to, I don’t have friends to turn to. I only have you, Lumka and Kofi. And those two are your people and their loyalty lies with you. So I don’t have anyone to turn to when you cheat or you disappear or when we fight. So that day, I was in that situation and I was all alone. I had no one to call. I’d just found out that you had slept with another woman and I was hurt. And since I couldn’t exactly talk to you because you know, you did that, I turned to Jay. I needed to vent and he was willing to listen so I spoke to him. It was wrong of me yes but you have no idea how broken my heart was. I don’t mean to shift the blame but the only reason I went running to him in the first place was because I kept seeing you getting it on with another girl in my head and it was driving me crazy. I couldn’t look at you. I needed to vent. I needed to be heard”.

He keeps quiet. I keep quiet.

“I’m sorry baby. I’m so sorry for this. It will never happen again, I promise. Please forgive me”, I plead.

I get off the couch and kneel down next to him and throw my hands around him. I can’t lose him. One, because I love him too much to be without him. Two, because we’ve come so far together and have been to hell and back hand in hand. Three, because after all the panel beating, the stitching, the mending, the plastering, the patching and the repairing I’ve done with him, I can’t let him go and have another woman pick him up as a finished product! I put a lot of work in this man!

“I love you Elikplim. Only you. I wouldn’t trade you for anything. I don’t want any other man”.

He rubs his hands together. I think he’s trying not to get angry with me again. I’m just glad he’s listening.

“I didn’t read all your messages. I read enough to give me the idea that you were very comfortable talking to this guy. He told you to leave me and you didn’t say no. You bared a part of your soul to someone else Fierce. To another man! That right there pushed me over the edge. It took me by surprise because I couldn’t get how my perfect Fierce who’s loyal to death

could do this to me. Why baby? Help me understand”.

See what I mean? It takes a while but when he wants to communicate he does and I would like to take credit for that. So I can't give him up after moulding him like this.

“I turned to Jay because I'm always afraid that you'll go cheating on me again and I guess I needed someone to vent to and make me feel loved when that happens. I needed someone to make me feel like I mattered should you go and be with someone else for the night. I needed an escape baby. I had no intentions of pursuing a relationship or anything like that with him. I just wanted to know I had somewhere to turn to should you decide to, you know”.

He looks at me, then looks away.

“I was wrong though I admit and I'm sorry. Please baby”.

I think I'm begging him and maybe it looks pathetic but I don't care what it looks like. Elik has seen me at my worst. Pride is not something I have around him. I'm truly sorry and I'm willing to beg for his forgiveness if I have to. He lets me apologise and hold on to him.

“No. I'm sorry”, he says eventually.

I look up and I'm thinking what? I guess he's said sorry so many times the words come out naturally. Or does he mean he's sorry he can't do this anymore, we are over? That last thought stabs at my heart like a double-edged sword and I actually let out a shallow scream before the tears fill my eyes. Oh bother! I said I wasn't going to cry. What's wrong with me!

“You are mine Fierce. All mine! I don't want any man touching you. Do you understand that? The thought alone drives me mad. You are my girl. All mine”.

He helps me up and makes me sit on the couch in between his legs and I lean back on him.

“Don't cry baby. It's ok”.

My heart does a young Gwaragwara. This is more like it. I'm on the right path towards being forgiven. My tears are magical. Every time they fall, Elik's heart melts!

“Listen. I know maybe I overreacted. But when it comes to you baby girl, I can't control myself. You alone have the power to make me and you alone have that same power to destroy me”.

Those words! I have that much power over him? How though? I'm weak and always crying, always holding on to him and depending on him

for everything. How could I have that much power? I hold on to his arms and snuggle closer.

“You know baby. I was so angry I couldn’t think clearly. The thought of another man sleeping with you made me furious. I had to leave so I wouldn’t hurt you. But I can see clearer now. This is my fault”.

Inside I’m thinking ‘yes, go on, please Sir’.

“I have this one good girl in front of me. One that’s always stood by me no matter how many times I mess up. One that I know without a single doubt that she loves me. Then she loses her step one time and what do I do? I flip and punish her. I was angry at you but I think actually I was angry at myself. This is my fault. You just reacted to my actions”.

Yes, it’s your fault! Everything is your fault! I agree with him inside my head. But I just lean in closer and keep my lips zipped. We stay there, quiet for a while. It feels good that he’s gently rubbing my arm. I know I still have him.

“I guess what I’m trying to say is that I’m sorry I’m making you to become this person. I don’t want that. I don’t want you to become like me and I end up dating myself. It won’t work. I love you baby because you are everything I’m not. You have a beautiful heart and you are patient with me. I value loyalty Fierce. You know that. I can’t share you. I won’t”.

I keep quiet. I need everything he’s said this far to sink in.

“I’m going to talk to Jay and tell him that me and him can’t chat anymore. I’ll cut all contact with him”. He kisses me on my head.

“I’ll appreciate that”.

We just sit there and it feels good to know he’s still here and still wants me and isn’t going to throw me away. I’m going to grow up and stop seeking for attention from other men. It’s childish and uncalled for. So what if he cheats? Will me cheating back balance the scale or it will just destroy us? I need to respect him, he’s right. I apologise some more and he says he has forgiven me. He points out that had I slept with the guy though, we would be done. “I thought I would find you here with some girl. I was so scared”, I say. He rubs my arm for a while but I’m patient, so I wait. “I won’t say I didn’t consider it. I actually thought of hooking up with someone and taking them to a hotel somewhere to de-stress”.

Ya ne! Some honesty! When I say I want honesty sometimes I mean I want it after it’s been filtered and reworded.

“I thought long and hard about it though. And in as much as I was angry

with you I realised that we were in that situation because of me and these girls. So I couldn't. I promised you I'd stop and I'm glad I managed to resist that urge".

"I'm glad too".

"How did you end up here? Whose cabin is this anyway?" I think I can ask now that the fire is dying down.

"It's mine", he says.

"We own a cabin now? How come I didn't know that?" I turn my face around to look at him.

"No. WE don't own it. I own it. It's mine".

My facial expression says 'what?'.

"Lumka owns part of this farm and he gave me this cabin years ago. It's my safe hideaway. I sometimes drive down from Joburg to be alone. I haven't been here in a long time though".

"It's in the middle of nowhere!"

"That's the whole point". So Lumka has a farm now! How much money exactly do these guys have?

"Do you bring girls here?" I blurt out then quickly cover my mouth. That just came out. I was thinking it and I didn't mean to say it out loud. He makes me turn around and face him. Eye contact is everything to him.

"I've never brought anyone here. This is MY space! I mean even you, I didn't bring you here, you brought yourself". I believe him. But that last part had me blinking fast. Does Elik hear himself when he talks?

"Not that I'm complaining. I'm glad you came. I was in so much pain I might have done something stupid. I'm grateful that you came to save me once again. Thank you".

I squeeze his hand to say 'it's all good. I know I'm your saviour and you're nothing without me'. We've been talking for so long, I'm starving now! But since I was wrong here I can't just say 'End of discussion' and change the topic to food.

"Baby, do you know why those messages upset me that much?"

I shake my head but keep my eyes on him.

"They made me realise that you actually could leave me. That you really could walk away from me and be with someone else. I can't have that. If I lose you I'll have lost everything". I look down and my heart smiles.

"All those girls I slept with meant absolutely nothing to me. In fact, I hated myself every time I got with them. It just proved everyone's opinion

of me right. But for the longest time, I couldn't stop and I was beginning to accept it as fun just for my own absolution. I fucked them yes, and it was just that but I've only managed to make love to you".

I keep looking at him and he drops his eyelids and looks down. He knows that last part was unnecessary! Maybe it made sense in his head but nope it doesn't sound right at all.

"I promise I'm going to try as hard as I can not to hurt you anymore. I'm grown up now baby and I know what I want in life. I want you. I learnt a lot from my time with Komla and now I know what I don't want in love. I'm not going to be selfish or immature or all that stuff. I want to be open with you and tell you everything like you always encourage me to. I want to listen to you and make decisions with you. You know that I look at everything I have as ours, right? Fine, I put in the work but the money and everything that comes from it is ours. We're a team now baby. You mean everything to me and my only wish is that I make you happy and treat you right. I know I probably have a long way to go and I might make mistakes along the way but I'll try hard. Please keep helping me", he looks at me.

Those eyes! Those eyes make me want to take off this T-shirt!

He's so precious. At least he says he's going to try, not he's absolutely going to do. I don't want statements of action that are not seen through so I prefer a promise to try. He's a work in progress. When everyone sees a horrible human that I should run away from, all I see is a man I'd do anything for and I would drive across the Karoo to find. He's a diamond covered in mud, I just need to keep washing away to get to that sparkle. And I love the turn of events. He's the one apologising now! This is good. I sit at an angle and wrap my arms around him.

If there's one thing I'm thankful for it's finding a man that allowed me to teach him how to talk and open up. Sometimes the things that come out of his mouth leave me wondering about his state of mind but he talks and that's all I'm thankful for. That way we get to work things out faster. He handled this better than I thought, I must say. I thought I'd be dodging beer bottles and probably get thrown into that river. I can't believe I made it all this way in pyjama shorts! Talk about temporary insanity!

"Anyway hunn. Please call Lumka. He said he needs your brain".

"Doesn't he have a brain of his own?"

"Probably one of his girls stole it".

At least we're laughing now. The sun has already set by the time we step

outside. He laughs at me for having blocked the door with the couch earlier. Well, a girl had to make sure her man doesn't leave without hearing her out. I bring up my hunger and he says he's starving too. He says there's no food in the cabin though so we have to drive out to see if we can grab something.

"You're stinking", I wrinkle my nose. His T-shirt smells of beer.

"I still look better than you in that T-shirt!"

Mxm. I don't look that bad, he's lying.

"You can have that T-shirt. It looks cute on you". He said I look bad in it a second ago and now he's saying I look cute in it? And what does he mean I can have the T-shirt? I can have any of his T-shirts and I'll wear whichever one I want. I don't need permission.

We drive down to the farm quarters and the tuck-shop is closed! We ask and we are told to drive down the main road to a garage kiosk. Some 10 km later we get a garage with a tiny shop. All they have is the last loaf of bread. You can tell by looking at this bread that it's been here for days. It's not fresh at all and the crust is dry. We buy that though and a can of baked beans and the closest they have to a drink is Drink O'Pop, the sweet-aid powdered drink. I get the cream soda. We just have to make do today. I told him we should drive towards town but he's stubborn! We make it back to the farm and it's getting dark but there's still dim light on the horizon. There's no cutlery here or plates or cups or anything, I use an empty 1 L bottle in the boot of the car to dilute the sweet aid. We sit by the river bank, behind the cabin and have our supper. Since the bread is unsliced, we have to break it with our hands then take the open can of beans and pour on the bread then eat and pass the 1 L bottle of drink between each other. I think this is what serenity looks like.

"I should write a book about everything we've been through".

"You want people to hate me for being such a demon and for treating an angel so badly?" he gives me a kiss.

"Come on. You're not that bad. Well maybe a little. But on a serious note, what do you think?" I look at him.

"Go ahead and write the book. People won't believe you anyway".

Four

So I have succumbed to societal norms and I'm throwing a housewarming party this evening. It was my idea because with the way our lives go, I feel like we need to celebrate every passing day. I've never thrown a party before or been to a housewarming party before. I hope no one buys me those 6 pack water glasses or those wall clocks from China Town. I actually don't want gifts. I hate gifts. They make me feel like I need to buy the giver a gift as well in future and I hate walking around feeling like I owe someone something. And I might never get to use the gift anyway. I've been up and down buying alcohol and having people look at me funny in liquor stores because I'm pregnant! People, always so quick to judge!

Hennessy and Courvoisier for Elik. Gin and Tonic for Lumka. Malibu, Vodka, Wines, Savanna and Castle Light for whoever shows up. Elik said as long as there's meat and alcohol then everything will be fine. If you saw us right now, you'd forget that someone had run off to the Karoo and someone had panicked and followed him.

I don't have many people on the guest list. I don't even have 10! It might just end up being a group discussion with refreshments instead of a party. When I first wrote it, I had three names on it. Fierce, Elik and Lumka. Elik said it's fine Lumka could organise girls to liven the party up. It's worrying that he didn't see anything wrong with that statement. And no he wasn't joking. And who knew! Lumka was actually serious about trying it out with Thando so he's bringing her and her friends from Joburg. Elik insisted that I invite my 'friends' a.k.a lab mates and I said no, they are busy and stuff but he wasn't having it. I tried to argue but it wasn't open for discussion, it was

"Fierce invite your friends from your lab. Full stop".

I don't want Bunke and Elik within 100 m of each other seeing that I sought of forgot to mention that Bunke was back from Florida. One misplaced word could blow my world apart. And Bunke kind of saw me and Elik having sex in the lab so I don't know if he has forgotten that image. Elik might recognise him as well and then ka-boom. It's pointless to stress in advance. I'll cross that bridge when we get there. In the meantime, the guys are invited. On days like this, I wish Kofi was around. He's the life of the party and I really miss him. He gets me and can cheer me up in

microseconds. And he says things as they are, one trait he takes from his 'brother'. If I wasn't pregnant I'd have gone to visit him already.

I don't even know what I'll wear because well this stupid stomach just keeps growing! I don't know how women say they enjoy being pregnant! How? This is pure torture! What's there to enjoy here? Unless if your idea of enjoyment is being unable to wear whatever you want and feeling anxious all the time! And I want to have sex, like all the time! At least the orgasms are off the charts. I guess that's why Elik doesn't mind my weird cravings and mood swings because he knows I apologise the best way I know how. At least the mood swings are better now and the morning sickness only comes around to say hi like once a week or so.

Elik has been 'busy' on his laptop all day. Shame, he missed an important meeting in Zambia when he was out in the Karoo throwing tantrums and he's been doing 'damage control'. But he's been using that excuse every time I ask him to do something! He's lying I know. He just doesn't want to do anything! He only got busy when I gave him a list of things I needed him to do! Lazy bones. It was fun watching him unmount the TV he broke and mounting a new one. He looked sheepishly shame but I didn't lift a finger. I just folded my arms and looked. We can't reward violent behaviour! And he got a car for himself. I'm jealous and I'll be driving it all the time, he'll see. I'm just glad should he want to run off again, he won't take my car. He got me a phone as well and he backed up all my settings, apps and configurations and restored them on the new phone. It looks just like I have my old phone. I could have done it myself but he wanted to do it so I let him. Making him feel better is something I deserve a PhD in.

Anyway, all is set and my house is ready to be warmed. It has to be warmed from the outside though, I don't want too many people in my house. By 6 pm I say I'm going to fetch the guys from campus but Elik insists he will go. He doesn't even know them so I don't know why. He says I must just tell them to be ready and give him their numbers. I try to argue but again, he wasn't really asking. So Elik is going to pick up Bunke. Awesome. My ex and my current in one car. Good times.

When gone, Lumka arrives with Thando and two other girls! I stand there wondering if we're casting vixens for a music video or what. These girls are dressed like they're here for a model casting. You can see they took hours getting ready. They're on fleek, jealous down! They say hi and give

hugs. They are just happy people and it's refreshing. Thando gives me a half hug and I just roll my eyes. They ask if they can help with anything. I ask that they take care of the drinks and make sure everything is there. I can just tell they know how to party and they are really nice and sizzling hot too. If I was Thando I wouldn't let those girls around my man! Lumka pulls me aside and asks that I play nice with Thando. I say I will if she will. I'll try my best though.

He goes to get started with the braai stands and I go and change because well, those girls kind of made me feel like a maid over here. When I'm done I look so much better. They've already started the party all by themselves! They would have made good friends had we met in my early university days. I'm glad for them whoever they are, they'll bring the party alive. I forgot their names already because they'll never hang out with me again so why waste storage space in my brain by downloading unnecessary names? I'm looking at the one dancing and I'm thinking, "Dang, she's flames!" I feel like asking her how many squats you do per day to get your ass to look like that! She's the kind of girl your man cheats on you with and you say, "I don't blame you baby. I understand completely".

Lizzy made all the food so there isn't much to do. I wanted to buy but she said cooked is better, so she cooked and I made the salads. Perfect division of labour. Me and the girls sit outside. They talk and I sip on my lemonade and listen. The conversation jumps from which foundation is better between the liquid and the stick to sex very fast. These girls are certified harlots! The stories! My word! My mouth hasn't really closed in the past 10 minutes. As soon as I close it one of them says something that makes my jaw drop again. So these two girls here slept with some guy they are calling 'Juicifer' because apparently he's a lucifer in bed but he's also king of juice boxing so hence the name. They say this guy did things to them they can't get over and they are generous with details. Apparently, this guy is the ultimate dickmatiser and had them falling in love after just the one night.

I just sit there looking at them and wanting to lay my hands on them to pray for their deliverance. Good gracious! The detail is too much like I can almost see this guy in my head but I'm an engaged woman, I have no business imagining naked guys! Juicifer! What a stupid name! How are they ok with having slept with the same guy and then discussing it? I just raise an eyebrow and sip on my lemonade.

When Thando starts talking about Lumka, that's my cue to leave. I have a certain level of respect for him and I don't want to see him in that light. I excuse myself and go into the house. I honestly can't allow my ears to hear about Lumka's performances. Eeeww. Elik gets back so now I can go out and see if Bunke is still alive. Elik is over there by the pool arguing with Lumka! It looks serious because he's actually shouting and using his hands. That's a first! He looks pissed. I kind of like things so if I'm being honest my walking across to them is to find out what the fight is about. They keep quiet when they see me approach.

"Hey. What are we talking about here?" I ask nicely

"Business", they both say. Mxm! So annoying! I'll make Elik tell me later when we're in between the sheets!

I leave them and go to give my lab mates a tour of my house. Ndivhu is thoroughly impressed, Brain keeps pointing out silly things like how my choice of curtains is depriving me of external light. I tell him I hate natural light so I knew exactly what I was doing with these curtains. Bunke looks like he's impressed but doesn't want to show it. When the tour is over and we go back outside, I'm told those pretty girls just left! I thought they were staying, I didn't know they were passing by. Is my party that boring? They were fun though and they had sex stories for days, I'm sad they're gone. Now I have to hang around Thando alone. Just great! I ask Elik why the girls left and he says what girls, I say Lumka's girls and he says "Oh well ask him". I guess whatever they were fighting about with Lumka was serious and now he's grumpy. I'll get him a double shot of Hennessy on the rocks to calm his tits.

Anyway the party goes on. Bunke is playing with the twins. I don't know where they came from! I couldn't find them earlier. The way they get along with people bothers me. That means they can be easily stolen mos! I need to address that soon. I actually wonder if Elik made the connection of who Bunke really is. I think I'll ask Lumka.

"Are you and Elik fine?"

"We good", he says and I can tell he doesn't want to discuss it.

"So bhud Lumka. I have a small problem here. That guy over there is that Nigerian guy Elik hates. Should I tell him?"

"Why is he here?"

"Elik insisted. We share a lab you know", like duh.

"Just make sure he doesn't say anything"

“Umm. Ok. So should I tell Elik or not?”

“Sisi. Let me tell you something. As a rule of thumb: Never confess things you were not asked”. I look at him.

“If you don’t tell Elik, nothing will go wrong. If you tell him, you’ll end up running around all night when he’s left you here and you’ll be busy calling the police and driving across the province looking for him. So just let sleeping dogs lie”. Mxm. Was it necessary to phrase it like that?

“I don’t want to lie to Elik”.

“It’s not lying if you were not asked! Lying and withholding the truth are two different things. Learn the difference! Withhold your truth ke sisi and allow us a peaceful evening please”.

“Elik is upset right now. Go and tell him the guy he hates is in his house and playing with his children. Let’s see how that will go. He just bought that new TV sisi please don’t make him break it too. I’m sure he’ll drive your car into the swimming pool this time and drown it. Maybe with you in it”.

I can’t tell if he’s serious or not.

“Fine. I won’t tell him. I get it”, geez!

“Good girl. Now go and play nice with Thando”, he dismisses me. This guy!

Another group of people just arrived so I go to welcome them. It’s a group of guys I don’t know with three girls. Awesome. At least these ones are wearing jeans and look normal. My new hangouts for the evening! Everyone is drinking and I feel left out. When I tell the girls I can’t drink because I’m pregnant they all start saying how I’m glowing and start telling me their own pregnancy stories! One girl says she was in labour for 48 hours! I don’t need such horror stories.

At least Thando’s attitude has gotten better and she helped me put ice in buckets and she actually said I look great and I’m carrying my pregnancy so well it’s hardly showing. I can see why Lumka likes her. She can be lively. Before long, there’s like 30 people here. I didn’t even know Elik had this many friends in Cape Town! But again, it’s Africans. For every one person you invite expect at least three to show up. I don’t know how I feel about the presence of Lemon though! That guy gives me the creeps with his tattoos, muscles and scars on his face. Maybe it’s because I know that he’s a drug dealer and a gangster and I know what he’s capable of. Ask Athi! I don’t want drugs here. I’m raising two beautiful boys and it’s my duty to

shelter them from such! Those boys are still hanging around alcohol and grown-ups by the way!

I find Elik and he assures me everyone will behave. How he knows that I don't know but he seems very sure so I let it go.

"I'm tired baby. Was it necessary to get me pregnant though?" I whine.

"It was necessary. Look how gorgeous you look now. You should be thanking me", he laughs.

He's too silly. Gosh, can't I finish being pregnant already. Now I'm getting tired but I have to stay up.

"Come with me. I need to show you something", I take his hand and lead him to the house and into our bedroom.

"What?"

"Can I have some, please?" I blush immediately after saying that. I asked like I'm asking for a biscuit. He stops laughing when I take off my dress. The guests can wait, we'll be done just now.

I'm happier afterwards and we meet Lumka as we go out.

"Seriously? You left us out here and went to get it on?"

I don't know how he knew but I blush and leave them. We were gone for 30 minutes, what's the big deal?

All is great and I'm going around chatting everyone up and trying to get people to mingle. I even have a chat with Lemon! He has an extreme Cape coloured accent and it's fun listening to him. Half the time I don't know if he's speaking English or Afrikaans, it's confusing. I have to keep saying, "Say again". He's full of compliments so I kind of don't dislike him as much as I did earlier. He said I look like his white BMW. I think that's a compliment. I like his silver tooth as well. It's different from these golden ones everyone else has. I still don't want him around us though for obvious reasons.

It's a great party really. Way better than I expected! Elik is happy now, well because he just got some of course and he has alcohol in his hand and Lumka next to him and the twins trying to talk to him, so his life is complete. There's alcohol and meat galore. They are playing house music and I don't know these songs but occasionally I find myself nodding to the beat. We have to keep the music down because of the neighbourhood. These people will be calling the police on us for noise making and we're new here so we don't want that label. I was explicitly told that I shouldn't bore people with Akon tonight!

The girls are sitting in a group this side and the men are laughing and braaing more meat that side. So naturally, I go and join the girls. As soon as I sit, Elik pulls me up and says I must come and sit with them rather. I'm like no because come on now, why should I go and sit with men? He says he misses me and I roll my eyes. Like you just had me, like had all of me so how can you miss me now? I don't want to hear things men talk about! I want to hang out with these girls here. He insists but I refuse and I actually start getting upset when he keeps insisting so he says fine and leaves.

Surprisingly, he's not drunk yet! I don't mind him being wasted but I don't want Bunke seeing my man like that. I don't know why I care. He's a fun drunk and will either make you feel like the sexiest thing walking just by his words or give you a full lecture in Robotics or explain to you in fine detail how to hack anyone's phone or computer remotely and if you ask nicely he'll tell you how to bypass security systems and disable alarms. I love that part though. Maybe that's the engineer in me.

I'm fine chilling with the girls though. These girls don't sleep shoo! People are busy at night out here getting it on with strangers. Listening to other people's lives make me realise I'm actually not that bad after all! I'm a saint! They keep talking about their Tinder hook-ups and I can't stop blinking. I thought Tinder was a dating App! But clearly, I'm wrong. So you mean to tell me you hook up with a guy you don't know online? Then allow him come to your house? Then let him hit that without you even knowing him? That's crazy! How can they think it's fun? But I won't comment, they said I need to loosen up a bit earlier when I made a similar comment about how hooking up with strangers could leave you dead in a ditch somewhere with your organs being shipped to Russia! I want to ask if the guy pays you the next morning so I can know if they are selling themselves or if it's just community service. But I can't ask that too.

By 11 pm almost everyone is drunk or getting there. Even Brain is drunk! Elik is tipsy but he's fine though. He's being a good host I suppose. Thando is sitting on Lumka's lap, I'm sitting on Elik's lap, Peter and Paul are chilling with Lemon and some girls. Elik said they are fine, Lemon won't drug them. This public display of affection in front of my lab mates is uncomfortable for me but Elik sees nothing wrong with 'loving his woman' as he puts it. Elik talks too much!

The lecturer in him is interrogating everyone about their research fields, PhD projects and future prospects. I'm just glad he doesn't say Chemical

Engineering is not really engineering. That may be funny to me but these other guys might take offence. Then he starts asking about girlfriends. Lord come quickly! Brain gives his sob story about how his girlfriend dated him concurrently with another guy! Then he says he blames this one girl he has wanted since the first day he laid eyes on her.

“Does she have a name?” Elik asks him. I cringe.

“Fierce”, Brain says and everyone stops and looks at him. Has he lost his mind?

“Fierce? As in my Fierce?” Elik says.

“Well yes”, Brain says and we all just looking at him. Alcohol be not proud!

“Oh is it now? So why hasn’t she said yes to your advances?”

“I don’t know man. I don’t think she thinks I’m good enough for her. She never gave me the time of day”. Wow Brain! Do you have a death wish? Lumka changes the subject and Elik is on to Bunke. I have my heart in my throat and I’m pleading Bunke with my eyes, like ‘Please don’t talk like Brain!’

Bunke says he has a wife but she’s back in Nigeria. Phew!

“Wait. Dude I know you from somewhere! You walked in on me and Fierce in your lab that time! It’s you, right?” Wow Elik! I’m a fiancé. A little respect over here please.

“Yup. On my desk. How can I forget?” Bunke says.

“But man! You cock blocked me bad that day. You know she wouldn’t let me continue after you left!” We all turn and look at him.

“What?” Elik says. Have they been smoking weed maybe? Or is this how guys talk? I’ve never seen such. I’m sitting on the edge hoping that he doesn’t say, ‘You’re the guy who used to sleep with my girl, right?’ Thankfully, Lumka changes the subject again and I can breathe. He’s got my back tonight shame. He knows if Elik loses it, everyone’s night will be spoiled. I’ll high five him later.

Elik and Bunke get into a debate about which browser is better between Firefox and Chrome. Like seriously? Isn’t it obvious? And how they’re making such valid points when alcoholised, I would like to know. I can’t make some of these arguments sober! I’m just looking at these two men that I know all too well and thinking ‘I’ve got taste!’

Ndivhu is too drunk and is starting to doze off and the kids are dozing shame, my little pumpkins. Why didn’t anyone think of taking them to bed?

We are going to church tomorrow morning and they should be asleep by now. Bunke offers to help me carry Peter and I carry Paul into the house and put them to bed. For the first time he says my house is beautiful and he says Elik really loves me and he spoke about me the whole time I wasn't there with them. Awkward to have that talk with him but ok.

By 1 am it's time up. Party is over. Poor Lizzy. She has serious cleaning to do tomorrow. I call the guys an Uber because no one is driving them to campus at this hour! Lemon leaves with his people and his car is so loud! It's a Citi Golf revamped, pimped from top to bottom. It's painted red and Lemon says it was painted using blood. And he says that with that type of smile someone gives you just before they stab you! It's creepy. It even has a sunroof! And it's dropped so low I wonder how it makes it over speed humps! When he drives off it's like there's gunshots firing.

When everyone is gone, it's just Lumka, Elik, Thando and I. I peacefully take a stroll outside to have some fresh air since all the strangers that were in my yard suffocated the life out of me. I sit on a poolside chair and look at the stars shining bright and listen to my neighbours' dog barking. Thando finds me! Which part of I want to be alone didn't she get? Sigh. I hope she's not here to disturb my peace because I want to be alone.

"Nice house girl".

"Thanks", I respond without opening my eyes.

"The party was lit! Wasn't it?"

"It really was".

"We will have more of these you'll see. I'll teach you how to do *vosho* (dance style). Just give birth first and I'll teach you". I give a fake laugh.

"So, tell me, how did you do it? How did you make Elik leave his wife?" I open my eyes and look at her long and hard.

"I didn't. It just happened".

"Was it because you got yourself pregnant?"

What? How does one get themselves pregnant? I'm not a flower, I can't self-pollinate! Also, I hope she's not implying that I trapped Elik!

"So if I get pregnant do you think Lumka will ask me to marry him as well?"

This girl though! She already has a child. Why would she put herself in that situation again? Lumka can't exactly be trusted. And they just got back together and she already wants to get herself knocked up? Someone needs to apply the brakes.

“Do you love him Thando?” I ask nicely.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean do you really love him? Like will you stand with him no matter what? Like do anything for him and deal with all the stress that comes with him?”

“Hell no! Do I look dumb to you?” she says. Is that a trick question?

“Come on Fierce, it’s not like you love Elik, right? These are not the type of guys to love. You stay with them because they make things happen not because you love them. Love for who? For the what?”

“So Lumka is like a blesser to you?” I sit up. I can’t believe her really!

“Of course. Elik is that to you too”, she says like she knows for a fact. She even looks at me surprised. This girl, this girl! I care a lot about Lumka you know! And he really wanted to give this conniving bitch a chance but she’s just using him for his money!

“He actually wanted to try with you, you know! He wanted to give your relationship a shot. But you just want to be a gold digger?”

I’m appalled to say the least. Well Lumka loves her because she’s a good lay and she loves him for his money. It’s a fair deal if I’m to be fair. But I’m team Lumka here!

I don’t learn shame. Those words become my undoing. Yho! The girl stands up and breaks it down for me piece by piece. Her eyes are rolling so much under those long feather eyelashes I think they will fall out! I stand too, in case I need to hit her you know.

“Listen here SpongeBob! You think wena you are all that in a bag of chips ne? That doctor doctor thing is still messing up with your wires upstairs? Who the hell do you think you are? I thought I’d let your holier than thou attitude from last time go and give you a chance to actually try and be a decent human being like the rest of us. But clearly you are stuck on being a homo naledi and that pumpkin head of yours doesn’t function. You think you are Beyoncé ne? Still acting like you sleep in heaven and come down to grace the earth with your awesomeness every morning?”

I have to keep moving back to avoid those talons scratching my face! Those nails are so long I wonder how she does anything!

I wasn’t ready! She actually called me SpongeBob! Is it because I’m wearing a yellow dress? I feel like laughing at her. She looks funny as she keeps looking me up and down like she’s measuring my height or something! But if she keeps talking I swear I’ll hit her and pull that

beautiful Malaysian wig off her head! If this girl ran as fast as her mouth, she would be in Europe by now! She keeps spitting venom shame and now she's pissing me off.

"Lumka. Come take your trash over here", I call out. I think I'm ratchet too. I'm not sure.

"What did you just say? Between me and you, who do you think qualifies as trash? Your problem Dr. Fierce is you've let Elik shelter you and keep you away from the truth! He's made you think you the finest thing walking the earth! I see your problem darling so allow me to fix it for you right now!"

I'm just looking at her and shaking my head. Bless her heart.

"You think Elik loves you too much and would never do anything to you, right? You think because he put that ring on your finger it means he's faithful and always waiting patiently to come home to sweet Mother Fierce Theresa. Well, I've got news for you on this day the Lord has made. Guess who Juicifer is? Take a blind guess! Yes, you guessed right. It's Elik! Your man slept with those two girls and he invited them over here. Who knows why? Maybe he's bored of you and wanted a threesome with my girls! Who knows?"

Noooo! Elik can't be that guy those girls were talking about. For real? Goodness gracious! He's such a freak! Like what! He did that to her and he really did that to that other one? Noooo! Imagine having listened to girls give a step by step description of what your man did to them. I think I need to sit down. Wow! Whaaaat? Well, that was in the past though and at least he did them so good they said it was the best they ever had. Gods, the way I justify things is so messed up. I should have known though. It did sound like Elik!

I don't give Thando a chance to see what I'm doing. I push her into the pool and she goes plunging in. How much makeup did this girl have on exactly? The blue water turned muddy around her face! I want to stand here and watch her drown. I'm going to kill her. Then I'll hunt down those two girls and kill them. Then kill Elik. Then kill Lumka for bringing them here in the first place! Then kill whoever asks why I killed them! Then kill the cops who try to arrest me. I'll kill everyone. I don't know when but Elik is holding me. I must look crazy now. Lumka is pulling Thando out of the pool.

"What's wrong baby? What's going on?" Elik says.

Lumka holds a dripping Thando in place and keeps telling her to shut it. She looks like a wet chicken with that wet wig.

“Oh I see what’s going on here! I had two girls here that slept with my man, standing in my yard! What was that exactly? What were you all trying to do here?” I yell.

“Bro, I told you!” Elik says to Lumka and he just looks at him like ‘Sorry bro’. You know what I’m not going to turn into Komla. I’ll breathe in then breathe out. I’m going to my bedroom and I’m going to sleep. Those girls did say it was over a year ago so I’m not a historian. I refuse to revisit history when there’s enough to deal with in the present.

“Baby”, Elik says.

“I’m going to sleep now hunn. I’m tired. Just get this bitch out of my face”, I ask him to let me go.

I listened to those girls talk about all the mind blowing things Elik did to them! He really did that thing? I thought that was just for me! I’m unable to can. I need to lie down. I can’t. I go into the house and he follows. He’s still talking and saying sorry but I’m not mad at him. I’m mad at Thando! I can’t be mad at him. Come on, with him playing Hugh Hefner everywhere he goes, I’m bound to meet my penis-mates at some point and I can’t always be upset about it. I tell him I’m good. I mean he made them leave as soon as he got here. That counts for something. He doesn’t believe me and keeps saying he’s sorry. I go to shower and he stands by the door saying he’s sorry. I don’t know how else to convince him I’m fine really. I just want to shave Thando’s hair off when she’s sleeping, then steal her wig and throw it away, that’s all.

Bunke was here too, so in a way, we are even I guess. But Thando so! I’ll deal with that girl tomorrow after church. She’ll see.

“Are you sure you won’t kill me in my sleep baby”, Elik!

“I’m sure. Now stop worrying and let me sleep. I have church tomorrow morning”, I say.

“I don’t even remember their names baby. And Lumka just had to allow Thando to bring them here!” he says.

I give up. I said it’s fine! He’s just standing there against the wall looking guilty and quarter to defeated. Damn he looks so fine! I don’t know how to explain it but I get up and lock the door. Just seeing him standing there makes me want him bad. I’ve been wanting him all evening. I had him earlier but I still want him some more. I watched him having a chat with

Lemon earlier and I was just imagining going down on my knees and letting my mouth worship him. Maybe it's the hormones running through me or it's just the effect he has on me. I'm just drawn to him in a way I can't explain.

I'm supposed to be mad at him, right? Why am I not? It wasn't his fault though and I can't hold him accountable for Thando's verbal diarrhoea. I hold him and we stand there with his chin on the top of my head. I look up and kiss him. I think that took him by surprise. I actually throw myself at him.

"Did I tell you how beautiful you look tonight?" he takes off the towel I have around me. Damn his voice!

"You look even more beautiful without anything on".

He pushes me back a little and I stand there in nothing. I'm tempted to cover my boobs because I'm just standing here. It feels like that very first time he undressed me and just looked at me. I'd just blushed and blushed. I don't even think he's blinking and I feel shivers on my skin. He's drinking my body with his eyes and I love how he looks so thirsty for me.

"You're gorgeous!" he smacks his lips like I'm a delicious meal waiting to be eaten. I blush some more and look at my toes. He pulls me in and his lips take mine. His hands grab my bum and he kisses me with so much urgency I'm crying into his mouth in no time. He's crushing, sucking, wanting, punishing and soothing all at once. It's like he wants to prove a point. I hold on to him and keep my eyes closed so I can feel every sensation. I just want him inside me already. I let him kiss me some more and let our tongues get acquainted with each other. I want his body on mine right now but I'm not there yet. I've been fantasising about kissing him in other ways all evening.

I work the buttons of his shirt and when there's like two left I tear it off him and hear the buttons land on the floor. Now it's just beautiful black skin in front of me. Rope after rope of muscle begging my hands to touch, grab and explore. It's all man in my hands, my man. And I want to touch and run my fingers across his chest and down the length of his hands. I want my eyes to take him in. This body right here is the reason for most of my bad decisions. He starts to unbutton his jeans but no "Please. Let me", I say.

I push him against the wall then sink down to my knees. The jeans soon join his shirt on the floor and I'm ready to thanks give and show reverence. I try not to remember the first time I did this. I used too much teeth and bit him and he had winced. I was embarrassed but he just kept laughing at me!

I've had enough practice now though and I won't stop before the job is done. I'm a swallower. I wipe my lips as he helps me up. Obviously, he can't kiss me now so he kisses me on the neck and whispers "I love you so much". Damn his voice!

I hold on to him. I need to take in his scent a little longer. He pushes me onto the bed and I lie on my back. He attacks me like he hates me. He's licking and touching and grabbing and kissing. I swear he has a point to prove tonight! He takes his time returning the favour I gave on my knees. I'm grabbing at the sheets with one hand and holding his head down with the other when his tongue hits the spot. I take a screamy trip to the heavens and I come back breathless. He gives me a second to catch my breath. But I don't want to catch my breath. I don't care about breathing! I just want him. All of him.

"You're so beautiful", he says.

I'm just useless and weak right now. I want him to stop talking and start doing but his hands are not done exploring my body. I'm just a receiver tonight. He pulls me to the edge of the bed, then off the bed and turns me around. I stand with my knees pressed against the base of the bed. I'm trapped between him and the bed. I close my eyes. I need to shut the world out and take all of Elik in. He grabs my neck and makes my head turn so my eyes can look into his. It's straining but what's a little pain?

"Look at me", he commands and I obey and stare into those eyes I love so much.

"You are everything to me", he whispers. I nod. That's the best I can do right now. "Are you ready for me?" I nod vigorously. I've been ready since the time I saw him standing there looking all kinds of guilty!

"I hate you", I whisper.

"I know. I love you too", he says as he pushes my upper body forwards a little and finds his way into me. I almost fall forwards onto the bed but his hand on my stomach has me locked in place. My body is like 'welcome home' and I go berserk. I don't care if I'm waking up the whole neighbourhood right now.

"You're all mine", he says into my ear. Take his voice and add sexual passion to it and you have Fierce surrendering herself completely. I wish I could respond but the speech portion of my brain is on vacation right now and all it knows to say is "Yes...Elik". I'm all his. All of me. He can have me and take me and keep me and do whatever he wants. I don't care. I'm all

his. I'm at his mercy. Bound to him by him.

"I love you", he whispers in my ear.

He tries to be gentle at first but with every second it gets ungentler and ungentler and I love every stroke of it. His insatiable need to own my body and his breathing in my ear threaten to send me over the edge, again. He lets my upper body fall forwards and I hold onto the sheets and give up all will to hold back. I can feel warm sweat drop onto my back and I say his name. The ride is rocky and intense and selfless and sweaty and amazing. It's good. It's severe. It's primitive and beautifully barbaric. I just want it to never stop. He sends me over the edge. I couldn't stop it. And maybe it's my screaming or my saying his name over and over again or my shaking legs and trembling body but as soon as I finish my own race he plain right grabs me hard by my neck and presses my head onto the mattress. He holds my head down and mercilessly slaughters me as he gets here too. I'm catching my breath in his arms and he's running his hand up and down my back. I feel so connected him.

I'm just in love with him and I find myself getting lost in his eyes and saying, "Promise me you'll never do this to any other woman". He laughs a little and kisses me.

"I promise. I won't", he says. This Juicifer of mines!

Five

Hypnotized - Akon (Elik's song of the day that woke up the whole house!). At first I thought I was in a concert in Los Angeles and Akon was serenading me. That was fun and I was enjoying it. But the music just wouldn't stop! It went on and on until I realised it wasn't a dream. Elik was playing his song loudly and singing along! How are we expected to sleep? Sometimes I wonder where he gets his energy from! I mean, we get that he's in a good mood but he's making my mood sour. I used to think it's only women who wake up singing after a raunchy night but in my relationship it's the man, while I continue sleeping like a log.

Akon is singing the walls down all the way from the living room. Elik didn't even have the audacity to close the door, even though we live with children and we are hosting Lumka and Thando! Like how inconsiderate of the sleeping can one be! I try to put a pillow over my head but it just won't stop. Aaaggghhh! I'm going to kill him! I drag myself out of bed so I can go and throw a remote at him for this! The music goes off and I hear Lumka complaining! Oh well he beat me to it but I also have words for Elik!

"So much noise in the morning baby!" I complain.

"You made me sing baby!" he says with a smile.

"No baby", I'm not amused. Do I look like a choir teacher?

"I'm in a good mood. How is that a problem?"

"I don't know, maybe because some of us were still sleeping?"

"Oh I'm sorry. Did I wake you? Come give me a good morning", he opens his arms. He's so annoying! I forget to hit him with the remote and give him a hug instead.

"Well, it's still better than the noise y'all were making last night", Lumka says.

"I had to make up for the damage your girl caused", Elik says and they laugh. The hell? I'm right here! Hello! But I smile a little because make up he did! It's my house though. I should be allowed to make all the noises I want at whatever decibels at whichever time of the night! Anyone with a problem knows where the door is!

"We couldn't sleep though for real! And you guys wouldn't finish!"

Oh great! Now I'm going to stand here and let my man's best friend talk about my screaming abilities! And Elik laughs! Why is he laughing? I think

I missed the joke!

Thando walks in just as I'm ready to go back to bed. I just need another 20 minutes of sleep. At least now my sexcapades won't be discussed further.

"Look what the cat dragged in", I say.

"Ha a baby. Don't be like that", Elik says and I make a face.

What is this girl still doing in my house? She says her good mornings to the guys and completely ignores me!

"Oh great! You both here. Take a seat over there we need to talk to the both of you", Elik says.

I look at Thando and roll my eyes and she does the same too. But like good little girls, we sit. So her lashes were stick-ons? They are gone now and she looks umm different. Lumka stands in front of us and just stands there. Elik soon joins and hands me a cup of warm water with lemon. Isn't he just perfect! So these two men stand in front of us and take turns telling us how we need to grow up! When did they decide to do this because I thought Lumka just walked in seconds before me?

I give Elik an eye and he says, "It wasn't my idea baby. It's Lumka. Don't look at me!" Seriously, I can't take him serious sometimes! Lumka apologises for bringing those girls in the first place and blames it on Thando. He says all she had to do was keep her big mouth shut. No! All he had to do was not bring them here in the first place! Are these guys serious right now? And why are we still talking about this? Isn't they heard me forgiving Elik last night! What's the problem now?

"I don't have time for this. I need to get ready for church. And I still need to get Paul and Peter ready as well", I stand up.

What's this? An intervention?

"Fierce. Sit down". I look at him to say something but I can tell he's not joking this time, so I sit.

"Fine, man let me handle this!" Elik says. Watch my man take control. Sexy Sexy.

"Listen. You are our women and you will treat each other with respect. You'll stop this nonsense of always fighting and acting like pre-school children! Grow up!"

I'm looking at him like how could he ask this of me seriously! Besides, I think he misused the word 'always' in that sentence! I've only had words with Thando twice!

“Thando apologise to Fierce for what you said to her yesterday and baby apologise to her”.

“What should I apologise for?” my attitude is on 100.

“For pushing Thando into the water. She wouldn’t stop complaining about her wig!” Lumka chips in.

“I’m not apologising for nothing!” I sip on my water.

“Oh is that so? That’s cool ma, suit yourself. You won’t go to church then! Both of you will sit right here until you apologise and promise to stop acting like spoiled brats”, Elik says.

Why is he being like this? Whose side is he on? I’m mad at him now! I stay quiet for a good 10 minutes.

They tell us not to move, they are going to have breakfast and if we want to join them we need to grow up. Growing up is a process though! I’ll need a couple of years to achieve that! Minutes are not enough, it’s not like we are on growth hormones and GMOs over here! I don’t even know why exactly we listening to them. I mean I can get up right now and go do whatever I want. I stay seated though. My man said I’m not allowed to stand up before I say sorry and when he commands I obey. It’s 9 am and mass starts in an hour. You know what, I’m a Christian woman now and forgiveness is part of the package. Besides, I just have to say it, I don’t have to mean it.

“Thando, I’m sorry for last night”, I say it loud enough so those two facilitators can hear.

“Ya me too. I just wish you could stop thinking you are better than me!”

“Oh no sweetie, I don’t think I’m better than you [I know I am ... I say silently]. You are probably intimidated by me but that’s fine, most people are”, I smile sweetly. She looks at me confused.

“Fierce!” Elik says. Fine whatever!

“I’m sorry Thando”.

“I forgive you. Everything I said was true though I just added a little spice to get to you. So we good”. She forgives me? This girl!

“Come here girl”, she helps me up and gives me a big hug. I think she’s just pretending like me.

“It’s fine. Eat. I’ll go get your mini loaves ready for church”, she says and walks away. Why she is calling the twins mini loaves I don’t know!

“Well, that wasn’t so hard now, was it?” Elik kisses me on the forehead. Mxm. I have mass to get ready for! I don’t have time for this.

When I'm done it's 20 minutes before 10. I find Thando and the mini loaves ready. She says she's coming with me to church. Just great. Now she's going to make me sin in church! And those jeans and that heel for church? But the church says come as you are so who am I to judge! When people start looking at her I'm just going to look at her too and pretend not to know her! We make it a few minutes before the altar boy procession walks in. As we stand and sing '*Enter Rejoice and Come in*', I can't help wanting Peter and Paul to be altar servers as well. I'm enrolling them for Catechism classes after mass. They will look good in those white tunics and heavy crosses around their necks carrying bells or a chalice or incense. I can almost see them. My two angels.

The priest giving mass today is quite older but he looks almost celestial in that purple robe.

"Why is he wearing purple? Red might look better on him", Thando whispers.

"It's Lent babes", I whisper back. I hope she knows what Lent is.

The priest says The Liturgy of the Eucharist in Latin. How? Why? We are in South Africa and no one speaks Latin, so why? After church, I escape the women who want to recruit me for the Youth group and I leave Thando with the kids and make my way to the confessional. There's a nun in front of me and she goes in and is out in like 2 minutes! How little are her sins? Wow! I'm jealous. I go in and close the curtain. It's that hot priest in there, I can tell from the voice. Where do I start? I have so many sins my goodness, I'm sure I have my own special book in heaven. This is creepy, I'm on one side of a wooden wall and the priest is on the other. Is he inside a closet? It looks like a closet. The wall has tiny holes but I can't really see through.

"Welcome child. Open your heart and confess your sins with your mouth", he says. What else can I confess with? I make the sign of the cross.

"Forgive me father for I have sinned. I'm a girl aged 26 going on 27", I start.

"When was your last confession?" he asks.

"This is my first, ever".

"Open your heart and speak your sins my child". He's only 2 years older than me but is busy calling me my child! Don't ask how I know his age! He explains to me how to go about the confession. Cool, we will need at least three weeks to get through my list! Some of the things I say have the poor priest fake coughing. I guess I'm the worst person he's ever had to forgive. I

keep going and I'm not even sure if some are sins but I say them anyway. I talk about Elik, Komla, my mother, my family, Elik's family, Bunke, Athi, Lemon, the miscarriage, Replace, Lumka and his ex, Lumka, Thando and everyone. I think I'm treating this as a therapy session more than a confession. I cry as I talk about some of the things and laugh as I talk about others.

"Pain is a beautiful gift we were blessed with. Without pain we would be numb and our souls would be silenced. You need the pain to remind you of the unpleasantness of a situation and to urge you to move on. The mistake we make as humans is that we harbour that pain, we keep it locked away because we are afraid to feel. Afraid that it will rage out of control and destroy us. But no, you need to face pain if you are to deal with it. Don't fear it, conquer it. Do not be so hard on yourself young one, forgive yourself".

His voice is soothing and I find myself holding onto every word he says.

"Do you have more confessions to make?" I don't really. I've spent the last hour or so pouring my heart out but I need to hear him speak one last time so let me derail a bit just to keep him talking.

"I have unnatural thoughts sometimes", I confess.

"Like what?"

"I want to be a vampire. Tell me, can I be a vampire Father? Are they real? I've been doing research but the evidence I'm getting is inconclusive and contradictory".

"So you want to be dead?" he says.

Wait, so he knows what I'm waffling about?

"No not dead dead. I want to be dead but alive, you know? Like a vampire. I don't want to stop living but I also want everything inside me to die. Well except the baby of course. Can vampires have babies?"

This is the kind of conversation I would normally have with Elik.

"I don't think so. I've never met one".

"I'll read up some more. I don't want to drink blood though, like NO, yuck! I want to be a vegetarian vampire. I could be the first and I'll sire others and have a colony of good vamps. And the best part is I'll never grow old! I know it's wrong because me wanting to be something else means I'm not content with the image I was fashioned after. So that's my sin there but you understand, right?"

The priest sighs.

“Ok fine! Maybe not a vampire. I could be a werewolf. Do you know werewolves?”

“Ummm. Lycans is the right word”.

“Exactly! I want to be one. I’ll still be human except on full moons. I just want to walk around knowing that I have a wolf inside me. I want that amount of strength. I’ll probably kill a lot of people along the way though so maybe I don’t want to be a werewolf”.

“But He who is in you is way greater than any wolf or lycan or vampire. Why are you not drawing your strength from Him?”

“My faith is not that strong yet Father. But I’ll get there. I’m working on it. Ok. How about I become a witch? A good witch”.

“Like the Harry Potter type?”

“Hell yeah!” I cover my mouth. I don’t think I can use ‘hell’ in a nice way in this place. He sighs.

“Child, focus. Tell me your sins”, he cuts me short. How rude! He’s so cool though so he’s automatically forgiven.

“Alright I’m sorry I got carried away there. Ok. I almost forgot. I fornicated with two men in one day. I wasn’t dating them then though. No, please don’t judge me, let me explain. It wasn’t a threesome or anything unholy like that. No, no ways. I had one in the morning and one in the evening”.

Flip. I need to stop talking because this is coming out very wrong. Let me quickly move right along and hope he won’t linger on that one.

“Ok I’m done. That’s all of them”, I say. He sighs! And sighs again! But I’m serious now, we getting to the forgiveness part. That’s the whole reason why I’m here.

“These are all my sins that I can recall. I confess to you Father and to all my brethren out there that I have sinned through my own fault. In my thoughts and in my words. In what I have done and in what I have failed to do. And I ask blessed Mary, ever Virgin, all the angels and saints, and you Father, to pray for me and help me ask for forgiveness”, I finish my confession.

He makes me recite the Act of Contrition.

“I’m heartily sorry for having offended Thee. I know you are deserving of all my love. Help me do penance. Help me to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin”, I read from the church prayer book.

He tells me to refrain from sin and that my body is a temple and I should

treat it like it. But if my body is a temple, why should I deny Elik entry into a place of worship? Ok maybe I shouldn't say that out loud. He then says a prayer of absolution and I say Amen.

“Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more”.

“All of them?”

“Yes. Even the worst of the worst are welcome in the kingdom”.

I think he just insulted me but I just had my slate wiped clean a few seconds ago and I refuse to sin so soon.

“What if I sin again?” I know I will sin again. I'm a walking sin.

“Then come again for confession”.

“For your penance, I really don't know”.

“Come on. I can't be that bad!” I chuckle.

“Ok. Do five Hail Mary's and five Glory Bes then recite the stations of the cross tomorrow morning. Make the sign of the cross with holy water before you depart”.

“Only?” it sounds too lenient.

“I wish I could ask you to bring a lamb so you could make a burnt offering on the altar, or ask you to punish yourself every morning by hitting your back twenty times with a sjambok. But alas! Those days are behind us”.

I laugh. This priest! So he really thinks I'm that horrible?

“Actually, Go and pray at the altar then return here. I will give you a rosary and a list of patron Saints to look after you”.

“Cool. Thanks Father”.

I go and pray and pray and pray and go back. He's out of the booth and waiting. He tricked me. He wanted to see my face! I don't think that's allowed but well his sin not mine.

“Walk with me”, he says.

Can I tell him he looks good? He reminds me of those priests in high school that had girls cutting their skirts short and wanting to go for morning prayers every morning in winter nogal! He looks divine though. And that purple robe flows down his body perfectly like it was made specifically for him. Do they make fitted robes? This church is involuntarily exorcising the whore in me and now it's restless and wants to come out to play. Gosh. Such thoughts should be forbidden! He's hot though with that white collar on his neck.

We walk out and into the church cemetery. A walk in the graveyard? Is

that a thing priests do? What's with Catholic churches and graveyards anyway? It's spooky!

"What's your name again?" he looks at me.

"Fierce".

"Oh yes I remember from last Sunday. I'm Father..."

"Father Francis. Fresh from St. Augustine's Seminary".

Why is he looking at me like that! I'm not a stalker, I'm a researcher. Huge difference. I have a lot of information on him that would shock him if I repeated it right now. I know why he was almost dismissed from the seminary in his second year.

"You know Fierce, commonly I assign people one patron saint but I feel like you need more than one. I'll assign you St. Raphael the Archangel and St. Valentine of Rome, the patron saints of love so they may help you find love".

Seriously? I told him I have a fiancé and told him all about Elik and now he thinks I need to find love elsewhere? Judgemental much? I'll take the patrons though but they have to help me with my current love affair not a new one.

"I'll also assign you St. Teresa of Avila the patron of those who have lost a parent and St. Catherine the patron of those who have suffered miscarriages. They will help you find healing". Ok I'll take those.

We talk about other things. He says he's enjoying it here and is learning a lot from the older priest.

"I've sinned against a holy man Father", I blurt out.

"What have you done now?"

"I've lusted after him. I've looked at him and had inappropriate thoughts of him. Forgive me".

"Who is he?" he asks. Ever so calm.

"You, Father", I laugh. I need divine intervention! What? He said I must tell nothing but the honest truth!

"Fierce", is all he says and we walk on.

"Lastly, I'll assign you St Jude".

"What is he patron of?"

"It doesn't matter. Just take him", he says and changes the topic to asking me about school. I'll take St. Jude alright. Walking in between graves is so weird. Of all places he took me through a graveyard? Is he sending me a message? Is he trying to say my soul is dead? I hope not

because that's just wrong. My soul brought me to church! I ask about exorcisms and the crusades and he explains as calmly as he can. The walk is over and I thank him graciously and say I will see him next Sunday and leave.

I still want to know what St. Jude is the patron saint of. And you know when you're walking around sinless, good luck just falls on your head. I bump into the older priest going to greet the parishioners.

"Father", I call out.

"Yes, my child".

"Thank you for the sermon. It was powerful", I smile and shake his hand. I have no clue what it was about! I kind of dozed off around that time.

"Thank you. I'm glad the seed did not fall on rocky land but in your fertile heart". Oh-kay!

"Father, what is St. Jude patron of?"

"St Jude is the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes".

I can't help but laugh. Father Francis ne! I see you! You think I'm a lost cause! I'm watching you!

I find Thando. She says she looked for me everywhere and is asking why the kids only speak English. What does she want them to speak? They speak a bit of their dad's language and they are taking French classes! They are just forced to speak English most of the time because of the people around them. I sign the kids up for Catechism classes then we go home. I feel so safe I might not even need to wear a seat belt! I have five patron saints watching over me.

Thankfully, Lizzy cooked a full Sunday lunch and these men had the sense to wait for us. They probably ate already and will just eat again. I'm warming up to Thando I think. She's not that bad. I need to loosen up a bit and not be so hard on her I guess. After lunch I go and lie down. The food didn't agree with me and now I'm nauseous and I have minor cramps. I'm exhausted. And you'll hear someone say "Being pregnant is nice!" Gerarahere!

Dinner has been had and the kids have been put to bed. It's just adults now. I suggest we play 30 seconds, you know, do couple things. I team up with Elik and Thando with Lumka. This is the best game I've ever played. I swear I've never laughed so hard. My word! This girl is so thick in the head

it's not even funny! I think Lumka is getting offended by Elik and I laughing. We say we just thought of an old inside joke that's why we keep laughing so hysterically! He's not stupid though, he knows we laughing at Thando. She's a special breed shame.

Lumka gives the clue as, "It's a fruit, it's small and it's grown in vineyards and it's used to make wine". She thinks.

"Come on. It's mostly grown here in the Western Cape. It's small and almost round. It makes wine baby come on". And the girl says "Tomatoes".

I've never laughed so hard in my life. Maybe I missed the memo. Are tomatoes grown in vineyards now? And do they make red wine out of them maybe these days? But Lumka is determined to move at least one spot forward so he gives another clue before the hourglass runs out.

He says, "It appears after a rainfall and has seven colours and it forms an arch in the sky". She thinks.

"It first appeared after that whole Noah flood in the Bible as a promise not to kill us all with water", he says urgently. I start laughing even before she answers. So when she says, "Oh I know! It's stars" I die. She said stars! I kid you not. Elik says I must behave just before he bursts out laughing!

We play and only move one step. We couldn't focus with all the laughing. Then it's back to them. Maybe she will do better with asking questions.

"Ok Lumka focus. It's easy this one", then she goes off on a tangent. Laaawwwddd! The answer is Marie Curie and it's ok if she doesn't know her but the funny part is how she tried to explain "Marie biscuits" for the first part. The way she went about it has me in stitches. Elik and I laugh so hard Lumka says he doesn't want to play anymore. And that's the end of the game. How can he find this not funny?

I suggest we play Settlers of Catan or Dungeons and Dragons rather. Lumka says he's done with stupid games and wants to sleep. Such a sore loser! We apologise for our unruly behaviour and he agrees to stay awake. We watch a movie. I excuse myself halfway. I'm feeling funny. Elik asks if I need him to come with me, I insist that he stays, I'll be fine. I have minor cramps again. The doctor said it's expected. I'll just sleep them off like I did in the afternoon.

"Elik wake up", I say shaking him. My phone says it's 4:23 am.

"Wake up", I shake him harder until he wakes up.

“Something is wrong. I’m in pain”.

I also feel sticky and wet. I must have been sweating in the night. He’s grumpy but I said something’s wrong so he gets up. He gets the lights on his side, then gets the main lights and pulls the covers off.

“No”, I say. This can’t be happening to me. I’m sitting in blood and the cramps on my stomach and lower back are getting worse.

“No”, Elik’s face changes.

He quickly throws on sweatpants and a hoodie. For the first time ever I’m glad he leaves his clothes lying around! The cramps are getting worse by the second. I’m trying to sit, to turn, to get up, to stay still but they won’t give me a chance. I saw blood and I panicked. It just keeps getting worse. I think this is how labour feels like. But I’m not even seven months pregnant yet so how can I be going into labour? I let out a scream as a pain cuts across my lower abdomen and all around to my back. It’s like someone is trying to claw my spinal cord out of back and at the same time rip my uterus out of my womb. The tug of war is excruciating. I try to drift my thoughts to happier times but I can’t find a memory to hold on to. All those that come to mind are dark and are making me feel worse. My mother. Komla. The last people I wish to think about right now.

Elik is trying to hold me so I don’t fall off the bed. I just want to roll off and maybe the carpet will make me feel better. He’s telling me to try and stay calm. There’s knocking on the door. I scream again as the cramps take another stab at me. The door opens. It’s Lumka. He looks lost and when I let out another scream, he comes around the bed to us. Elik is now trying to make me lean back so he can lift me up.

“Shit”, Lumka says. No one cares I’m naked right now. I for one don’t care.

“Let me call an ambulance”, Lumka says.

“No there’s no time. Get the car out of the garage and I’ll bring her out”, Elik says.

“Which car?” Lumka asks.

“Any. Just grab any key and run man”, Elik shouts.

“Come baby. It’s ok. I’ll get you to hospital. You’ll be just fine”.

I wriggle some more. I’m trying not to do anything because the pain intensifies when I move. I try to not even breathe. I close my eyes and hold my breath, when I finally exhale the sharp pain is released throughout my whole body like an electric current. Only a scream can explain what I’m

going through. I can't let Elik touch me. He will move me and I'll die from pain.

"I know it hurts but please work with me here. Be strong for us baby girl please, just to get to the car. Please ma. For our baby".

It's unbearable. My entire body is on fire. It's like my insides were dipped in Sulphuric acid then rinsed out with boiling oil. Elik lifts me up, naked as I am and carries me out of the room. Blood is dripping everywhere but again no one cares. Thando is up now too and she's trying to ask what happened when Elik screams at her to open the door.

"It's ok baby. Hang in there. Please". Lumka holds the door open as Elik puts me on the back seat of his new car. It's going to be so bloodied but I don't think any of us care about anything right now.

"I'm coming with you", Lumka says.

"No. Get her some clothes and follow", Elik says.

"No Elik. You can't drive! I'll come back for clothes. Jump in", Lumka insists. Elik jumps in the back seat and puts my head on his lap. That feels better. I'm humming softly to myself so I can listen to the pain and see where exactly it's coming from. Elik keeps saying it's alright but his voice is shaking and I can tell he's just as terrified as I am.

"Please don't die on me baby. Please, I'm begging you... Don't worry we'll get to the hospital now now... Lumka drive... Please baby. Stay with me my angel...Go Lumka, fuck the red lights, just go... I promise I'll do everything for you baby. Whatever you want, I'll do it... Stay with me... No, don't close your eyes...".

I'm in no capacity to respond. My eyes are heavy but I can't afford to keep them closed. I feel faint but I know I can't afford to pass out now. I can't die. Not today. If I die the baby dies and I can't have that. When Lumka drives over a speed hump I almost become paralysed.

Thank goodness I think we're at the hospital now. The car has stopped and Lumka jumps out leaving the engine running. I'm numb from trying not to move, but the moment the nurses try to put me on the stretcher bed my body bursts into flames, like a thousand tiny needles attacking me. I bite my lower lip and screw my eyes shut to suppress the spasms running through my spinal cord. Everything's happening so fast, my brain can't keep up. I mean to say "I love you" to Elik as they wheel me away but my mouth is too dry. In case I die, I'd have loved him to know that no one ever put so much effort in me and made me feel the way he did. He's my soulmate. I

don't know what's happening but I'm terrified out of my mind. They tell Elik he has to stand outside. He tells them it's his wife lying on that bed and he's not going anywhere. I'm his wife now? That's sweet. They let him be. They try to stabilise me and check my vitals and all that emergency patience routine check-ups. I can't see Lumka but it's fine. The man I need is right here.

Without warning I feel the urge to push. I know I need to stop pushing but I can't. And the pain is excruciating. It just started and I just keep pushing. It's happening on its own and I'm trying to stop it. I keep pushing and pushing and the pain is killing me. I can't give birth now. It's too early. I try to close my legs but two nurses hold them wide open.

"Elik", I mean to shout but it comes out as a sad little whisper.

I swallow hard and choke on my tears. I have no scream left in me and the truth is hitting me hard in the face.

"I'm losing our baby. Please help me. I can't lose him. Someone help me, please", I plead with everyone in the room.

They are all busy and no one is listening to me. I know it's quite early in the morning but I hope my patron saints are awake and doing something about this situation I'm in. This is pure blazing hell. I can't lose my baby. I just can't.

"I'm so sorry. I promise I'll go to church more. I'll change my ways. I'll do anything, just don't let me lose my boy please. St Jude? St Catherine? Anyone? Please help me", I say a little prayer in my heart.

"Elik. I can't lose our baby. Please help me. I can't stop pushing. I don't know what to do", I see him wipe his eyes with the back of his hand through my glassy eyes.

"Hang in there baby. I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere".

They ask him to move back and I thought they asked him to go out. Noooo! Elik can't leave. I need him here. I strengthen my grip on his hand. I find his eye and my lips say "Don't leave" without uttering a word.

"I won't leave you", he assures me.

That stabbing pain again and I push one last time. I feel life just leave me. I feel like I just died, except I can see that I'm alive, except everything is so silent around me, except I can see Elik holding my hand and his lips moving, except I feel an emptiness within me. I just died or a huge part of me did. I smile at Elik. I'm at peace.

"Thank you". I feel my consciousness leaving me and I shut my eyes

and give in to the darkness.

I wake up I don't know whether minutes or hours or years later. Elik is still sitting by my bedside and his clothes are stained with blood. I'm in hospital! I thought the last time was the last time! I never wanted to lie on these beds ever again and feel weak and helpless like I do right now. And like the last time and the last, Elik is right here by my side. There's a particular void inside of me that I just don't understand. I immediately touch my tummy, out of habit. I try not to rush my thoughts but the moment I look at him again. I remember. In between what seems to be a suppressed cry and hurt, the words "I'm sorry baby" come from him and echo in my ears. What is he sorry for this time? I look at him with eyes saying 'what?'

"We lost the baby", he says.

I just sit there, staring blankly at him. I can hear that he's talking but his words don't make sense. What does he mean?

"I'm so sorry my love", he gets up to hold me. I can tell he's been crying and he looks drained. He shouldn't cry. I'm sure I'm still pregnant. It was a false alarm. I'm fine. Right? Wrong!

I can't feel that little heartbeat that's been beating inside of me for months. It's gone. I don't feel the connection. He died and I think I died with him. My precious little boy, gone like a kiss in the wind. Just like that. No warning, no goodbye, nothing. I carried him for almost seven months and I get nothing? Gone to be with the twins I lost in a similar way. I could be a mother of three now but I'm still on zero. There's only one nurse and doctor left in the room. The doctor tells us some medical jargon and says I'm fine and in perfect condition. But if I am why couldn't I retain my child? Two more months is all I needed. Just 60 more days. Was that too much to ask for?

He says not to worry, the foetus will be disposed of accordingly. I think Elik is more hurt than me. I'm not hurt anymore. I'm just sitting here waiting to die. The good doctor says they did all they could to prevent me from any infections and stuff like that. He says the baby was already dead on arrival so really nothing could be done. He says I'm fine. Am I fine really?

"Where's my baby?"

"Aah ma'am. I just explained that he'll be disposed of accordingly. No need to worry".

"Disposed? Like garbage? That's my child! I want him. Bring him to

me”.

I’m calm. Too calm. My spirit is raging though but I screamed all my shouts away earlier so all I have left now is this thin, cracky voice. They look at each other. I’m not mad, I promise. I just want to see my son, fully formed or not. Why can’t they understand that? I’m not going to take him home. I just want to see what he looked like and hold him just this once. After seven months of being attached to him don’t I deserve that? Elik is holding my hand and looking at me. He doesn’t have to say anything, his eyes say it all.

“Where is he? Please bring him to me. I’ll bury him myself!”

There’s a beautiful holy graveyard behind the church. I’m sure they will allow me to dig a little grave there to let my little one sleep. My voice is broken and comes out raw and tainted with sobs.

“Ma’am. That’s not possible. He wasn’t fully formed yet and we have procedures”, the good doctor says.

“I don’t care. Fuck your procedures! Bring me my child!” the tears are back and they just won’t stop. I try to get off the bed. I’ll go find him myself if they don’t want to bring him. But the pipe in the vein of my right arm stops me and gives Elik a chance to hold me back. He just holds me there. He’s not talking. I am a lost cause, ain’t I? St. Jude, pray for me. I walked through the graveyard with Father Francis yesterday. It didn’t mean anything then. But then what if it was symbolic? What if he took me there to bury my past and move on? What if he wanted me to walk in there carrying my burdens then walk out with nothing? Was my child also considered a past that needed to be buried? No. That can’t be. When I did the confession and asked all my sins to be washed away, did I unintentionally ask my child to be washed away too? Was going for that confession a mistake? Am I being punished for lusting after a priest? Is that an offence punishable by death? If I’m to keep my senses together, I need to make sense of all of this.

Like at 4 am this morning I was pregnant and now I’m not. Just like that? What did I ever do to deserve this? Why couldn’t I be allowed just this one thing? I have proven I can be a mother. I do everything for Peter and Paul, you can ask them. I might not be perfect and I feed them too much junk food but I try my best. I got them Lizzy, didn’t I? I read them bedtime stories and tell them I love them every day. I try. I would have tried with this little one too. Where are my patron Saints? Why didn’t they help me? I

did confession yesterday and I was forgiven. So what did I do wrong? Why do other people get to have children and I don't? Don't Elik and I deserve a child together? At least one? And all those baby clothes and toys and pram and crib that I already bought. What must happen to them now? I took my supplements, I ate well, I prayed, I practiced yoga, I meditated, I stayed away from alcohol and pain pills, I took care of myself! I even started going to church! I did everything right! So why did he die? What did I do wrong?

The doctor asks Elik if it's ok if they sedate me and he says yes. I don't even know why they need to sedate me. Are they sure they are not over sedating me? But I'll never say no to anyone offering me hours of undisturbed peace. I'm just a statue in all of this. Numb. Elik just sits there, holding on to my hand the whole time. My poor baby. His mind is not here at all. I feel drowsy and I hate them for putting me down like an animal. I need to stay awake and face my pain so I can conquer it. That's what Father Francis said.

When I wake up next, I'm still in hospital! What am I still doing here? I'm no longer pregnant mos so they should let me go home. Elik is still here and Lumka is trying to convince him to at least change his hoodie for a clean one he brought. He refuses. I'm up now though so Lumka needs not worry I'll tell Elik what to do. He takes off his hoodie and throws it to the floor with so much anger and puts on the one Lumka hands him. Thando isn't here, I'm glad. I'm not in the mood for her. They both start asking me silly things like am I hungry or am I thirsty. I'm none of the above. I used to eat so my baby would stop kicking me. He used to throw tantrums like his dad. I hated it then but I miss it now. I wish he could be here kicking me all day and giving me cramps. I would gladly give anything to have that again. I have a hospital gown on now, at least. I hope Lumka has forgotten what he saw earlier. Elik's eyes are red and I have to look away to stop my tears from coming. He sits on the edge of my bed and takes me into his arms.

"It's ok my love. Let go. I'm here for you", Elik says.

"I love you more than anything and it's tearing me apart seeing you like this", he says.

I let my hands wrap around his neck and I cry. Softly at first but I let it out. I unashamedly weep. Lumka steps out I think because I hear the door open then shut. I feel tears drop on my neck and hear sniffing. I can't explain what I'm feeling. All I know is I want it gone. All of it. Like I've

done so many of my demons in the past, I want to open a shelf and put this one in there then lock up and throw away the key. I want everything inside of me dead. I don't want to feel anything at all. But until then I'll hold on to Elik and cry my eyes out. I can barely feel the physical. It's the emotional stab running between my heart and head that's driving me insane.

When the doctor comes to check on me, Lumka comes in with him. I'm more behaved this time. He gives me tablets that will remove any tissue that might still be in my uterus and says I have to wait at least five hours for observation before I can go home. I take the pills and thank him. I ask if he can put me under for those five hours. He says no, no more sedation.

"Please, five Mybulen pills is all I need", I say.

He looks at me and I look down.

"You can't give her that Doc. She has abused them in the past and I'm not going down that road with her again", Elik says.

How can he say that? I need them, can't he see that? Is he that blind? He's got his vices, I've got mine. So why is he being unreasonable? He squeezes my hand and I keep looking down.

"What happened?" Elik asks. He pulls me into his arms so my head rests on his shoulder. I'm not crying now. I need to hear this.

"Her body was under a lot of stress", the doctor says. No it wasn't, I want to say, but the lump in my throat won't let me speak.

"Couldn't you save him?" Elik asks.

"No. Nothing could be done. She had what we call a missed miscarriage. It's strange that it happened so late in the pregnancy. It often happens in the first trimester. The foetus had been dead for almost a week now. Her body just didn't notice so it continued producing hormones thinking it's still pregnant. What's strange is that the foetus was well developed and we couldn't find anything wrong with it. And stress, although it's a common cause of miscarriages, I don't see how in this case it affected her, she had gone so far into the pregnancy", he explains.

What exactly is this man with the stethoscope saying? I don't think I heard him right. So, you mean to tell me that I've been walking around carrying a dead baby in my stomach for a week! So, at that party when I went on and on about my pregnancy I was talking about a zombie? Was it rotting in there or just there? I don't think I want to know that part. So, I went around carrying a corpse in me for a whole seven days? What witchcraft is this? I curl up to Elik and hold on to his arm as he keeps

talking to the doctor wanting to know what exactly could have happened. I just want to die!

“She had a significant amount of CRH in her system. It’s a stress hormone and I suspect she’s been under a lot of stress. It’s the only way to explain it. Besides that, I can’t tell you at this present moment what exactly happened”.

I shake my head and wipe my tears.

“Stress is stress. You may conceal it and cover it up but your body will still take strain”. Is he trying to convince us or himself? He just wants a medical explanation so he can sleep better at night. Stress? Me? Nah! I start laughing. Seriously! Stress? Come on! He must go run more tests because we’re not accepting stress as cause of death. I’m talking to the doctor but not exactly. I’m more thinking out loud.

“I wasn’t stressed! Are you a doctor or a psychologist? I’m a little confused now! I told you I wasn’t under any stress but you telling me about subconscious stress now! I’ve been very fine throughout my pregnancy! More than fine! I was pampered and had everything I needed. Fine, minor insignificant things happened, like my mother disowned me, my lobola process didn’t happen, I almost didn’t finish my PhD, I constantly missed my twins that died, I had bad nightmares, I suffered anxiety and my man cheated on me. But I wasn’t stressed at all, I swear”.

My voice is croaky and talking is such a strain. Then you tell me I was stressed? I don’t do stress! Stressed is desserts spelled backwards and that’s exactly what I do to my situations. I eat them up like dessert and lock them away where they won’t bother me.

“What? Why you all looking at me like that for?” I laugh a little but I can’t remember what the joke was. Now I just want to go home. Why are they looking at me with so much concern?

“I’m done here. Please let me go home! Doctor, you said you’re going to dispose my baby. So what are you waiting for? Go ahead and dispose of IT!” I look crazy I’m sure.

“Come on baby”, Elik takes my hands.

“What? I’m fine baby. Very fine”.

“You have to wait until all the bleeding has stopped before you have sexual intercourse and wait at least two menstrual cycles before you try to conceive again”, the doctor says. “Make that a lifetime of menstrual cycles! I’m done trying. I don’t want to be pregnant ever again. I want the 3-year

implant please”.

And sex? I never want that thing near me ever again. I’m done.

“See Doc. Not stressed at all. I’m making logical decisions here. I’ve never been stressed in my entire life. What’s stress? What’s the medical term for it?”

Gosh! It’s getting hot in here.

“Can I have a minute with her, please Doc”, Elik says.

“Take all the time you want”, he walks out.

“Look at me”, Elik says.

“Why?”

“Look at me Fierce!” There’s so much hurt in his voice I feel guilty for laughing. Why was I laughing? I can’t remember. My emotions are all over the place. It’s a rollercoaster.

“Please don’t leave me”, I say in between sobs.

“I’ll never leave you! Now look at me!” he says.

“I’m not crazy baby. Don’t let them take me to a psych ward. Don’t leave me Elik, please”, I plead with him. He wipes away a tear that just ran down my face.

“I’m not going to leave you. This was my child too. The child I’ve always wanted with you. So, we’re in this together. They won’t take you away and I won’t leave you”.

“I don’t know how I’ll get through this baby. I’m not strong enough. I want the pain to go away. Please make it go away”, I sob.

“You don’t have to be strong at all. Let me do that for us. Let me take care of you. I got you”. I nod.

“I love you. And I know exactly what you’re going through right now, because I’m going through it too. But I need to be strong for you. Can you let me do that?”

“Yes”, I say in between sobs.

I put my arms around him and thank the patron saints of love for coming through for me. My thoughts are disorganised today and keep jumping from one emotion to another. Now I remember why I’m in this bed. My child is gone. I complained so much about my pregnancy and now that it’s gone I miss it. I miss the morning sickness, the cramps, the anxiety, the weird cravings, the throwing up, the back pain. I even miss the kicking. It’s like a huge part of me just got taken away without notice.

I ask to lie back. He sits and holds my hand. He did say he wasn’t going

anywhere, my black panther. My mind drifts far away and I'm trying to remember what that last ultrasound scan looked like. It was an outline of a baby with a big head. I smile a little as I imagine my baby looking something like Peter and Paul. Would he also talk that much? Would he be as cute and adorable? Would he have Elik's eyes too? And his eyelashes? I will never know. But what if he's here listening? My aunt once said even though the body is not fully formed the spirit would be whole. So, let me just talk to him and only hope he can hear me. It's too quiet here, I wonder what time it is. I start talking and Elik sits up because I guess he thought I was talking to him.

"I'm sorry my sweet boy that we had to part before we even met. I'm sorry that I'll never get to hold you. That I'll never get to smell you or hold your tiny hand or kiss your sweet face or hear your heartbeat. I'm sure you would have been just as handsome as your father. I saw his pictures from primary school (choke-giggle). His ears were running away from his head but he looked so handsome (Sad smile). He looked just like your brothers, Peter and Paul, and I'm sure you would have looked the same. I would have my house full of four of the most handsome boys in the world. Your brothers would have protected you with their lives, I'm sure of it. I'm sorry that they will never get to play with you. I don't even know what I'll say when I get home and they ask how the baby in the stomach is doing (sigh). Your father would have loved you with everything. He loved you from the very day he found out about your existence and he treated me like a queen because he loved you that much. He's here with me. I'm sorry that I failed to carry you to the end.

I would have named you Elikplim Junior because I've never heard a more beautiful name. I would have named you that so you can turn out to be like your dad. Drop dead handsome, beautiful skin, gorgeous eyes, smartest brain ever, a big heart and all these qualities that make him so irresistible. We would have sheltered you from the snares and the wickedness of this world. You are safe now. I love you with everything. Rest in peace my heart".

If Elik thinks I've gone mad, he doesn't say it. He just moves closer and holds me in his arms and tells me to cry it all out. What did I ever do to deserve this though?

Six

It's been five days since the miscarriage. These have been the hardest and the most confusing days of my life. I look in the mirror sometimes and I have no idea who that girl looking back at me is! I've laughed, I've cried, I've cussed, I've prayed, I've stared at the wall blankly and I've tormented Elik. I have gone mad! Elik is taking it all like a man though and never once complains. All my multiple personalities came alive from day one and all, except Sweet Fierce, crucified Elik left right and centre.

SWEET FIERCE: *'No one dies a virgin. Life screws us all. Just get up, shake off the dust and move right along'*. The good girl. She carries on like nothing happened. Too bad she never lingers for long. The other personalities overpower her.

CRYING FIERCE: *'Cry a river and maybe the pain will be washed away'*. Tears are for the shedding so why go against the order of the cosmos? Well, Crying Fierce isn't mean to Elik but she just cries her eyes out and makes Elik hold her.

NUMB FIERCE: *'Be like a vampire. If you keep your mouth closed the fangs will remain unseen'*. Numb Fierce is alive but dead. She's strong but weak. She's soulless but heartfelt. Just like a vampire she just sits there looking dead. She stares at the wall not wanting to do anything. Elik sits with her, begging her not to shut him out and allow him to be there for her.

ANGRY FIERCE: *'Fuck the innocent flower, be the serpent underneath! Spit venom and bite'*. She's the scariest of them all and the most difficult to deal with. She is rude and she spits venom.

DELUSIONAL FIERCE: *'It's all in the mind. It's only as real as you want it to be. The dead are only dead if you believe they are'*. This one is the worst personality by far. She refuses to accept that her child is dead so she carries on like nothing has changed. She talks to the baby and claims to still be pregnant.

DESPERATE FIERCE: *'A baby is the glue to a relationship. Without it you are doomed'*. She believes that without the baby Elik has no reason to stay with her. She chooses to forget how he stayed with her long before she was pregnant and stayed with her after the first miscarriage.

It's day five now and I'm still out of my mind. I'm a legit mess. All those personalities came from nowhere and I've been battling with myself trying

to hang in there like the saying goes. I know I'm just grasping at straws and honestly, I don't know why Elik hasn't left me yet. All I've done since we left the hospital is abuse him. It's like every passing hour I'm a whole different person. Lizzy is an angel. She helps me with everything and takes care of the kids for me. I feel like my body betrayed me because it's forgetting way too fast!

The bleeding stopped and I have no pain left. I want that pain back as a reminder of what I lost. My body is perfectly fine but I can't say the same about my mind. It's been a roller coaster of feelings going at fast speed through a dark cave. I'm sinking fast and feeling like I'm free falling through a dark hole. I want my baby back. That's all. Elik is at work. He had to go and work from some office in Claremont because he can't focus at home. Because of me I know and he has an important deal to close. And he can't go to Joburg yet. I need to get over this, be a big girl and dig a river, build a bridge and get over it. That's exactly what I intend to do and I know the right person to help me.

I clean up, get into my car and head to town. I still remember that club Elik disappeared to that time after my first miscarriage. I get in and ask for Lemon and thankfully I'm told to wait because he's around. Minutes later I'm ushered up the stairs and into a small office-like room. Lemon is in there and he asks his guys to excuse us. I always hated the fact that Elik had this guy in our lives but today I thank him wholeheartedly. He's my last hope.

"Hi Lemon. You good?"

I have on the best smile I can muster. I'm sure I look like purgatory right now. I looked like hell before but foundation and powder and eyeliner helped me some. They couldn't make me look like heaven but I'm not looking like hell either, I'm somewhere in between. So, purgatory.

"Hi my skat. Do you have a name?" he says showing that silver tooth.

"I'm Fierce. Elik's girl".

"Oh ya. El's goose! Gaan sit", he invites me to sit down.

"Dankie", I thank him.

"Aren't you knocked up? Where's the belly?"

"Gone", I look down. He raises an eyebrow but doesn't ask. He offers me alcohol, a joint, a cigarette. I say no to all.

"Vat can I do you for?" he talks funny.

"I need a huge favour", I try to maintain my composure.

“Praat to me”.

I look around then lean towards him and drop my voice, “I need something strong. Like cocaine, ecstasy, anything. Whatever you recommend”.

“Wait. Say what you say again”, he raises an eyebrow. I repeat. He looks at me like I’m insane.

“Please Lemon. I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t desperate. I don’t know anyone else who can help me”.

“Does Elik know you here?”

“No and please you can’t tell him. Asseblief”, I plead.

“Ever done drugs before or anything lekker like that?”

“No. Just pain pills but no not really”.

He studies my face for a while.

“I’m sorry. You’s Elik’s goose. I can’t”.

“Please, I’m begging you. Money’s not a problem. I’ll pay double what you sell for”.

He has to help me. I’m on the verge of tears. And can’t he at least be impressed that I understand some Afrikaans and reward me with drugs?

“Okay, tell you what. Lemme see what I can do. I’ll hit you up”.

Phew! Great news.

“When?”

“Later”. The way he pronounces every R in words is strangely fascinating! I thank him and leave. I make sure my phone’s is on loud. I’m not planning to be an addict, it’s a temporary fix. I know drugs are bad and addictive and all that bad stuff but I will be careful. I just need them to help me for a short while. At least until I can cope with all this that’s happening.

I’m waiting on Lemon’s call and I was hoping he would have called me by now. It’s afternoon and the twins are taking their afternoon nap so I take my own nap. School holidays have them staying home. Elik wakes me up and he’s rough about it. He says Lemon called him. I freak out and fully awaken. The betrayal! I explicitly asked that tattooed man not to tell Elik! I need to think fast and get out of this one. I lie and say I wanted them but wouldn’t use them. I just wanted them for a project I’m doing. That doesn’t even make sense. He asks again, more sternly this time and I find myself admitting.

He’s furious and I’m scared. But silly me thinks it’s a great idea to flip

the script and blame him. Reverse psychology. But he's not having any of my bullshit today.

"You did this to me Elik! You did this!" I storm out of the room. I get out and go off to the kitchen. When he gets to the kitchen he finds me wanting to destroy everything. I just want to break something. I want to break someone's neck. How dare he judges me for wanting drugs? Does he know the pain I'm going through? I break the glass sitting on the counter, then a cup then a plate from the cupboard and throw another cup at the wall.

"Fierce! Not again! Stop".

I stand there with a pile of broken things on my feet. Did he say stop? Why? I'm just getting started! We have a new TV that needs to be broken and I might just slash the tyres of his car and put sugar in his fuel tank! He walks up to me and pins my arms to my body and forces me against the wall.

"Get it together woman! This can't go on", he shakes me.

"I'm going to ask you once Elikplim Nkrumah! Get the fuck out of my way!"

"No princess. You don't talk to me like that!"

I'll talk to him however way I want! He just cost me the only chance I had of getting something that will help me heal. And I'm mad at that Lemon guy. He's such a Judas Iscariot! He smiled at me in that club office and he betrayed me just like that! You can't trust anyone these days.

"Let. Me. Go. Elik", I say slowly this time so he knows I'm serious.

"What's going on?" I hear a little voice. We both turn and it's Peter rubbing his eyes. For a moment, I'm ashamed of myself.

"What's going on? You are making noise!" Peter says.

"No big guy. It's nothing. Fierce and I are just playing. Come, let me take you back to bed. I'm sorry we woke you up", Elik says. He shoots me an 'I'm not done with you' eye. He picks Peter up and disappears. I can feel my anger receding and the tears coming. The shame. What have I become? What am I doing? But now is not the time for tears. Crying Fierce should go to sleep and let me handle this. I need to defend my foolishness. I'm not stupid! I wouldn't turn to drugs if I had another option. Besides, why is he overreacting, it's just a combination of chemicals that I can manipulate. Chemicals are kind of my thing. I'm getting a PhD in manipulating them. Elik comes back as I'm still piecing together my argument and he's not smiling. He's furious with me, I don't get it.

“Fierce!” his tone is harsh and I can’t read the expression on his face. And why is he walking towards me so slowly? Suddenly I’m aware of how tiny I am as he stands right in front of me, I feel like a little lamb ready for slaughter.

“I won’t have this nonsense in my house”, he says, his eyes shooting daggers to mine. I take a step away, somehow feeling the need for space lest things get physical, because I don’t know the man standing right in front of me at this moment.

“Come on Elik! I’m a Chemical Engineer! Trust that I know what I wanted to do!”

“I’m intelligent you know!” I add on unnecessarily. Said an about-to-get-a-PhD Chemical Engineer to a Professor with a PhD in Robotics and Mechatronics! Wrong move.

“Intelligent?” he laughs at me.

“You are a pretty dumb engineer! Beyond academics you have no clue! Don’t tell me about engineering, that could impress your little friends out there but not me”.

Ouch! That hurt.

“You want to bring drugs here? Around MY children?”

Short sentences, short breaths in between, why are my knees shaking? The emphasis on MY children grips my heart. What is this, spitefulness because I lost my child? So it’s his children now not ours? A bolt of courage hits me, I won’t let him intimidate me, not now, not after he said that.

“Your children Elik? Because mine died you’ll rub it in my face that these are yours?”

Mental note : Never poke a beehive and expect not to be stung. I shouldn’t have said that, the look on his face says he doesn’t care.

“Goddammit Fierce!” he throws his hands in the air.

He starts pacing around the room, if I wasn’t in the middle of a fight I’d have thought the man was going crazy. He clenches his hands into fists and raises his voice at me.

“They’re MY children and I don’t care how you take it! I won’t let you do your drugs in here or whatever you think you need to do to get your head together. I won’t sit and watch you endanger MY children or disrupt their lives. I won’t let MY children grow up around this chaos. I won’t have them see all this (points at broken things all over the floor)”.

“This is all your fault!” I say. Why am I being made the bad person here? It’s just this once. I have raised these children too and been around them more than him, he should cut me some slack. The nerve to act holy!

“Oh no ma. Hold it right there! What did you just say? What the fuck is wrong with you? Huh? You gonna blame everything on me? Every time? Fuck that shit! It’s old”.

I’m staring at him in shock, from the look in his eyes he’s battling with himself, he probably wants to slam his fist into something. Hopefully not my face! I’m hoping he does that though. That way I can spin the tables and be the victim. Don’t judge me, I’m desperate, this seems like a fight I won’t win.

“You need to grow the fuck up! I’m fed up of your nonsense! I won’t have you disrespect me every day in my own house when all I’m doing is being there for your ass! Don’t you think I feel the pain too? Do you think I’m made of adamantium?”. Wow Elik! Adamantium isn’t even real! Big words or not, I still won’t back down. And aren’t we swearing a bit too much today? I can’t believe he’s talking to me like this! The nerve!

“Fine! I’ll leave you and YOUR children then. Clearly you want me gone so let me make this easy for you. I’m leaving”.

I’m not going anywhere. Like where would I go? But let’s see how he likes that idea! Didn’t see that coming did he? I know he’ll start begging me soon! He’s so predictable *rolls eyes*.

“Go”, he says.

“What?” I’m utterly shocked. This throws me aback; it takes me a little longer than usual to think of a response.

“Go. What you waiting for? Get out”. I look at him and I think he’s actually serious! His body language suggests he’s so serious he’ll drag me out himself if I don’t leave. Toughen up girl, stand your ground, boy he doesn’t know me! Fine. I’ll get out. I’ll go to a hotel somewhere! Fine. I’ll blow his money to cents!

I scurry to the bedroom and he’s right on my heels. Folding his arms, he stands by the door, unfazed by the reality that I’m about to walk out that door. Is he going to just stand there and watch me leave? Daddy, you’re about to lose the best thing you ever had in your life and you’ll just stand there and do nothing? I put on those jeans that make my ass pop and pair them with that Forever New corset I’ve been saving for a rainy day! He has no idea how hot I’m going to look! I put on a red pair of heels because I’m

feeling sexy and dangerous! This jacket I got in Milan will keep the cold out.

I was so focused on my look I didn't see him move from the door. Just as I take out my makeup bag to contour my cheeks and shape my brows, he takes it from me and I catch a fright, I wasn't expecting that. He throws it on the bed. Good gracious what has gotten over this man?

"I'm not gonna stand here waiting for you all day. Get out". And now I have had just about enough of whatever it is that's gotten into him. I can't deal with this, I've had enough to deal with and Macho Elik and suddenly Father-of-the-year will not be going on that list.

"Fine!" I snarl at him and I reach for a weekend bag in the closet to throw in some clothes. I think I'll be gone a while so I need a number of outfits.

"What do you think you doing woman? You're not taking anything out of this house! What makes you think a drug addict, crack whore deserves anything my money bought? Huh? That's the shit you should have thought about before going behind my back and trying to get yourself a fix. So, get two stepping Amy Winehouse, all the shit in this house is mine. Leave it".

I freeze and look at him. Information overload, what did he just call me? Amy what? This man forgot the shit I had to take from him and now he's throwing me out and calling me a crack whore?

"Leave Fierce! Don't make me repeat myself!"

He's determined to see me go. I am filled with the urgency to leave as well, like who wants to stay for this kind of nonsense anyways? He takes me by the hand and shows me the door.

"I can walk by myself! Get your hands off me!" I shrug him off. I grab my handbag by the couch then reach for my car keys and my phone.

"Where the fuck you think you going with my car? You're pretty stupid, aren't you? What makes you think you can leave with my car after you couldn't take a pair of socks? Stop wasting my time Fierce", he grabs the keys from my hand.

"You said you want to go, so go. Get your ass out of my house princess! This is MY castle not yours".

"But Elik!" I'm calm now, shit is getting real fast. Where will I go without a car?

"I bought you that bag as well, didn't I? Leave it!"

My jaw drops. I quickly take his bank card in the bag and then toss it

away. He can keep it. I'm going to buy another one.

"Good girl. Now get out. I need to get back to MY kids".

"So now everything is yours? Not ours but yours?" I don't believe he's doing this to me.

"Yes they are mine! I work hard Fierce and I take care of you! But that's made you way too comfortable! You think now you can talk to me however you want! The houses, the cars, the kids, the bank accounts. Everything is mine. I own it, including you too princess, I OWN you!"

Why does that sound sexy? Even though it's meant to be an insult, it's making me want to jump him and maybe let our tongues wrestle each other. He's a good kisser he'll probably win. I'm quickly taken out of my little fantasy, how I got here in the midst of this turmoil beats me. St Jude, I hope you're praying for me fam.

"Too bad I don't have space for drug addicts and junkies in my life so you're out missy", he says. I feel tears building in my eyes. Douchebag! Was Elik always so spiteful and vindictive?

"It must be nice being you Dr Fierce! Just have Elik put you up on that pedestal and bust his ass for you, working long hours! Then having him come home to you and try to spend as much time with you? Then have him run around doing everything and afraid to break precious little you. What does Elik get in return? Your disrespect? Your uncalled for attitude? Well, reality check your highness, that ends right now! Everything here is mine! Look around".

I'm trying to grasp the meaning and reasoning behind everything he's saying as tears roll down my cheeks. He looks at me unmoved and shakes his head. Since when do I cry and he doesn't apologise and hold me?

He motions to grab me by the arm but I don't want those hands on me so I move away. He won't have it, so he forcefully grabs my arm again moving much faster than me this time. The grip is tight and unforgiving, I'm sure it will leave a bruise. Then he proceeds to push me out the door. I hear the door shut behind me and lock. I don't remember the last time he shouted at me!

I'm tempted to kick and scream maybe wail as well, but I'm dressed too good for that kind of drama. The gate slides wide open and I walk out. I stand to watch as it closes and the truth in Elik's words sinks in and I realise I have nothing! I have my phone and his bank card, I can at least find comfort in that, it should suffice for now. Gosh it's on 20%. I really should

learn to keep my phone charged! I order an Uber. The worst feeling in the whole world. He actually threw me out and didn't look remorseful or anything! I'm not even sure how I'm feeling right now.

I really deserve this hot chocolate and this double chocolate fondant to appease my soul. I always loved Sevruga. I might as well check into the One&Only! Let's see how he feels footing a R14k per night bill! An hour later I've calmed down. The waitress brings the bill and it's only R120. She looks very nice so I tip her handsomely. I add a R500 tip. Not my money!

"What do you mean card declined?" I look up at her. "Try again". This card never declines. Something must be wrong with their speed point not the card! She tries the again and again and it declines. You mean to tell me within this hour, Elik blocked his card? I don't even have mine. It's fine. He thinks he's clever? I'm clever too. Internet banking! Why can't I access my mobile banking? What happened to my Banking app? I swear it just disappeared right in front of my eyes! I can't even reinstall because my Playstore is broken! What's going on with this phone today! This is bad. I don't have money! And now I owe R620. How will I check into a hotel? Flip! Lumka! He will help. Why is my battery at 5% now! That doesn't make sense. It was on 20%! Bad bad.

"Bhud Lumka".

"What do you want Fierce?" Ok that's a bit off but whatever.

"I need a favour. Can you send me money, as in right now? R10 000? My cards are not working".

This waitress is still standing here.

"Sorry, I can't help you. I'm boarding my flight to Zambia right now!" he hangs up. I'm left staring at my phone with my mouth open. Since when is Lumka this cold? My battery is at 2%. Why is it draining so fast? I need to make it snappy. I call Kofi. I don't think he can send me money fast enough but I'm getting desperate here. He's in a very noisy place and keeps saying "Can you hear me?" Just great! Shit just got real. Bunke. I'm just opening my contacts list when my phone dies. Wow. It never rains but it pours for sure! What am I supposed to do now?

Only Elik can save me right now. But he doesn't want me anymore.

"Can I speak to your manager please", I say to the waitress and she says cool. This is embarrassing! I tell him my story and that I don't know why my card is declining because I have money, a lot of money in there. He says no, he knows my type. Wanting to dine fancy then twisting a sob story to

get out of paying. He's so rude!

He says he can either call the police or I can come and wash a load of plates at the back. I'll do the plates alright or might just break them all. My poor nails have to deal with detergent. I ask for gloves and they laugh at me. And the other people here at the back are laughing at me for looking so expensive while I can't afford mere dessert! People are such bullies! The plates won't stop coming and they keep shouting at me to hurry up. I feel a sadness deep inside me. When I'm done I'm allowed to leave. I was doing dishes for over two hours! That was thoroughly embarrassing! My phone is off still so there's no hope of an Uber. This corset is making my stomach hurt but I can't do anything about it right now. I walk. I leave Waterfront behind and walk towards Green point. The sun is going down and I just keep walking. My feet are killing me now so I take off the heels and walk. Oh, great there's a bench facing the seaside. I sit there listening to the ocean and wiggling my toes to bring blood back to them.

Where am I going to sleep? I can't sleep outside! Can I? It's getting dark fast and still no plan. I'm scared of darkness but I'm sure I'll sleep outside today. How I'll make it through the night I don't know. The tears won't stop. I guess this is how I lose weight! I cry it away! I'm down 5 kgs this week alone! Or is it because the baby is gone plus my depression? Sitting on the bench, alone with my thoughts and washing my face with my tears, I miss Elik so much. He didn't deserve my behaviour. He is a godsend and took care of me even when I was being impossible. I love him with every inch of my soul. My little heart doesn't want to beat without him. I need to forget Elik and look inside myself, if there's anything left in there.

I'm stuck between hope and despair. Hope that I can get myself together and maybe Elik can have me back and maybe I can be a better girlfriend/fiancé. Despair because the chances of that happening appear very slim. The only thing giving me hope right now is this ring on my finger. He asked me to marry him and I said yes. So maybe that promise still stands. I promise I'll stop my nonsense. As I sit here I look at myself. Who's this girl I've become? If 18-year-old me could see me right now what would she say? She would be so disappointed. She was ambitious, had big dreams, wanted to start her own company, wanted her PhD as soon as possible and was willing to work for it. She wanted big things and was a role model. She promised never to depend on a man for anything. 26-year-old me is here judging slay queens and blessees when I dress just like them

and probably think like them now. What happened to ambitious me? Oh I remember! I fell in love and that came with money and all my dreams died because everything I'd dreamed of buying Elik gave it to me.

He said everything is his! That stung because for the longest I've been thinking it's my house, my car and even the twins were mine. I forgot to pursue my own dreams. How can I not have learnt from Komla? Damn you Lemon! What kind of a man snitches like that! He could have just said no! And Elik overreacted! Or did he? I thought me giving him bomb sex was enough. I thought me being a Doctor-to-be set me far apart from all the other girls and made me a goddess that he would worship endlessly. I thought my body was that one temple he would want to do his morning devotions in and pull all night vigils on for eternity! I thought I was the best he ever had.

I got too comfortable. long the way I forgot the little things like respect. Like that he too was human. Like the child I lost was not mine but ours. I thought since I'd taken care of him so many times in the past, he had to take care of me. It seemed only fair. And he didn't seem to have a problem with it. Who am I? I can't cry now. No. I should chastise myself harshly and tell myself the truth. I was going to hurt the twins I claim to love. I was tearing down the man I claim to love. I was breaking myself apart. I need to go back to 18-year-old me. I'm 8 years too late but there might still be hope. His words were harsh but they woke me up. I can almost see Komla laughing at me right now. I don't remember how not having money feels like. I don't even have R30 so I can take a taxi to Bellville tomorrow morning and ask Bunke to help me. It's cool, I'm sure I can spin a story about being robbed and have people giving me spare change. Gosh I'm going to be a beggar now. What if I'm seen by someone I know? I want to be strong. I want Fierce back and I'll crawl towards her if I have to. I want Elik though. I want to feel his arms around me, feel him breathing down my neck and hear that voice telling me 'It's gonna be alright'. I miss him and I'm so sorry.

I curl up on the bench and rest my head on my arm. My stomach hurts and my breasts are on fire. I thought I was healed! I take off the corset and only wear the jacket. Wearing something as tight as a corset was very stupid of me. Elik's point made. Apart from academics, I have no clue! I'm freezing and I won't be shocked if I wake up a dead block of ice tomorrow. Had I known I'd end up here, I'll have chosen a whole different outfit! I

pray for sleep but I know I'm not going to get any. What with cars hooting on that side and the ocean raging this side.

"I'm sorry Elik", is all I wish I could say.

Is Elik thinking about me perhaps or is he warming up another girl's body right now?

Seven

I can't sleep. Too many external and internal factors are collaborating against me and plotting my demise. Inside, it's just the silent pain and the harsh reality check. Outside, it's the scary sound of the ocean waves, the freezing breeze, the noise of music coming from bars that other side of the road and the hard bench beneath my body. This bench has that metal badge like thing stuck on it written '*Dedicated to Julia Smith, 1960 - 2016*'. I wonder what this means. Like she loved this bench so much they gave it to her when she died? Or they cremated her when she died and scattered her ashes all over this bench? Or when she died they mixed her ashes with wood and made a bench? Like what does this mean? For all I know right now I'm chilling with a 56 year old ghost! All I'm curious about is how she was when she was alive. If she was a serial killer or stuff like that, I need to know so I can change benches you know.

To think I once owned a penthouse in this side of town. Or I thought I owned it at least. That thought alone is killing me! I think I'll just lie here and die. Dying sounds like a good idea right now. I could go and be with my lost children. But before I die it might be a good idea for me to decide what I believe happens after death. It just makes sense. Right now I believe in reincarnation and I don't want to come back a rat or a cockroach or a donkey, goodness no! I want to come back as a small white dog owned by a rich mistress in Sandton, wearing pink ribbons and carried in handbags. In my past life, I'm convinced I was a jellyfish, because they don't have as much as a single brain cell! Dumb as hell and incapable of thinking. Sounds too familiar.

I also believe in heaven and hell. And if the Catholic Church has taught me anything it's that St. Michael the archangel is the patron of death. Can I like invoke him and ask him a couple of questions about the afterlife? Or once you call him it's life-over for you? Let me rather not call him. Can't take chances. I also believe in ancestors. Like you die and you join those gone before you. I don't quite get it though. Like who exactly qualifies to be an ancestor? Everyone who dies or there's a criteria? It can't be everyone though right because that means my children that died are now ancestors. That doesn't sound right at all. And that would mean when my mother dies she will become an ancestor and will be expected to look out for me and my

future children! I wonder how that will go! Or maybe hating someone stops the moment you die? This ancestor-land is confusing.

I also believe in that whole dust to dust, ashes to ashes, no afterlife theory. You die, you die. Game over. You just cease to exist and your body becomes manure and that's it. I believe in too many things so until I make up my mind I can't die. I am so screwed it's not even funny. I feel like laughing at myself. This can't be me? Me, I'm a princess and Elik worships the ground I walk on. Isn't that just the mentality that got me kicked out in the first place! I know I should be upset at him but all selfishness aside, I made him do it. I pushed him to his limits. I behaved like a two year old. I can't believe I really wanted drugs! My head needs to be checked, a wire is loose up there.

I miss Elik so much though. It's unnatural. I'm not mad at him at all, if anything, I'm mad at this stupid stupid girl that lives inside me! No matter where my thoughts go they keep returning to Elik! My fine dark prince. I want to apologise. I want to ask for another chance. I want to be the girl he deserves. I want us to be the power couple not this Superman-Victim relationship we are having right now.

How did I even get there? I don't remember. I think I blame it on poverty! I grew up with nothing so when all this money fell on me I didn't know what to do with it. It seemed endless, I could swipe and swipe and swipe and the bank account never dried! And since I grew up poor, all I wanted was to be superwoman and make money one day and take care of everyone. But now I had the money so I lost my purpose! Damn you poverty! You messed up my head and now I'm back to you!

Elik did me rough though tjo! The bastard left me homeless, carless, moneyless, clothesless. Kanjalo nje! I always knew he was savage but I never thought I'd also be on the receiving end one day. I kinda thought I was super special to him and funny enough I still think so. I laughed at Komla when Elik left her with nothing but I bet she's having the last laugh now. I could steal Peter and Paul and ask him for ransom. Except Elik will kill me and besides I need money to get to them, something which is a scarce commodity in Fierceville right now. He's such a dashing handsome, arrogant, selfish, gorgeous fool! But despite all that, I keep seeing his body crushing down on me in my head. I need help.

It's all good. I'll be just fine. I'll make a plan. I thought I said I wanted to die and dead Man make no plans! As always, I don't know what I want.

Can't even make a simple decision like to live or not to live! Make up your mind Fierce! Get it together! Like where am I going to start rebuilding myself? I'm at zero! Actually I'm at the minus side of the number line. And I have zero money. I did a 180 degrees without warning. I honestly didn't see this one coming, I must say. I need to pick myself up, and hurt as it may, accept that my son is gone and I need to grieve like I've got some sense not like a mad woman. Geez I'm 26! Soon to be 27! 30 is coming for me fast and I need to get it together. Sigh.

How the mighty have fallen! From hero to zero. From Newlands to a park. From Jeep Grand Cherokee to Two Feet. From Egyptian cotton to old wooden bench. From Persian rugs to grass. Fallen. Head first.

I wonder what time it is! I can't stay lying down because my thoughts always seem to intensify this way. And now I'm thinking of Elik junior and I can feel my brain preparing to go crazy. I sit up and bring my knees to my chest, then hug my legs with my arms to keep the cold out. And since I have no phone to play music from, I'll sing a song to calm myself. Akon always has my back and he always has a song for my every situation and I'm sure if he knew I existed, he would fly down here on a private jet and take me to Senegal with him so we can light up Africa together. Let's see how Elik would like that! Discord or not, it's not like I'm singing to anyone!

The first song that jumps into my mind is *Mandela by Akon* . He sings about missing Mandela but I sing about missing Elik and every word fits my situation and my life like a glove. I was born and raised in shackles and Elik gave me my freedom and he always lifted me up when I was down, he protected my soul, he illuminated my dark days, he blessed me. All that and more he did with a warm arm around me. And for that reason, I will never surrender and I will never give up on us and I will fight and fight and fight until I can't no more, then I'll fight some more. Because we deserve to be together! Am I fooling myself again? As Akon sang this as a tribute to Nelson Mandela, I sing it as a tribute to my heartbeat, Elik. So with my non-angelic voice I close my eyes and start singing.

You know when you sing alone you sometimes start thinking you can sing. I guess that's how some people end up embarrassing themselves on Idols and X-Factor! I personally think I killed that song! I even hit the high notes with ease. Damn I can sing! I should ask Father Francis about joining the church choir. Who am I kidding! I'm still stunned by my singing

capabilities when my peace is disturbed. A man in black sits next to me. He just came from nowhere! I didn't even see him or hear him approach. He gave me such a fright! I fall off the bench in my attempt to run away. My life is becoming a movie stru! I want to scream because I'm sure this person had no good intentions. A person in all black at night. Can't be good at all. He sits on the bench and I'm on the ground!

"You butchered those lyrics ma! It doesn't say "These whips on my back represent what I CAN DO", it's "These whips on my back represent what I ENDURED".

It takes me a minute. I can't even see clearly. My poor eyes have been crying.

"Hey. I didn't mean to scare you... And you really miss Mandela that much?" he laughs beautifully.

My goodness. Did I really sing so well the angels kidnapped me to heaven so I can join the cherubims and seraphims? But why is this one wearing all black then? The dress code for heaven is all white, right? So what's this all blackness here? Shit! Maybe I'm in hell. I have to run. They do say the devil was like singer of the year in heaven at some point before he started acting up and got kicked out. Maybe he recruited me for his choir down in the pits of sulphur and fire. I don't want that! I don't like heat that much. Or maybe it's Mandela himself. Like he misunderstood my sing and thought I was calling out for him? Or it's that Julia woman who owns this bench? But wait, I know that voice! I hallucinate well enough without drugs I don't even know what I wanted them for!

"Let's go home baby". Elik!

"Elik?" I half say, half ask.

"In the flesh". Am I dreaming? Am I dead? I am in half; one wants to scream out in joy and another wants to say a prayer that whatever reason he is here, I get to sleep on a bed today not this hard bench. I'm sure he must have noticed the internal conflict in me and sought to shed some light.

"Let's go home baby. Come", he says and offers me a hand. I take his hand, barely conscious of the action I'm taking. It hits me as I stumble to my feet, how ridiculous I must have looked on the ground! And why is this body of mine betraying me? Shouldn't I probably maybe be upset with him? Why am I like this mara? Ok we will solve this mystery of why I'm like this on another day. For now, I'm relieved. I'm ecstatic. I'm happy and most of all hopeful. Let's be honest, this was my fault. I can be forgiven if I

show how sorry I am. Heee, I told a full grown man to fuck off in his own house! Such disrespect! I got too comfortable and overstepped. I'm just thankful he's here though, somewhere underneath the monster I saw today, lies the love of my life.

Him throwing me out was a blessing in disguise. It gave me the opportunity to re-evaluate my thoughts and make sound decisions.

"How am I supposed to see you in the dark though when you're wearing black? You blend perfectly with the night!". And I'm not kidding. He laughs. Yes, I still have my 'laughing in difficult and unfunny situations' and jokes about his blackness never get old.

He pulls me into his arms, his embrace is warm, goodness do I need warmth! His heart is beating fast, he takes a deep breath in and then out. He doesn't say anything but just holds me. I don't hug back. I just stand like a statue. He threw me out! Why would I hug him? I want to laugh though and give him a handshake. He really got me shame!

"Let's go home", he takes my hand. I grab my corset on the bench. He begins to walk us towards the road but his steps are wider than mine and my feet hurt and I'm trying to keep up so it seems like I'm limping behind him. I'm kinda barefoot here! But I don't mind because he's taking us home. Home, the thought feels so good. He notices my limp but doesn't say anything. We stop at a once red Toyota Tazz that has obviously seen better days. The guy rolls down the window. Another face that looks like it should be in prison! Elik hands him an envelope, shakes his hand and says, "Thanks. Got her. Tell Lemon I'll call him".

The guy drives off and Elik goes down to a squat. I'm confused at what is happening and before I ask he says, "Are you going to hop on or are you going to stand there and look at me like the rest of these people?".

A piggy back? Hell yeah, you should have said so though Mr grumpy pants! I get on his back, I need not be told twice.

"I noticed you limping earlier, did you get hurt? We can call the doctor to come over and check you out".

"No, a doctor is not necessary, my feet hurt and I couldn't keep up with your long legs that's all".

Shucks! I forgot my heels under that bench! Whatever! Someone lucky will find them. He laughs. This is good, being on his back like this, I like it. It's like old times. He better not call me fat or heavy or nonsense like that! I'm barely 60 kgs!

When we get to his car, he opens the door for me. Such a gentleman! He turns the heat on and I say a silent 'thank you'. I'm freezing, I miss his back already. He drives in silence and we make it home. It looks clean! Lizzy did a good job cleaning after me as always. He looks too chilled for my liking, like I just left and now I'm back. Nothing major.

"Come let's clean you up", he says. I just stand there. He leads me to the bedroom and helps me out of my clothes and he gets out of his. Why is he so quiet? I'm not going to be the first to speak! We get into the shower and I'm still not doing anything. He washes me. I always love it when he bathes me. He does that a lot when I'm distressed and I refuse to bath or do anything for that matter. It always makes me feel so loved and taken care of.

"Which T-shirt of mine are you stealing today?" I smile a little. I couldn't help it. He's so adorable. He hands me my tiny pyjama shorts and that T-shirt he said I could have in the Karoo.

It's past 10 pm and I'm sure the kids are sleeping. I just want to kiss them goodnight, not mine as they may be. He stands by the door and watches me kissing them and covering them up and telling them I love them no matter WHO says what. I hope he gets my point!

"You hungry? I can't dish up for you because we don't have any plates left. Someone broke them all!" I just look at him. Mxm! He's not funny. I'm not hungry though and if I was I know where the food is! He makes me a hot water bottle. So chilled! This man of mine! You'd swear nothing happened! He sits on the couch and makes me snuggle in between his legs with my back leaning on him.

"Let's get this T-shirt off you so I can hold this bottle to your stomach".

I don't resist. I don't know what he ever did to me but I just love him and I'm putty in his hands. Maybe he was right when he said he owns me. We sit there in silence under a fleece blanket, with the back of my head on his neck, his breath on my neck, his one hand on the water bottle on my stomach and his other hand cupping my boob. I'm back home.

"Cybertron".

"Cybertron", I agree.

"Let's start by setting some things straight baby girl. I love you more than anything and what happened in the afternoon, that doesn't mean I don't love you. It doesn't change anything at all".

"There could be many reasons to justify the way I acted today, even

though some of the stuff I said was true, I don't think you deserved to have been told that way". I just stay quiet.

"I love you Fierce. More than anything and this afternoon, that should never have happened", he squeezes my boob. Like seriously? That's how he says sorry? By molesting me? I'll push that aside though for now.

"I love you too. More than anything". And that's the honest truth!

He sighs, with relief I think and kisses my neck.

"Baby you, the twins and our future babies are the reason I work so hard. I have no right to claim all of this because you are my drive. I don't see myself having most of it if I didn't have you, the one person that's always believed in me". He takes a deep breath.

I don't speak, I want to listen, so I wait for him to go on.

"I got scared and I projected it on you, all my inadequacies were screaming at me, I thought I was being here for you but hearing that you wanted drugs made me feel not good enough, like I wasn't enough for you, so I did what most guys do, deflected and highlighted your weaknesses. I was a coward Fierce, it's a shame I have to live with, and I have the rest of my life to atone for it, if you will let me".

Is this man good or what? How does one say no to such? I want to scream 'I love you' but I hold myself back.

"You forgive me?" I stay quiet.

"Please Sweet Thing? Should I beg? Get on my knees?"

"Yes", I say under my breath. I'm thinking he won't do it! He shifts me out of the way and straightens me to sit looking forward and he kneels in front of me. He actually got on his knees. He's so precious.

"Let's talk baby", he takes my hands. At that level he looks like he's talking to my boobs cause him and them are just staring at each other.

"Ummm. Aaa. What was I saying again? Don't you want to umm, put this jacket, I mean this T-shirt back on, umm, I kind of, I can't focus".

I laugh this time. Nope no T-shirt! That's his punishment. He clears his throat and focuses on looking into my eyes.

"Alright, baby I just want you to listen. I know I said what I said but I was bluffing. Whatever is in your name here is yours. I gave it to you and so it's yours! I swear I would never take it from you".

I raise an eyebrow and my look says 'but you did!'

"I swear. We can call Clive (his lawyer) right now and he will tell you. I can't ever take away anything that's in your name baby. In fact half of

everything I own is yours. It's ours". He looks so desperate to be believed with those eyes of his.

"I know I was harsh about this earlier and it could have been said better but baby I just, I need my girl back man. I need that girl full of life and love. I need that ambitious girl of mine. We've lost Junior and I was losing you at an alarming rate. Do you know how scary that was? I want my girl back". I look down. I know he's right. I want that girl back too.

"And come on. You've been so lazy baby and you haven't done much for yourself lately", he says. *Lazy?* Unfortunately for me he doesn't see anything wrong with that statement.

"And I know you five years from now you going to look back and blame me for standing in the way of your dreams and for stopping you from being the amazing woman you were always meant to be", he looks at me. Sometimes I think he blinks like that on purpose just so I can see those hypnotising lashes of his! I'm listening.

"I know you want to be a professor one day. Your dream was always to get that professorship at a younger age than I did. But at the rate you are going you will never accomplish that. It will be miracle if you even become a professor at all! Baby, I didn't just wake up a professor and I didn't just miraculously have millions of Rands in my name! I worked baby girl, hard! I set my goal when I started my Masters and I followed through. I got that professorship because I deserved it. I university hopped, I had over 30 publications in accredited journals, I put in teaching hours, I supervised Masters and PhD students, I presented at numerous conferences, I have patents in my name, I have collaborations with renowned researchers, I did my hours of community service. I did everything. Remember how long I'd stay up in the office back then?"

I nod. I remember. I also remember that those long days of his usually ended up with me on his desk with my dress up. I was his warm down. Saying all that just made him look sexy as hell right now! His brain is so attractive! I've even forgotten I was sleeping on a bench not so long ago. I'm just looking at him and thinking of things I shouldn't be thinking of.

"You need that baby. You need to make your mark and I know you can do it. You one hell of a smart engineer!" I laugh a little. Smart?

"But you said I'm a dumb engineer", I remind him and look down.

"No man. You know that's not true. I didn't mean it that way. Well, you doing Chemical and one could argue that it's technically the easiest

engineering field but that doesn't make you any less of an engineer". Wow! There's the man I know. Dissing me with a smile on his face!

"On a serious note baby. When was the last time you went to a conference? Published anything? Built a prototype? Did anything to progress your research? You have to work hard. Tell me what I can do to give you back that boost you had when we first met? I want you to be the best you can be. And whatever you need for that to happen just tell me and I'll hook you up. You need funding? I know someone high up in NRF. You need a collaboration? All I have to do is send an email to a few Profs. You want to publish and so need time in the lab? Go. Isn't that why we got a helper to stay with the kids? We can get another one if you want. You want to start your own company? Bring me a business proposal and I'll help you. I'll fund you even. You want to consult with Lumka and I? Just say the word. Whatever you need, you know I'll do it for you. You just need to want it and to tell me what it is and I'll make it happen for you". He looks so desperate on my behalf. So serious I know he means it.

I've always known he can do all that for me but I got lazy and got carried away with going to spas and shopping in Cavendish Square. A tear falls out of my eye and he pulls me towards him. I think he just wants my boobs in his face and not necessarily a hug! I'm not crying. I'm just touched. I have it good, don't I? How many people have it so easy in life? I need to stop being ungrateful!

"You said you own everything here and you even own me!"

"Well, technically that's true, isn't it? I kind of bought everything".

I push him back to look at him.

"No baby wait. I'm kidding! Everything that's yours is yours. And when you finally decide to marry me we'll share everything. On that note. When are you marrying me?" Gosh! I can't take him serious.

"Forget marrying you. You said you own me!"

"I do, don't I?" he bites his lip in that 'I wanna smash that' type of way.

"If you were not sick right now, I'd show you exactly how I OWN you!"

I don't know why I'm smiling like an idiot right now. I get back to seriousness.

"But when you said Peter and Paul are not mine. That hurt deeply. You know I've been struggling with the loss of Junior so for you to say that". He looks down and squeezes my hands.

"I was out of line there. You've done a lot for them and I had no right.

I'm truly sorry for that. And I know how hard this has been on you. I just need us to face it together and do it in a sensible manner. We have kids in the house baby, some things we just can't tolerate. I'm sorry I said that to you. I'm sorry for everything I said. I promise I didn't mean it. I was so angry".

"I'm sorry too. For the way I've been acting lately and for disrespecting you".

"It's ok baby. As long as we have each other", he says and gives me another boob to face hug. So they do make perfect man after all! Because this for me is perfection.

"I want to try for another baby. Not now though and maybe not anytime soon. But one day when I've healed from this".

"You know I'd love that more than anything. We will get over this, together. We always get over things, together. For now let's get you that implant you want and we take a break alright? Then one day when we're both ready we will make a beautiful baby".

I smile a little. More like blush. He buries his face in my chest. I push his face away. We are on Cybertron mode here! He needs to focus!

"So how did you find me?"

"Promise not to be mad at me", he says. He doesn't tell until I promise.

"I had you tailed and that smart home app gave me your location earlier. Oh and I kind of hacked your phone".

"You hacked my phone? How?". He laughs!

"Tell me. How? When I tried to hack your phone last time, you had a security system up and I couldn't get through". I quickly cover my mouth. That was never supposed to come out. Things like hacking are kind of deal breakers. No one likes being hacked and it breaks trust. Thankfully he laughs. Phew! Might have found myself back on a bench!

"So you tried to hack my phone? Which software did you use?"

"You first! How did you hack me?" I should have known! It was obvious that someone was manipulating my phone!

"I didn't hack it hack it per se. I kind of planted a real time cloning system on your phone that time I migrated your data. I'm sorry".

He doesn't look sorry though. Wow! He needs to show me how to do that! That's some mad skills there! I know it's just wrong but come on you gotta admit it's impressive!

"And you cupcake? How did you fail to hack my phone?" I'm not an

expert in these things. I was just trying but I'm not that good. I use the simplest softwares. I started doing these kinds of things to impress him vele.

“Well. I used Midnight Raid but when I pushed the response invoked, the data I received wouldn't translate your phone's IMEI. Your security was too tight”. He looks impressed and has that smug look on his face.

“I'm proud of you! You are learning! But that would never work on my phone. You can't bypass my firewall babe. I kind of had to get the best security system for my devices. I have sensitive information on my phone you know, like those pictures I took of you that time. Imagine if those found themselves on the internet!”

I refuse to imagine such horror. I looked good though, if I do say so myself, so it will be horror but a beautiful horror. I know by sensitive he means his business info and things like what he discusses with the likes of Lemon! My nudes are just secondary.

“Why did you need to hack me though? You know my passwords”.

“Where's the fun in accessing someone's phone using a password?” I raise an eyebrow. He knows I've got a point.

“Wait a second! You drained my battery didn't you!” Flip I'm so impressed right now I can't even be upset! This sly fox! I love his brain!

“Yup”, he says. No shame at all!

“Wow! Will you teach me?”

“If you ask nicely I can teach you a lot of things”, he kisses my boobs.

I push him away. He needs to focus!

We are a total fuckery. The both of us. We are so lost and are beyond saving. We just fought like we were done this afternoon. I got kicked out and cut off. And now we confessed to invading each other's privacy, or failure thereof on my part, and we are impressed! We are not mad about that! How messed up.

“I saw you were at Sevruga. So how did that go?” he laughs! He actually laughs! This idiot of mine. I laugh too but it's too soon though. Why is he laughing at me? So soon nogal!

“Dude! You have no idea! I washed like 500 plates in there!” I say and we laugh. Good times.

“Can I come sit now? Am I forgiven?”

“I love you, you know that?” I hold the stare and I can't resist kissing him. I meant to kiss him but he's doing the kissing now. He makes me lie

down on the couch and is on top of me, careful not to crush my poor stomach. Gosh love is something else. I'm just moaning softly in his mouth and hoping those kids stay asleep. He's so hard in those sweatpants and busy poking my thigh. I'm not feeling sorry for him. It's his punishment!

"I love you", he keeps saying. He stops and holds the back of my neck with his hand and looks at me.

"Please marry me already. Please baby. I can't wait any longer. Please".

"Fine, I promise. I'll think of a date and I'll tell you soon. I can't wait to marry you too".

Weddings are not my thing though and I've been avoiding thinking about it. Let's just focus on kissing and leave big things like weddings alone. Who knew you could cross the finish line just by someone kissing you and loving your boobs. Well I knew but it's always good to be reminded. He has to put his hand on my mouth when I want to scream out his name.

"We probably must go to sleep now. You need to be up early so you can pack. We going to Victoria Falls tomorrow", he says.

I sit up. What now? He thinks because he just finished pleasuring my flesh, I will accept whatever he says!

"We both need it baby. You are a mess and I can't focus, so let's do what we know best. Let's travel!"

That's not what we do best though. He could have asked me you know!

"Come on. We'll do a two week road trip from here to Vic Falls. We'll stop in Joburg first and spend a night, then on to Botswana and spend two nights, then to Zimbabwe and spend two nights at your aunt's. I already called her and she can't wait to see Ghana man, whoever that is!"

He went and made all these plans all by himself! When? When I was on a bench out in the cold? Some things never change! At least I'll get to see Lumka in Joburg so I can ask him why he was so mean to me. I just wanted R10 000 nothing much! I know why he was mean but I know his response will be classic so I'll ask anyway.

"Are the kids coming?"

"No. You'll be ready for me in a few days so how am I supposed to get all up in you and OWN you with those two around? They are staying!"

"But...", I start.

"No babe. I need us to take time out alone you know and reconnect you know. Just the two of us. No phones. No Social media. Nothing. Just us".

I'm happy. No complaints. I'll miss Facebook though. But well I'm happy. And I'm planning and forgetting my minor (major) fight with Elik. I'm already thinking up everything I want to do in Vic Falls and what I'll wear.

"The doctor didn't say your mouth is also out of service though, did he? Don't you wanna maybe you know, help me over here".

"If you beg me nicely", I giggle.

He begs and asks and begs and pleads and promises all sorts of heavens on earth if I do. How can I say no?

It's now me on my knees, bowing down and giving head like I'm under evaluation. Only I would blow a man who kicked me out hours ago! Only me would forgive and forget that easily. That part of me I love. I didn't even shout at him! I'm sure the entire female race is mad at me right now for misrepresenting. But it is what it is. I'm not one of those women who don't need a man. I need a man. This one in my mouth right now! I need him. Some of us have to be stupid so the clever ones can shine.

And when I almost gag and he says something sweet, I want to marry him already. That's right, he may think he owns me but right now I own him!

Eight

I'm now used to the no-planning part of Elik. He tells you to up and leave and you do just that. It's been like that from the beginning. I mean I used to wake up to a flight ticket on my phone and I had to run around like a headless chicken getting myself ready for Joburg. I'd complain and complain but I would board that flight! For this road trip, I didn't even complain. I mean, a car seat feels so much better than a cold bench. From Cape Town we drove past the no girls-allowed cabin in the Karoo then next day we drove on to Joburg where Lumka was waiting for us. Lumka! He is one of the most charming beings walking! You can't hate him! You can try but you'll fail! He has that smile when he says 'sorry' that you just can't resist.

All I did was look at him and he started explaining. "You know I was going to send you the money but Elik threatened to kill me if I helped you in anyway". Elik doesn't kill people! And Lumka, Elik would never do anything to him. Sometimes I think if it came down to me and Lumka, he would pick Lumka. They have that thing that I admire and wish I had with some girl. He's just like Elik in so many ways. I get why they are BFFs. They can pull on that innocent face that you can't help but forgive.

"I can send you that 10 grand right now", he said.

He's an idiot. I had to give him a big hug to let him know we are cool and decline his offer.

Then the weirdest thing happened. I'm still struggling to wrap my head around it. Let me back up a bit. To celebrate our home leaving, Elik, Lumka, Thando and I decided to turn up at home. We had the likes of Clive and a few other Elik's people come by. It went great, no hassles just fun. Elik was with his friends and me because I like things I found Lumka so I can ask about Thando. I always have to be strategic so it doesn't come out as if I'm gossiping but more like I'm concerned. Ok so I find Lumka to pry but I don't even get the chance to ask anything because from the time we get past our hellos he takes control of the conversation!

"So you really want to marry Elik?" he says, putting his beer down and looking at me.

"How could you even ask!"

"Just making sure".

“Why though Fierce?”

“Why what?” I’m legit confused.

“Why would you want to marry him? You know that putting a ring on his finger won’t magically stop him from sleeping around, ne?”

I stop for a second and look at this man. He has a serious face on so I’m confused. What is this?

“What exactly are you saying bhudi? Is there something I need to know?”

“No. Nothing you don’t know yet. I’m just saying Elik is going to keep breaking your heart and he’s going to keep fucking around. Like how are you so ok with that?”

I’m lost. Why would Lumka say things like this to me. Dear universe, help me understand.

“Bhudi, I appreciate your concern but I know Elik and it’s him I want”.

He looks at me like I’ve lost my senses then relaxes his face with a satisfied look on his face. Was this a test?

“Wow. I need that kind of loyalty in my life you know”.

“One day you’ll find someone who will be that to you. You just need to keep it zipped up nawe for a while”.

I’m still not done processing what he just asked me.

“I hope so. But I still think Elik doesn’t deserve you”.

That statement coming from him is worrying. I look at him with ‘explain!’ eyes.

“Fierce. You are gorgeous and you love hard. Anyone looking at you around Elik can just tell that you are smitten. The guy even wanted to make you a second wife and you agreed to that. You chose him over your own family even. He cheated on you numerous times and even got that Mbali chick pregnant. And you stayed!”

The weed he was smoking today is too strong. I told them not to smoke skunk but get a cleaner grade but they didn’t listen. Look what it has done to Lumka’s head now. But wait, what’s that about Mbali?

“Mbali is pregnant?” I can’t even hide the wave of pain that swept through me.

“Well, she had an abortion but still”. My eyes are blinking so fast right now I’m sure they are about to roll out of the sockets.

“What? When?” Can he talk fast please, I need these details as soon as yesterday!

“I thought you knew. Elik tells you everything, right?”

Why is Lumka doing this to me though. And why didn't Elik tell me this? This trip to Victoria Falls is not happening.

“You realise if you didn't tell me this I would've never known, right? I was having a great time. Why did you have to go and spoil it? Why did you tell me this?”

“Ey, sorry. I thought you knew!” I don't think he looks sorry.

I get up and leave. I need to find that man-whore of mine! I'm going to kill someone today. He's with Clive talking work! Seriously? At a party?

“Hi Clive. Can I borrow my man for a second? Please”, I say with a plastic smile.

“One moment baby. I need to finish this talk real quick. Can I find you when I'm done?”

“Cool. I'll be by the pool house”. I need to collect my thoughts and calm my breath before I speak to him. He only shows up some 25 minutes later!

“What's up?” he playfully pulls my hair.

“When were you going to tell me?”

I. Will. Not. Get. Angry. Actually, I think I'm going to faint.

“Tell you what my angel?” He sits on the bench and pulls me onto his lap. Gosh he's so irresistible. I hate him.

“Promise not to lie!” He nods.

“Mbali and her abortion. When did you get her pregnant? When did this happen? Everything. Spill!”

My heart is beating hard because what if he says last month? I don't know how I'll proceed.

“What? Where's that coming from?”

“It doesn't matter where it's coming from. All that matters is that it's here now! So, speak Elikplim!” I'm not joking here.

“Baby, that was that time you found us at the hotel and you threw her out. Remember? We met because she claimed to be pregnant and said she had an abortion and was going to tell Komla and all that shit. Who told you this? Lumka? Thando? Who?”

I stay quiet. Why then did Lumka tell me this if it was back back then? Maybe he's drunk? Or stupid high as I suspect?

“So you like had raw sex with her?” I always thought he protected. That made me sleep better at night.

“No. I used a condom. That bitch was lying!”

“No one gets pregnant through a condom Elikplim. Come on”.

“She was lying baby”.

“Did the condom break or something?” I can’t believe I’m here with my man, talking about him and another girl. But I need the truth.

“Look at me Fierce”, he cups my cheeks to make my face face him.

“I don’t know where you got this from but this is what happened. I used a condom with Mbali. She was never pregnant. She lied about everything. That’s the truth”. And of course, I believe him. The trip is back on. Yea, I’m that easy.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. You know I’ve been trying with you baby”.

He really has been trying shame. I won’t dispute that.

“You have nothing to worry about. I’m all yours and I’m never going anywhere. You’re my girl. Anyway, who’s feeding you this nonsense?”

I leave my head on his neck and don’t respond. He pulls my head back so I look at him and brings his lips to mine. It’s like I’m kissing a bottle of Hennessy! He’s just confusing me with his lips but I don’t stop him. I’m enjoying this.

“Are we good?” he looks at me.

“I know you haven’t been sleeping around and I appreciate that. I wouldn’t make it through life without you”.

Such confessions are the reason why I get cheated on because he knows I’m not going anyway.

“Baby. I don’t care about all those girls you slept with in the past. All that matters to me now is what happens in the right now”.

He laughs and looks down. This Jucifer of mine! I put my hands back around his neck and rest my head on his shoulder.

“Elik”, Lumka’s voice disturbs us. I swing my neck backwards and look at him. He looks legit shocked to see me. I don’t know why. I smile and excuse them. Maybe Lumka can explain to Elik what he hoped to achieve by telling me that whole Mbali situation. But before I leave, I give Elik a long passionate kiss. The type you give a guy when you are undressed and have him on top of you. It’s just to let Lumka know that I truly love his friend no matter WHO says what!

“Get a room you two”, he says.

“No need. I’m leaving”, I get up and walk away. I can feel eyes boring into my back.

By 12 midnight it’s just the four of us left and Elik says he has to sleep

and because shame my poor baby has a long drive ahead of him. And he's been drinking so he needs to sleep it off and wake up de-alcoholised. It's like 2 am and I'm still up. I put on Elik's T-shirt with nothing else underneath and leave the bedroom. I'm pretty sure Thando and Lumka are sleeping now. I get to the kitchen and have a glass of water then when I turn around to go back to bed, there's Lumka. I swear he is staring! I pull down the T-shirt and apologise and ask what he's doing up so late. He says he was finishing up some work stuff in the living area when he heard the tap running so he came to check. His eyes never leave my body and I'm starting to feel uncomfortable. My cue to run back to bed. He's seen me in just a T-shirt before. Hell, he's seen me naked even, although I try as hard as I can to forget that.

"Hug?" he opens his arms. I find the request weird so I say no and tell him Elik is waiting for me and laugh my goodnight. I feel so naked! As I pass him to run back to bed, he unexpectedly grabs me by the waist and I find myself facing him. But now he's tall so when he bent down to hug me, my T-shirt went up. I'm looking up at him like was "What's up?" He lets me go and says goodnight. I straighten the T-shirt and walk quickly away. I'm traumatised and scared and everything all at once. I'm shook. He stank of alcohol so maybe he was drunk shame and won't remember a thing. But he wasn't drunk earlier and if he was doing work then he must have been sober enough. Or did he mistake me for Thando? But no, I'm sure he knows his girl. I don't think I liked the look in his eyes though. I'm sure I'm imagining things. It was just a hug and we hug all the time! It was nothing. I run back to bed and stay there breathing and feeling traumatised by the whole ordeal. What am I supposed to do now? Do I tell Elik or not? If I tell him, what exactly do I tell him? Now that's just dumb. I feel like waking Elik up and saying 'Your best friend hugged me!'. My imagination is too active.

I wake up later than everyone and by the time I drag my bum short clad self into the kitchen, they are already having breakfast.

"You shouldn't have woken up baby girl. I meant to bring you breakfast in bed in the hope that you'll thank me back in kind", Elik says. I blush. My personal person.

"You guys are like rabbits!" Lumka says and I turn to look at him. Nothing. Nothing on his face says anything about last night. I guess it was

just a hug then. He looks just the way he always does. Chilled and too good looking for his own good!

“Rabbits? I wish man. I'm not getting any still”, Elik says. I look at him like what the hell!

“What? It's true baby. I'm in starvation mode!” I can't help but laugh. It's hard to be mad at him really. Half the time I'm convinced he doesn't hear himself.

Breakfast ends and I ask Thando to give me a hand with checking if I packed everything. She's still with Lumka so might as well make friends with her. We go through my suitcase to see if I have enough clothes.

“What is this?” she asks.

“Give me that”, I grab it from her and throw it back in my suitcase.

“What is it?” she asks again.

“It's nothing!” I quickly change the subject. Me and her are not there yet. I won't explain my sex toys to her.

“So Fierce tell. Do you have a thing with Lumka?”

I drop the jeans I was folding and my heart races.

“What? Hell no! He's Elik's best friend. How could you even ask me that! Geez! He's like a brother to me. Eeewww!” I realise now that a simple no would have sounded less defensive. “Why?” I ask her.

“It's just, there's a day he was so drunk he kept asking me why I wasn't Fierce!” she says. I give an awkward laugh. This is so messed up! Lumka? He always says he wants a girl as loyal as me so I guess he was just asking her why she wasn't loyal.

“No man. Remember my name is a word! He probably was telling you to bring your A-game on and be fierce. Get it?”

She looks at me. She doesn't get it. I'm not sure I get it as well, I just had to. Lumka! What the hell big bro!

We were meant to leave soon after breakfast but as always, Elik happened! He went with Lumka to do ‘something small’. When they got back at 3 pm they were hungry. Seriously? Wasn't there food wherever they were? I was annoyed but we cooked anyway. And they love their meat so we had to start from defrosting! I tried to offer to go and buy something to eat but Elik insisted that he wanted food cooked by me. Then there kept being something delaying us, a phone call to make, documents to peruse through, instructions from Elik to Lumka, reassurance that everything will be just

fine from Lumka. It just wouldn't end! Why we left Thando and Lumka in that house, I don't know. He has his own house! I'm beginning to think that maybe I'm imagining things. Lumka was chilled and normal to me all day. He even said the 'Take care of Elik' as he always does before we go on a trip. So maybe, just maybe it was just a hug he wanted.

We leave Joburg at 9 pm! So that means we have to do a 4-hour drive in under three hours because the Pioneer Border Post closes at midnight. I'm scared for my life as Elik does 200 on a 120 zone! He is flying! When I see the speed, my heart skips several beats.

"Baby, slow down!" I say. Cause I'd rather we get to the border after it's closed and wait till morning but still be alive.

"Do you wanna drive?" he says.

That's always my cue to shush. I recline my seat and close my eyes. I will not sit and watch myself die from a car crash. I'd rather exit life with my eyes closed. We make it to the border at 11:30 pm. He needs a job in the taxi industry. He will do well.

We sleep in Gaborone and then drive through the next day. Botswana: vast untouched nature which reminds me of the Serengeti, taking our 4x4 through rough off roads, a beautiful sunrise. It was perfect. Well, except for the animals on the road! You can't drive 10 km without meeting a donkey or a cow or a warthog! So many animals! Oh, and speed traps! Everywhere. I hope they take that money and fix the potholes before it gets as bad as Zimbabwe. Then it's on to motherland. Getting into and out of Botswana was easy peasy but getting into Zimbabwe now, now this is about to become a living nightmare. The queues! Like how though? There's no queue on the Botswana side so what's taking so long this side? Elik is grumpy and I know he's not going to stand in the scorching sun and queue! He doesn't even want to leave the car. I can't with him. And had he had some sense and we planned this trip in advance, we would have gotten VIP status but no, we just had to up and leave!

Elik has rubbed off me, I'm starting to pay my way through situations. It's actually that easy. Find someone in a lime reflective vest working for customs, tell them you need help skipping the queue, they say no you have to queue like everyone else, you say if I give you \$100 will you help me and they look at you and say of course sister. Then you give them your passport with the \$100 note inside and they take it strategically and give you back your passport. I'm sure \$10 would have worked but I'm in no

mood for negotiations. So that's how that goes and we get to spend less than 30 minutes and the guy gets to make \$100. Then you tell me corruption is bad when everyone wins!

The plan is to go through Plumtree and see if 4Jays still serves that nice pap and meat because my man gets hangry (When hungry he gets angry). So I know when his grumpiness levels start increasing, I have to feed him fast or else I'll have the Hulk sitting next to me. But it starts raining hard as soon as we leave the border and we just have to go on. There's zero roadblocks on the way to Bulawayo. This is impressive. I'm loving this new Zimbabwe. We make it to my aunt's house in Nkulumane. Elik went and made plans with my aunt without even telling me. That's just, I don't know. She is over the moon to see us! I think she likes Elik more than me and that's worrying me. I'm her favourite, why is he stealing my shine now? Either my aunt is too free or Elik is quite low on respect but he sits there, with a beer in his hand and his feet on the coffee table with his dirty shoes! When I hit his legs so he can take them off, aunt dearest says I must stop harassing her *mkhwenyana!* Ye bakithi! She serves us rice with all sorts of salads! She must really love Elik shame. To go and find beetroot! She hates beetroot! Then they start talking and I'm ignored completely!

Gosh, Elik can talk! My goodness! Then match him with my aunt and you have a full blown talk show. They talk everything from the economy to politics to life in general to traffic lights not working to water and electricity always going and right down to me. They talk about me like I'm not there! He says I'm a bully! He says it so sweetly though I'm blushing over here. Then when he says.

"I can't lose her. She's my whole world. I want to marry her but she just won't pick a date", I just melt. My aunt looks at me then at him then tells me to go sit next to him. I do. There comes the pre-marital counselling.

"I know you two have gone through the worst and honestly I don't know how you have survived every blow and are still this happy together".

I take Elik's hand and intertwine our fingers.

"I'm sorry about the miscarriage. It's neither of your fault. Don't punish each other for it and keep loving each other and talk to each other. I know you will be fine. You always are. And Ghana man, I can never thank you enough for taking care of her. We know she's hot headed and can be a cry baby sometimes. Thank you for loving her through everything and it makes me so happy each time I see how you look at her".

He looks at me and I blush. All these years later and I'm still blushing! His eyes!

"Fifi, you need to take care of him and make sure he's happy all the time". Elik shoots me that 'did you get that?' look.

"And you, you don't have to do anything. You're already doing everything. Look how she's blushing there next to you!" I blush even more, validating her point. I think I've lost my aunt to Elik. He's won her. She's right though. He's my perfect half.

She asks me about the miscarriage and what happened and how I'm dealing with it. I wish she hadn't asked in front of Elik but I'm sure she has a reason for it. I tell her everything and the tears come when I relive that night. I intentionally forget to mention how he put me out after that. As much as I hate that he's stolen her from me, I don't wish for her to think he mistreats me. When I tell her I'm scared of losing Elik and that I'm scared that because I'm not giving him a child he might leave me, he tightens the hold around me. She listens and says I need to forgive myself first, then allow Elik to help me. As for forgiving myself, I've done that. I know it wasn't my fault. I'm pretty sure Komla bewitched me and sent me lightning from Ghana. Mxm.

"Hey. Don't cry. I'll never leave you. I'm not with you to get a child out of you. I'm with you because I love you and you are my life. How can you not see that?" he wipes away my tears.

My aunt just looks at us smiling. She's such a sucker for love shame. Why is she smiling when I'm crying over here? That wave passes and we get to talking about Elik's businesses. I didn't know he was planning on starting a new company! When Elik goes to the bathroom I quickly tell her I have the implant now and I'm not planning on getting pregnant anytime soon. I don't know why I just told her that. I suggest that I'll sleep with her for the two nights we are here. She says no, he's my man and I'll share a room with him. Good gracious! Elik returns just as I ask about my mother. She says she's fine and doing alright. That hurts. She's fine without me?

So Elik and my aunt go back to ignoring me and by the time they are done, I think Elik just promised to extend my aunt's house and re-furnish it! I'm staying out of this one. He asks her why she doesn't drive if she has a licence. She says she kind of can't afford a car with the current economic situation.

"That's not right at all. No. I'll call Lumka to organise something for

you. You can't walk aunty in this heat! You'll get dark and look like some people from Ghana if you keep walking", he says and they both laugh.

I sit there looking at them. Did he just call her 'my aunt'? Is he really taking her away from me? She's my aunt. Mine! He can't have her. But he's right, she deserves a car. She's been there for us from day one. She's over the moon and can't stop thanking us. I don't know why I'm being thanked, I'm not buying her the car! I'm just over here on my phone. She says she wants a Honda Fit. I know it's a popular car in Zimbabwe but she needs to up her standards! I'll have that talk with her when it's just the two of us. I help her cook up a storm for supper while Elik is watching news. At least ZESA (electricity) is back now. He's so chilled in this house! I serve him and my aunt insists I wash his hands. She says I may be modern and hoity toity and all that, but I should do some simple things such as washing his hands and thanking him for small things and cooking for him sometimes even though we have a helper. She says it shows that I have respect for him and men love that. I'll try but no promises.

She says she's going to bed and I go with her and change into my tiny sleeping shorts and a vest and tell her I'll quickly check on Elik then come to bed. She says, "You not sleeping with me. Go and sleep with your man". This woman! Chasing me into the lion's den! I find him on his laptop. He says he needs to look at some documents that Lumka needs for a meeting tomorrow. He asks that I wait for him a bit because he needs to talk to me about something real quick. I say ok then lie down on the couch, stomach down over his lap. He puts the laptop on my bum and continues working. I must have dozed off because it's late at night when I wake up and he has his arm around me and he's fast asleep. I go back to sleep.

Morning

We wake up when we hear some noise coming from the kitchen. My aunt dropped a cup! She quickly comes to the sitting room and finds us waking up. She says sorry for the noise and says she couldn't wake us up because Elik was holding me like he was scared I would wake up and run away. I'm a bit embarrassed because well I'm in tiny shorts and I was spooning on my aunt's couch. Embarrassing! She thinks it's cute though! She's a lot of work!

"Now that you up. Come baby I want to talk to you".

I get Elik's hand off me and follow my aunt to the kitchen.

"Ya, so there's this girl from church who had asked me to help her with her wedding. She disappeared on me so I thought the wedding was off. But she called me this morning asking me to help her".

Ooo kay! I don't see why that's my concern though.

"When is the wedding?"

"It's starting at 12 today", she says and starts laughing.

"What? It's 7:30 now! How are you to prepare a whole wedding in 4 hours?" I'm thoroughly shocked.

"I don't know. Let me just go and see what can be done. You can follow later. You know the hall, right?"

"Yes. Let me go and bath and I'll come through".

I can't believe this really. How can someone be this not serious about their wedding! I wake Elik up when my aunt leaves and tell him I'll be getting ready and going to help my aunt help an unserious bride. He says he's coming too. He could have joined me for the bath except it's kinda hard to share a bucket when bathing. I go first because he says I need more time to get ready than him. Very true.

We only make it to the hall at 9:07 am. As soon as we get there my aunt is busy shame, walking up and down and giving instructions. She managed to get those plastic chairs from her church and there's plastic tables being arranged. I help with the decor and dressing up chairs and putting glasses on the table and all that nonsense. It looks ugly shame, especially the ones I did, but that's what they get for last minute planning. Elik finds a corner, pulls a chair and sits there and goes on his phone. I don't know why he came! By 11 we are done and my aunt has straightened things up and it looks pretty decent. She says I should go and check on the people cooking. Elik says he'll tag along because he's bored. We get there and I can't help but laugh. Not laugh at the people but at the situation in front of me. For 150 guests, there's only 1 big cabbage and 1 small cabbage, a 750 mL bottle of mayonnaise, 4 kg of meat, 10 kg of rice, 2 kg of Charhon biscuits and 2 L of cooking oil. At first I think it's a joke but the cooking women say that's all they were given.

This is a big joke! There's not even a drink or water, so why did we put those glasses on the tables again? I take Elik and go and tell my aunt. I can't stop laughing. This is a big joke. She's pissed and says we must find the bride! We find her in a back room and she's dressed in a beautiful white

gown!

“You think I’m a joke? You think I’m a fool? Why did you invite people to this sorry excuse of a wedding of yours? 4 kgs of meat? Are you ok, upstairs? What must happen now? People are sitting in the hall waiting for you! What will they eat?” my aunt shouts at the bride.

“Aa Sisi it’s just that money was a problem”.

“If money is a problem you either ask for help from your relatives or you don’t have a wedding. Finish and klaar! Why didn’t you ask for money? Donations from church? I spoke to some teachers you work with and they said they offered to help you but you refused and said you were fine. You call this fine?” my aunt goes off.

“Aa they only wanted to help so they can laugh at me later”, she says looking down.

“Laugh at you later? Why would they laugh at you? Now they will laugh at you! Everyone will laugh at you!” my aunt says. The bride starts crying!

“Ha a! You can’t cry. Now is not the time for crying! You can cry later when we are done talking. You have a huge problem here! You think a wedding is something that just happens? You think manna is going to fall from heaven for people to eat? You know what you should have done? You should have called the pastor, gone home and married your husband behind closed doors not this disaster here”, my aunt says.

“The bridesmaids don’t have dresses”, another woman in the room says. Talk about adding fuel to a fire. I almost laugh at my aunt’s reaction but I stop myself.

“Hayi ngeke! I’m out of here. Come baby, let’s go”, my aunt takes my hand and drags me behind her.

“Aunty, I could hear you shouting all the way from here. What’s wrong?” Elik asks when we get out of that room. I laugh as my aunt narrates everything wrong with the wedding in the funniest way ever.

“She says people see weddings on TV and think the bride and groom just showed up and everything was there for free and waiting for them!” she’s so annoyed!

“No ways! 4 kg of meat for 150 people! Damn that’s a bummer! Me and my baby can finish that meat, just the two of us”.

He’s right. We can. In one day.

“What can we do to help? Buy the food at least? Cake? Drinks?”

Awww my good Samaritan. My aunt looks at him with disbelief. Elik misreads the look though. He thinks he offered to buy too little.

“We can buy everything, it’s not a problem at all!” he pulls me towards him and drapes his arm over my shoulder.

“You’d do that for people you don’t know?” my aunt asks.

“You know them. That’s enough. If you say we can help then we will, right nana?” he gives me a quick smile. My aunt gives him a big hug and tells him his kind is rare.

We drive to Makro near Railways. We need things in bulk. We buy everything that will leave a plate with seven colours. And we buy so many drinks, Delta needs to call us and thank us! We then have to manoeuvre potholes until we get to Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, then past Bulawayo Centre and turn into 12th avenue then all the way down to Douglasdale. We eventually find the farm/plot my aunt told us about. We get 2 live goats and 10 chickens. They tie their legs up and we pack them up in the boot. It’s a farm-house and I hate the smell but Elik thinks it’s cool. He says he wishes the police can stop us so he can tell then we going to pay lobola. Lobola with chickens? We make it back after 2.

Apparently, the bride and her team went to take pictures in the park and are still not back. Only now do the men start killing the goat and the women cooking. Lunch will be served at 6 pm shame. At least now there’s drinks going around and enough biscuits and sweets, to keep people’s stomachs entertained. My aunt can’t stop thanking us. She should be thanking Elik though, none of my money was touched in this ‘save-a-wedding’ project. She says the blessings coming our way will shock us! I can’t wait.

We have to leave and go get ourselves something to eat. It’s so hot but it’s too late to start caring now. We walk and find a place at the local shops. I get pap and spinach and beef and Elik gets pap and hooves. Hunger was killing us over here. We didn’t even eat breakfast. And the last thing Elik ate was a pork pie we got at Baker’s Inn. We get back to the wedding. We were not invited anyway to this wedding! That’s why we are dressed in jeans like we are going for a walk. We just showed up and Elik saved the day. I think giving and doing things for people fulfils him. I don’t know how. People are asking about food and there are children everywhere

(Mental note: No children at my wedding)

The wedding people are not back. My aunt says she thinks they are chilling in the park hoping that people will be gone when they get back so

they won't be embarrassed by failing to provide food. Manje we are not going anyway! They will find us right here.

Nine

Good heavens! What are the bridesmaids wearing? Apparently, they were all asked to go back home and wear their best outfits because there were no bridesmaid dresses! So now we have all sorts of outfits here. One is in a green Jean and red AllStars and a pink T-shirt. Ayaya! And another is in a blue something, I'm not sure if it's a jumpsuit or an overall. Then one is in a white hipster. They still make hipsters? I didn't know. I wonder how the bride will feel when she looks at her wedding pictures one day! As if that's not enough, they took pictures with a phone! A phone! Wedding pictures and videos with a phone? I give up. They are not serious! And then the bride has the audacity to walk in smiling! Why is she smiling like this when there's so much wrong here?

The wedding gets better when food is served. I don't know what type of wedding I want but today I know what type I don't want. Things normalise a bit and the bride and groom have their first dance. Disaster, *mkhwenyana*, disaster! He's dancing so fast and leaving the song behind, my gosh! He has no rhythm but has so much energy and is even sweating! Someone make him stop please. Elik and I are laughing our lungs out. And wives hate their husbands, ne? Like why on earth would you allow your short person to wear a silver oversized shiny suit with a pink viscose shirt, a huge ass tie and pointed shoes! Why? He looks like those knock off pastors. It's not even funny!

The dance ends and for about an hour we sit listening to old people giving the history of the bride and groom. From where and when they were born to which primary school they went to, to which high school, to their ancestry and bloodline and so forth Elik almost laughs when they go on to say how their child has always been respectful and doesn't do earthly things. The way they go on about her you'd swear she has never seen a naked man before! And can this old man stop with this 'she doesn't do earthly things!' We are on earth so everything we do is earthly! No one lives in heaven here. He should get over himself.

"Like that time your family tried to pass you off as a virgin when I'd been fucking you for four years!" he whispers.

I giggle. That was funny. But fucking though? Couldn't he find a better word? Only Elik would find it ok to use such words. He then dares me to

dance when the long speeches stop and the floor is open to everyone. I say no, he says yes, I say no, I say he must dance with his two left feet if he wants to! He says no, he doesn't want people to feel bad for not being able to dance as good as he does. So neither of us wants to dance and so we settle it the best way we know how. We do rock, paper, scissors, but he keeps losing and then accusing me of cheating so we decide to quiz each other rather. The rules are simple. If you get it wrong, you dance! I go first.

"Ok. Tell me. If a car carrying helium balloons suddenly stops. What would happen to the balloons?"

"Seriously? Is that the best you can do?" he says with a condescending tone.

He's right. That's too easy.

"Helium is lighter than air so obviously the balloons will go backwards. Or do you want me to go all scientific on you? Must I explain it using Einstein's theory of general reactivity? You know, the Equivalence principle?"

"No it's fine. I get that you know", I sulk.

I just had to ask the easiest question ever! I'm sure he will ask me things I've never heard of. "What's the main difference between an Intel processor and an AMD Processor?" he says. Shucks. I think I know.

"Ummm. They are both CPUs, right? Ok, so almost all phones and laptops use Intel, right? As for AMD I'm not quite sure. Isn't it that CPU used for video games and movie graphics and all that powerful stuff?"

I think I'm right. He laughs.

"You are in the right direction but that's not the answer I'm looking for. I didn't ask what they are. I asked the difference".

"But Elik...". I gave him the difference, didn't I?

"No baby. You lose! The difference is they are made by different companies, simple!"

"I know that!" I say.

"Well Cupcake, you didn't answer the question! You're like the students I used to teach. I would ask them about a goat and they would go and plant a tree then pull the goat and tie it on the tree then start answering about the tree!"

Mxm. He's not funny. I don't even know why I'm laughing! So I lose the bet, unfairly so, and now I have to hit the dance floor. It's house music so this is the perfect time to show off my Gwaragwara skills. I actually

enjoy dancing in front of Elik. Truth be told, I'm dancing for him because why would I be putting some subtle twerking and some whining to it? I'm feeling hot when done and I need fresh air so we go outside.

"You turned me on", he says randomly as we sit down. I look at him like *what?*

"I mean watching you dance. You so perfect for me, you know that? Think we can go to your aunt's house and squeeze in a quickie?" he throws his arm around me.

"No ways baby. Remember when my mother walked in on us? Then that guy in the lab? Now you want to traumatise my aunt as well?"

"Look at me baby", he says and I do as asked.

"Tell me the truth. What's going on? The Fierce I know would have jumped me already wanting some. I used to wake up to you on top of me. You used to text me all day telling me the things you would do to me when I get home. But it's like you're suddenly not interested in sex anymore. Is it me? What's going on?"

"You imagining things wena. Of course, I want you!" I add an awkward laugh. The truth is I've been holding back on the cookie. I don't know why but I cringe at the thought of a D going inside me. And that's very strange because I've always been addicted. I can't explain it.

"Come on baby. In Botswana you said you were tired. Then the other time you pretended to be sleeping. Then that day you said you were scared your aunt would hear us. Then you said we can't do it in the car that time because you were scared cops would find us. And now you're using your aunt as an excuse again. What's going on?"

"It's nothing baby", I look down.

"Come on ma. Talk to me, please. Did I do something? Tell me so I can fix it". Gosh why are we talking about this right now.

"Baby. I need something in the car". I get up and walk fast to the car. I need to run away from this conversation. He follows.

"I've got the keys", he turns me around and pins me against the car. Now I'm cleaning this dirty car with my T-shirt! Just great!

"Talk to me Fierce!"

It's not dark yet and people can see this man pinning me against the car and his body too close to mine. This is not Sandton, where we could pretty much almost make out outside. People talk over here and soon my aunt will be the headline of gossip. Like *'Did you see what her niece was doing with*

that man? Outside? In broad daylight? ' I can't have that. She might just run people over with her coming car and end up in jail.

"Move baby. People are watching", I try to push him but he doesn't budge.

"Why do you always care so much what people say?"

"Well, I don't know! Maybe because we live in a society".

"Oh well. Fuck society! Now tell. Why don't you want to have sex with me?"

"Ok fine. Let's get into the car and I'll tell you".

"No. Tell me now baby or else I'm not moving". He's such a bully! I take a deep breath and sigh.

"Honestly baby. I don't know. I'm just scared and I don't know why but the thought of it just terrifies me".

I know it doesn't make sense. I don't get it as well. I just know I'm scared.

"Is it because of losing the baby? Are you scared of being pregnant again? You are on birth control though now baby, so I won't get you pregnant".

I know.

"I really miss you. It's torture having to hold your body in my arms every night but not be able to do anything. I miss you".

"There's this mini scream you let out every time I enter you and fuck I miss that shit. I'm getting a hard on just thinking about it". I half giggle, half blush.

"I miss you too baby. It's just, I don't know".

"You know I love you, right?" he says and I nod.

"I love getting it on, you know that and we love it together. So, you not loving it anymore is scaring me. You're my girl and I enjoy you. You know that, right? You know you drive me crazy, right?"

I know.

"Please be a little patient with me baby. I don't know what's wrong with me but I'm working on it".

He reaches his head down towards mine and lifts my chin up with his index finger. I feel butterflies in my stomach as he kisses me and pins me even closer to the car. Damn he kisses so good!

"I give up on the two of you", a voice says.

Elik steps away from me and looks down. He looks so guilty like he was

caught stealing. I told him people are watching! I look at my aunt then look down. I don't think she minds though. She says she came to fetch us because the bride and groom want to thank us for rescuing their wedding. By the time we get home, I'm exhausted. I worked so hard today for a wedding I wasn't even invited to. My aunt goes to bed and I go and boil water so I can bath. Just a quick half bucket so I can sleep fresh. I kind of sleep with a man so being fresh is priority. I get back and as I'm looking for something to put on for bed in my suitcase, Elik is behind me. He makes me stand upright and turns me around to face him and just holds me there. I don't know why he feels the need to hold me now when we should be sleeping but I hug him back anyways. Sometimes all he needs is a long, silent hug.

"I want you", he says eventually.

I stay quiet. I thought I asked him to be patient with me earlier. Why are we still talking about this now? He kisses me and I kiss back. I have no problem with kissing, it's the big job that has me cringing these days. We just keep kissing and he keeps telling me how much he wants me. I help him out of his clothes and we make out strong. Maybe I can do this. If I just relax and clear my mind. Maybe I can do this. Then when it comes down to doing it, I just tense up and freeze. I can't. I don't know why but I just can't. I'm lying on my back with my thighs locked shut and Elik lying on top of me, failing to move them apart. He's not using force because I'm sure if he really wanted to they would be apart in one second and he could just take what he wants. But I think that's called rape.

"Please allow me baby", he begs.

I can't. I stay quiet. How do I begin to explain to him when I don't even know the reason myself?

"Please. Let me in. I need you just as you need me. Don't shut me out baby girl, please".

I'm not sure if he's saying I shouldn't shut him out of my body or of my life. I don't know. He's free to enter my life and do as he pleases but into my body right now I can't grant him that access. He has to wait.

"Please Fierce. I know it's been hard on you but I need this with you. I need my girl back. I need you here with me".

He goes on begging and telling me how beautiful I am and how he misses my body. Is he really begging for sex or is it that connection we have when our bodies join that he yearns for? He keeps begging. He's got a

lot of patience shame!

“I love you baby. Please let me in. I need you”.

A tear rolls out the side of my eye. This is bad and what sucks is I can't explain it. He wipes off my tear and plants a kiss on my lips.

“I'm sorry for everything you are going through. Please let me be there for you. Allow me to love you. Let me in”.

Another tear rolls down and he wipes it off too with his hand. He gets off me and lies on his side and pulls me closer to him. His one hand goes around me and his other rubs my thigh up and down.

“It's ok baby. I'll wait for you. Whenever you are ready, you know I'll be right here. I love you. Don't ever forget that”.

“I love you too”, I whisper thinly. Progress. My sense of speech has returned. I take a deep breath and make a decision. Why am I scared so much of him? He's never hurt me? Well he has but I would rather not think of that right now. I give myself a pep talk in my head. *'Stay positive Fierce. This is your man and come on, you love how he puts it down! Do it'*. I pull him to come on top of me. He doesn't resist. There will be no gymnastics today. We will do things the old fashioned way. I don't have the energy. All my energy is directed towards fighting my sudden unexplainable fear of sex. He looks down at me for a while and I hold the stare. I just love his eyes. My eyes are glassy though with the tears and when I blink and a tear rolls out, he wipes it away.

“Are you sure?” he whispers in my ear. Like with that voice I'd say no! When he starts kissing me, I kiss back. I close my eyes and relax my muscles and let him take control. He pushes one thigh away with his knee and keeps kissing me. As he finds his way to internal me, I involuntarily let out that mini scream he says turns him on. I think this is the gentlest he's ever been with me. He keeps checking if I'm ok and telling me he loves me and kissing me.

Him breathing down my neck makes my body respond to what he's feeding me right now. I don't even know why I was scared! How could I have stayed away from this!

“I love you”, he whispers. “I love you”.

I knew gentle wouldn't last forever. He grabs my hips so he can lift me up to meet him. Then he starts driving me like a Land Cruiser and my moans just keep getting louder. I can't believe I'd almost forgotten how good he does this thing. All my fear moved out when he moved in.

“Don’t shut me out baby”.

I’m a bit confused because he’s driving me so what does he mean. I’m doing the opposite of shutting him out right now! I realise I’m still a bit tense. I relax and throw my hands around his back and open wider and that ‘yes baby’ he whispers tells me he approves. I grab the pillow and bite hard to shut down the screaming. My fear and anxiety is long gone. All that’s left is my body melting into Elik’s for a pure, sweaty, unfiltered joyride that sends ecstatic electricity through every cell and vein and nerve in my body. I feel an urgency to rush this so I can feel more and more of him but I also know I have all the time in the world to have him and should just follow his lead. It’s just our hands, mouths and bodies putting the work in. It’s pure paradise. One that I’ll never walk away from. I’m holding on for dear life and professing my undying love for him and for this and have even let the pillow that’s meant to quieten me slide off the bed. Time and space have long stopped and I don’t give a care in the world. I feel so safe with him. I just surrender myself so deeply I’m melting away into nothingness.

There’s something about him that allows me to open up unconditionally and let him in and allow him to blow my mind and to own me. He delivers and that just bonds us in a way nothing else does. I was done a while ago. Even started again and got done again before he finally got done. He’s such a selfless lover!

“Thank you”, he says when he gets off me and pulls me into his arm. *Thank you?* The first time, all those years ago, he said thank you after getting some love, left me not knowing how to respond. Do I say you are welcome? Do I say not a problem or with pleasure? How do I respond to that?

“No baby, thank you”, I decide to say.

He just liberated me from an unnecessary fear that could have grown and gone out of control. As I lay down to sleep and fit my body into his and feel his little kisses on the back of my head and his arms around me, I feel like he just gave me back to myself. Like I came back home, into my own body. Like I’m back to being confident and to feeling loved and to knowing I have him. Shucks! My aunt is in the next room. I really hope she didn’t hear anything. I’m tired of everyone around me knowing how I scream when I’m getting done! It’s just uncomfortable.

We have to leave for Hwange this morning. I woke up late. I kind of didn’t

get enough sleep because I woke up at night wanting some more and had to wake Elik up and thankfully he wasn't grumpy but worked with me and put me back to sleep in no time. So when I got to the sitting room and said my good mornings, Elik stood, gave me a hug and went to the kitchen and brought me a cup. All he needs is some steamy loving and he's the nicest and happiest person in the whole world! He's that easy to please.

"Aunty don't you have lemons or lemon juice?" he says.

"What for?"

"I need to make my baby her warm water with lemon. She drinks that every morning before she eats".

I just fall head over heels in love with him all over again.

"Really? Why?" she asks.

He goes on to explain how I say it kick starts my metabolism. She is all smiles. I guess she never met a man who's half as attentive and would actually want to do these little things for his girl. I get a lemon from the tree outside. The tree grows next door but it's leaning over to my aunt's house so technically she has shares on the tree therefore I'm not stealing!

If I was asked how my holiday went I would say: We had fun, we bonded, we healed, we reconnected, we were caught having sex in the car (not arrested), we got arrested (for public indecency obviously!), we were almost eaten by lions in Hwange National Park, we set a date for our wedding, we made future plans, we had enough sex to last someone a year, we got wasted, so wasted we slept in the car, we jumped off the Vic Falls bridge. We did it all! And I just want to rewind and do it all over again maybe minus the getting arrested part.

And because drama follows me everywhere I go, so many wrong things happened to me. My wig fell into the Zambezi river, I went to the Falls without a raincoat and got out looking like a chicken that was rained on, I embarrassed myself at the high tea at the Victoria Falls hotel when I complained too loudly about how small the food was for the amount we paid, we were almost trampled by an elephant as we were getting our freak on in the car at night near the big tree. Every day was a near death experience. I felt judged for my choice of short shorts by locals (women especially) but whatever, it's my thighs, I'll bare them whenever I want! Let me back up a little bit.

When we left Bulawayo down Victoria Falls road, Elik wanted to do

like 160 km/h but the potholes were like *'Nah boo! Not happening'*. He had said I won't drive because I drive like I'm going to a funeral. I think I drive well, very well if you ask me, he just drives like he's in Need for Speed!

"I can't deal with the potholes in your country!"

"As if Ghana is any better!"

"Come. Drive. I'm done dodging holes that keep jumping in front of me from nowhere!"

Shame the potholes got him so pissed he decides he doesn't want to drive anymore! He pulls over (into a pothole) and gets out of the car and says he's done. It takes everything not to laugh because as he jumps out, he steps into a hole filled with water and he's muddy up to the ankle and he keeps swearing at the poor potholes. Tantrum king! Meanwhile I'm thinking, *it's a 4x4 come on, what are potholes!* But I let him be. I just adore him when he's throwing tantrums. He's too cute I can't deal. He reminds me of those twins of mine that I miss so much. When they throw tantrums, my heart just melts.

So, needless to say, I take over the driving till he decides I'm driving like a grandmother and decides to drive again! I can't with him shame. We get to talk on the way. And I don't know what's happened to me but when I look back at my thoughts and some things I say, I realise I'm childish. And maybe I throw more tantrums than Elik and maybe in that way we are alike and deserve each other. And maybe I'm a little spoiled now, just a little bit.

"I don't want that Jeep anymore", I say.

"Why not? You love that car!"

"You took it from me so I don't feel the same about it anymore".

He looks at me for a long time.

"It's yours! I didn't take it!" he eventually says.

"You kinda did and it doesn't really feel like mine anymore so I don't want it".

"Ok, so what do you propose we do about it? Get you another Jeep?"

"No, I want something better".

"Like?"

"I don't know. I'm thinking maybe a BMW X6. Then when the X7 comes out you get that for me".

I'm dead serious. He pulls over on the side of the road.

"Fierce! You telling me you want a new car? That Jeep is new!"

“You know what Elik, if you don’t want to buy an X6 for me, that’s fine. Don’t! I’ll get a job and save up and buy it for myself”, I fold my arms.

I’ll have to save for 20 years to afford it cash!

“Quit tripping! And drop that attitude right now”, he commands.

“Whatever”, I keep my attitude.

“Tell me exactly why you need a new car. How much is an X6?”

“I told you already why! It’s just like R1.3 million or so?”

He laughs a little then turns and looks at me.

“So, baby girl you telling me you want a R1.3 million car when you already driving an R800 000 car? Is that what you’re telling me?”

“Ya. Why not? Don’t I deserve it?”

What’s the big deal here? He can afford it. He’s lucky I didn’t say I want a Rolls Royce!

“We spoke about this Fierce. We said you would start your own thing. Have you already forgotten? So, wouldn’t you rather ask me to give you the R1.3 mil to start up your own business?”

He’s got a point. One I don’t want to hear right now.

“Come on Fierce. Your Jeep is new. Don’t lose focus babe. I need you to do something for yourself. I told you to come up with a business proposal and I’ll back you up. Everyone on my team will help you, but only if you really want it”.

I fold my arms and look outside the window. Why does he have to make so much sense! Can’t we just buy all the cars we want and go shopping and go clubbing and blow the money? He’s acting too grown up these days.

“It’s fine, you don’t have to do anything for me. I get it. You’re now attacking me and making it seem like I don’t think or I have no plans for my future. It’s fine, forget I asked”.

I think I’m going to cry. I don’t know why though.

“Attack you? No baby, I’m not attacking you, I’m helping you. I want to help build you. You still young and you have so much potential. Let me help you and give you a head start”.

“I wish someone had given me that kind of help when I started but I was on my own and I started from zero and had to work extra hard. You don’t have to, I got you”.

I start crying. Why can’t he just get me an X6 and stop this preaching! We’re on holiday for crying out loud. I don’t even have an idea what type of business I want to start. And I don’t even know if I want to be a business

woman! I'm doing well where I am. What if I want to be a housewife! Did he consider that?

"Alright. Don't cry baby. Did I say something wrong? I'm just offering you a pass. Ok it's ok, don't cry. I'll buy you the X6 if that's what you want. As soon as we get back you can have it". No, I don't want it actually.

"You are right baby".

"I'm what now?" he says shocked.

I rarely say incriminating words like *'you are right'* .

"You're right. I don't need a new car. I'll work on my business proposal as soon as we get back". That took a lot to admit.

"For real?" he says. I nod.

"That's my girl! I'll help you as much as I can but I'll be very busy when we get back. You'll have to work with Lumka coz I think he'll take some time off. He won't have a problem with helping you. He adores you. And you two are always talking about me anyway, so there's a chance", he laughs.

Such jokes are not funny!

"Lumka? Adore me? He's my brother that one". I thought it but it came out. I can't work with Lumka. It won't work.

"I know. You guys make a great team. He'll guide you and help you with starting up. He's good with those kind of things".

"I don't want to impose baby and bother him unnecessarily. I'll find someone to help me. Don't worry".

I have my own reasons for not wanting to spend a lot of time alone with Lumka.

"He really likes you and he knows you are in my life to stay so he won't have a problem helping you. You guys get along", he says looking ahead.

"We do". We actually do.

"You know Fierce, besides Kofi, you and Lumka are the only people I trust. That guy has done things for me I would have never expected anyone to do for me. He's stood by me since varsity. And you know I'm a wreck baby and I did crazy stuff. That guy kept me together when all was going south for me. He rescued me everytime. He's more than a friend to me. He's my brother".

I swallow hard.

"And you, you are my life. Without you I don't know what would become of me. I trust you with everything. I know you will never betray me

or cheat on me or do anything to hurt me”.

Such a heavy burden placed upon me!

“You know when we started, I loved you but you know I couldn’t settle down. Everyone left me Fierce, my family lied to me, and there was the issue with Kofi’s mother, then Komla, you know how that went, and all those girls who were with me for the wrong reasons. But you were different and you loved me even in times I didn’t even love myself. You know, there’s times I would wake up and you’d be sleeping so peacefully next to me and I’d just look at you and wonder how you were still there, you know. You made me want to do better”, he looks at me briefly before looking back at the road.

“And what you’ve done and keep doing for my kids, I can never thank you enough for that. You made me the man I am today. I trust you Fierce, with my life. Please don’t hurt me”.

Oh dear. Now I honestly hope I misread that whole thing with Lumka. It will destroy Elik. I meant to tell him about it on this trip but how can I now?

“I’ll never hurt you baby. I promise”.

“Thank you. I need that”, he says and keeps driving.

That was pretty intense. And to think all I wanted was an X6! I plan on keeping that promise. I’ll speak to Lumka, me and him are cool, so I’ll just ask him what’s up and make sure it’s nothing. Maybe my walking around in T-shirts also needs to stop. Lumka is still a man after all. I can’t be advertising my thighs to him all the time. And the whole business of Elik and I not caring who hears us when we love make also needs to stop. What if Lumka wants some of that too? I have to eradicate all possible temptations and make sure I’m not the reason two best friends end up killing each other.

We make it to Hwange main camp and check in to our chalet! Then we drive around to look for animals. We are in the middle of the park when we take a turn saying ‘Mandavu Dam’. We’ve been driving for like 150 m when we come to a river. Looks like the bridge fell in so there is no crossing here.

“Let’s make a U-Turn and go back to that road”, I suggest.

“Let me get out and see”.

“Are you crazy? This is a national park! There are lions roaming freely and leopards and all those hungry cats”.

“Lions don’t eat me”, he says and actually jumps out of the car!

My jaw just drops and my heart is beating so fast as he goes down into the river. He doesn’t look fazed at all and I’m pretty sure I will watch him being eaten today. We saw two lions not so far away! He comes back, jumps into the driver’s seat and says, “What I’m going to do now is probably going to freak you out”.

“What are you going to do?” I ask, scared of the answer.

“We’ll drive down the side of the bridge. It doesn’t look deep”.

“Baby! Are you serious right now? It’s deep. Besides, do you see how high those stones on the bank are! They closed this road with those stones for a reason! We will get stuck!”

“No we won’t. This is a 4x4! It has high clearance. This river is nothing and we will just go over those stones and we will be on the other side in no time!” he says with so much confidence.

“No Elik, we not doing this!”

“I am, I don’t know about you”, so chilled and starting the car.

“I’m getting out. I won’t sit here and watch us overturn into the river!”

“You’re not getting out! This is a park with wild animals roaming around! Are you crazy? You wanna die?” he snaps.

Wow! I said that but it didn’t work on him.

I know him when he’s made up his mind so I let him drive us down to our death. We make it over the rocks but I bite my teeth hard as the rocks scratch the bottom plate of the car. He drives on until the front wheels make it into the river. And it’s deep as I foretold! As he accelerates, the wheels dig themselves deeper into the mud until the left wheel is almost fully submerged. I’m convinced that the car will fall onto its side anytime now. A warning alarm starts beeping and there are so many red lights flashing on the display. It can’t be good. He switches off the engine.

“Shit! We’re stuck”, he says.

I don’t say anything but just roll my eyes. I told him! He gets out and I guess he doesn’t care anymore because shoes and all he gets into the water and comes out a muddy mess. He looks at all the wheels and I don’t know if he’s doing calculations or what but it looks like it. He signals me to roll down the window.

“Ok, baby. Jump into the driver’s seat and engage 4x4. Control the left front first and let’s see”.

He spent some time teaching me how to drive a 4x4 over such terrain

and now I have to apply that knowledge. I do that and nothing. The wheel just rolls in place and splashes him with muddy water. I guess I'm naturally vindictive because I just press the accelerator some more and splash him some more. He deserves it! I told him to make a U-Turn!

"Hey! Stop", he says blocking his face with his hands. I feel sorry for him and stop.

"Ok baby, now control the back wheels only and see if you can reverse. Let's see if they can pull the front wheels out", he says wiping mud from his face. I try that and the car skids.

"Keep going".

"No, the car is falling over, can't you see?"

"Just keep doing it baby, don't argue".

"Will I fall over?"

"I don't know. Do and we'll find out".

That beautiful brain of his doesn't work! I switch off the engine. No one is driving anymore. We will stay here and wait for heaven knows what.

I have to get out of the car myself to assess the situation but at least I'm wearing shorts and I have the sense to remove my shoes. We try everything and argue because he says we must carry rocks and form an incline for the front wheel but I say that won't work because the wheels are now covered in mud so are too slippery. Besides, they are too deep in the water and I don't want bilharzia so I'm done playing in dirty water. He says I should find sand and clean the mud off the wheels. Now he's lost his mind! That doesn't even make sense. There's no way I'm doing that! It's impractical. Nothing works. We are stuck and we are outside in a wildlife park! Just great! I try to call for help but there's no signal on our phones! Even if we had I don't know the SOS number in Zimbabwe. I'd have just tried 111 and these park maps don't have a phone number!

"Say it. Say you told me so and stop looking at me with such judgement. Just say it", he snaps at me.

I'm thinking it yes, but I won't say it. I jump back into the car. It's almost sunset and what if the animals drink at this river?

"At least you don't get eaten by lions! I do, so I don't know what I will do! And what if an elephant comes and pushes us over? What if those lions we saw attack us? Or what if it rains upstream and water comes and sweeps us away? Did you think of that?" I snap at him!

"Well, they made you sign an indemnity form at the gate, right? So you

die, you die. No two ways about it. Decide now if you want to get out of the car and be eaten by lions or you want to stay in there and wait for the water to come and sweep you away. Your choice”.

I hate him! There will be no help for us clearly so I just sit there upset as hell. He looks too chilled now, sitting in the back seat eating lemon creams! It’s getting dark and I would be lying if I said I’m not scared.

“Come sit at the back so we balance the car”, he says.

As if our weight would make a difference! I’m not a fool. I refuse and he says fine. He starts playing music from his phone because I refuse to press the car’s start button. No one is driving! We will die here! And no one will play music and call the animals to come and eat us! He’s playing *Good Girls Lie* by Akon and I can’t help but laugh at his singing along. He might as well tell me he’s singing to me so I can tell him it’s the wrong choice of song at this moment.

He’s singing just to annoy me I’m sure but it’s not working because he loves this song and I’ve come to love it too. I can’t stay mad at him forever when he’s like this. He convinces me and tells me sweet nothings and apologises for miscalculating and he gets me when he says, “Ok baby I see I fucked up but don’t be mad at me. I’m already feeling bad as it is. Just be there for me. Please”.

I jump into the back seat and give him a piece of my mind before I can let this go. He keeps smiling as I keep shouting at him. There’s no point. I just give up. He knows the only way to resolve such things is by sexing me. I can tell what he’s thinking and I’m like hell no! The car will fall if we start rocking it back and forth! It’s like he’s trying to die or something. He trusts this car way too much! Anyway, my mind doesn’t work as well as most people’s. I let Elik take off my top and the bra follows swiftly after. I’m sitting on top of him facing him and allowing him to shower me with sweet nothings and exaggerated compliments that make me blush so hard.

It’s getting dark. It must be way after seven and clearly, we will sleep here today so might as well enjoy one last round before an elephant pushes us over then a lion comes and eats us then a hyena comes and scavenges and vultures come and finish off whatever is left then archaeologists find our bones and put them in a museum. I told him that we not doing anything but he knows all my weaknesses all too well and now it’s me asking for it and him saying no! I don’t know why he’s like this seriously! It’s weird how cars get misty so fast. I’m not even on bounce number five when

there's lights and knocking at the window. I didn't hear the other car come up. It's game rangers and they say the park closed at six and they are looking for day visitors who signed in and haven't exited the park yet. We are not day visitors! They think we are poachers! Just great! We have to show our in-park booking to prove we are not trying to catch rhinos and cut off their horns.

I might as well walk around topless for the whole world to see because way too many people have seen me topless. Life is not fair because Elik just pulled up his pants and that was it. No one even saw him. Me, I have to find my shorts and top. And Elik covering me with his hands is not helping because for people watching it just looks wrong. So unfair! And for some odd reason, when people catch you having sex, they don't walk away! They wait. Bloody perverts!

They pull our car out of the river and remind us that having sex in public spaces in Zimbabwe is illegal. A car is a private space but ok whatever. We manage to laugh about our getting stuck when we get back to our chalet and we finish off where we left off before we were so rudely interrupted.

Ten

Victoria Falls is like top of my favourite places right now. Maybe it's because I could speak to people in my home language or it's just the fact that I know I'm close to home or it's just all the attention Elik is giving me or it's because the Victoria Falls Hotel is just on its own level of luxury. It's amazing. From our room, we have a beautiful view of the bridge and the gorge underneath. Oh, and I get to pay a local fee for getting into the Falls and into Parks while Elik pays like three times the price! Money is not a problem but I just love rubbing such silly things in his face.

We did everything there is to do in Victoria Falls. You name it, we did it. Helicopter rides over the mighty falls, sunset cruises (my favourite). What with the bottomless drinks! My bae can gulp down as much rum and coke as he wants and I'll chauffeur him back to our hotel. Quite the alcoholic he can be. River rafting and elephant riding, reminds me of Bali and Thailand and Vietnam. Fond memories we have from there. I don't think Elik loves riding elephants that much but I do so he will do it anyway. Relationships are about compromise, right? I hate walking with lions, but I did it because he wanted to. He said we are a couple and maybe it would be better to be eaten by lions together. I kept thinking they would eat me. And it didn't help that Elik kept pointing out that my wearing shorts and showing thigh was tempting the lions and he wouldn't be surprised if they bit off a chunk. Then he would laugh! What's funny about that?

The zip line, they call it the slide down here. It's quick quick and it's one line, nothing to write home about. In Tsitsikamma and in Thailand we had like five lines to zip through. Now that was proper! The flying fox, I loved that although the adrenaline rush wasn't that much for me. Then swimming in the Devil's pool from the Zambian side! I swear Elik and I were trying to die. Why else would we pay to go and sit in a pool at the edge of the Victoria Falls? Lying on our stomachs we could see down the Falls and that was scary as fuck! One wrong move or if the water level suddenly decided to rise we would be dead in a second. The rainbow there and the view were jaw dropping and that kiss we exchanged there deleted whatever doubts I ever had with Elik. I think he has proven himself to be worthy and now I can really marry him.

Then my all-time funny, one Elik will never let me forget. We head

down to the bridge for Bungee jumping! Just one look down and I'm like NOOOOOO! I kind of don't have a death wish. But Elik said we are doing it so we are doing it. He goes first and by the time he comes back he's still smiling! The hell? He says he's doing it again! Now I'm convinced he's possessed. His addiction to adrenaline can't be natural. Before the jump, the guys tell me to take off my wig but my cornrows underneath are not quite what I want people to see in public, so I say no thanks. Elik insists that I take it off anyway and even lies and says my hair looks good. He says I will just put it back on when I come back. I say nope. It's tight. I have faith in my wig. It's not gonna fall. He says "Ok cool baby. If you say so. But it's going to fall off!" Why is he cursing me?

"I don't need anymore negativity. My wig is tight. Leave me alone", I snap.

"Don't jump angry at me baby. Is that the way you want me to remember you when you don't come back?" he says laughing.

So not funny. And now I remember that some woman once fell off this exact bungee jump. Will I also be part of the statistics? It's too late though now. With my legs tied up, hopefully tight, and me walking like a penguin, with a GoPro in my hand, I stand at the edge of the bridge. I'm told to dive into the air but when they say 3, 2, 1 bungee. I don't move at all so they push me and I just spiral downwards for over 111 m with blood rushing into my brain and air filling my lungs as I scream and then the water spraying on my face. I'm sure I pee myself a little there. My life flashes right before my eyes and I'm wondering how exactly I will die. Will I fall into the water and be eaten by crocodiles? Will I bash my skull open on a rock? Will I drown? Will too much blood rushing to my head make it explode? Because it does feel like it's about to explode. As I lay dangling upside down, I get to look at the gorge and the water and everything deep down there. It's beautiful. And in a weird kind of way, I'm glad Elik forced me to do this.

As the man comes to pull me back up I'm shaking. Even by the time they pull me onto that lower part of the bridge, my legs are shaking and I can't stand. Then when I get my senses back that's when I realise my wig is gone. It actually fell off! 30 inches of Brazilian hair down the Zambezi River! Now those ugly cornrows are out in the open and I have no way to hide them. Just perfect! Elik will have a field day. When I get back up onto the bridge he just starts laughing at me. I ignore him and talk to the crew as they ask me how the jump was and if I'm ready for the tandem swing.

“Where’s your hair baby?” Elik says. I can tell he just wants to laugh. He’s so annoying!

“Did it fall off?” he says.

What does he think? Mxm! Can’t he see I’m still traumatised. We have to do the tandem swing right after! Gosh Elik doesn’t love me much. Another fall off the bridge! The free fall has me crying again and praying in tongues and holding on to him, but at least now I’m with him and my head isn’t upside down. I enjoy the swing better and take the time to look around and after that initial fear washes away I actually get to enjoy while holding onto Elik with one hand and praying the rope doesn’t break. There’s our hotel over there looking quite small! When it slows down we get to laugh at the things we do.

We get back up and he wasn’t lying about doing the bungee jump again! He actually does it and still comes back up smiling! He’s not normal. I’m glad I did the jumpings and I’m happier as we have drinks and watch the videos. Elik has to lend me his cap to hide my hair and although he doesn’t say so, I can hear him screaming *‘I told you so’* in his head. I’m such a coward and my bungee jumping video is hilarious! I just fell and screamed all the way down and my wig flew off and I looked like I’d seen a tokoloshe! I cried. I give thanks for back-ups. I have two other wigs in my bag at the hotel. So by the time we go cage diving with crocodiles, no one will know that the cornrows under my hair need redemption. That also doesn’t go too well for yours truly. I’m scared these crocodiles will break in and tear me apart! They are too close for my liking. Too much adrenaline in one day! It’s enough for one day, so we go and get soaked in the Falls.

Woke up early this morning for our helicopter ride. We need to catch the sunrise. It’s just 15 minutes anyways. Then it’s on to the real stuff. Skydiving. And if I thought bungee jumping was a nightmare, I wasn’t ready for skydiving. With bungee, the free fall was only four seconds. With sky diving it’s 45 seconds.

“You realise if the parachutes malfunction we will die, right?” Elik says laughing.

He loves adding more fear to me. I hate him. I’ll never skydive with him again. Lie. I wouldn’t do it with anyone else. I don’t know why I feel so safe with him. My tandem skydive instructor is a nice guy though and as he kits me up and checks that the harness is tight, he reassures me that they haven’t had fatal accidents in a while. That’s not very reassuring. I’d have

preferred a 'we have never had an accident'. As we pack into the plane, I hold on to Elik. The plane just keeps going up and Elik can tell I'm terrified. I already hate flying so what about falling out of a plane! He starts telling me there's nothing to be scared of and that I should keep my mind open and enjoy it. Who knew 3 km was so high up in the sky! The things we do though!

When the plane levels out and the door open, a loud noise almost brings me to my knees. It's just air. Phew! Then Elik and his instructor move towards the edge, I hear him say 'YES!' for a micro second then they just vanish. Gone. Gosh we so high up. We're in the sky! Then it's me and my guy. He screams over the noise that I must relax and take it in. I think I fainted in the first 6 seconds and then woke up and resumed screaming and feeling like my whole body would explode. I can't describe the feeling. It's like I'm dead but more alive than I've ever been. It's so loud, I can't hear a thing yet so serene. The wind pushing against me is so intense I feel like it will get inside my body, yet it's so liberating. It goes on forever and I look around but can't really see much. Then a guy with a camera comes into view and is floating around us. Then the parachute opens and we dramatically slow down. We just paused and I feel quite dizzy but I know the ground is near and that makes me have hope to live to see another day. When I get off the ground Elik is so excited and is high fiving me.

"I wanna do it again tomorrow", I say. Surprisingly I'm excited. That was something else!

"Me too!" he says.

We have dinner at the Boma. I kind of put effort in the way I dressed. Then as we get there they drape a Zambia/Ntsaro over me covering my dress up completely! Just great! Elik says it looks like I'm wearing nothing underneath and he likes. He's so perverted my goodness! They put up quite a dance and drum show here and the buffet is alright. It's perfect in a way because there's meat galore. I expected more from the crocodile tail but it's like chewing on rubber. The warthog meat is nothing like pork! Isn't a warthog a pig kanti? The Eland meatballs, mmm nah, too mincey for my liking. I'll stick to real meat like antelope and buffalo and impala.

I can see why this place is so impressive to tourists and why eating mopane worms deserves a certificate for tourists. To me it's just meh! I grew up catching mopane worms during the holidays and by the time schools would open my hands would be a terrible mess. So eating it is like

drinking water. As for Elik, he eats everything this one, never picky. We have an alright evening of eats and beating drums and Elik doesn't even drink much. Afterwards, I feel like turning up and dancing some, but there isn't much clubbing in Victoria Falls really. The only night places are bars and pubs and beer halls in Chinotimba. So maybe not. So Elik says maybe I must direct the energy I have for dancing towards dancing on him. He's too much. And so we agree to dedicate the rest of the evening to grinding our bodies together and cuddling.

"Let's drive down to the big tree", he says.

"Now?" I ask, shocked. It will be so dark!

"Ya, why not?"

"It will be too dark there and if anything happens to us no one will find us".

"Nothing will happen. Chill".

I know exactly why we are going there and in a twisted kind of way I'm excited. Then we park the car and it's pitch black when the lights go off. This is bad. We jump into the back seat and prepare to get busy. We haven't even gone far when I'm like, "Baby, what's that?"

"What?" he says and doesn't even look out.

"Elik, look", I say. Only then does he look.

"Shit!" he says and I already know it's not good.

"Is it a tree?"

Please let it be a moving tree that miraculously grew in the middle of the road and is growing towards us and trumpeting as it grows.

"It's an elephant. There's more. Let's get out of here".

He finds his way to the driver's seat and by the time he drives off that elephant was so close I was shivering. One step of that foot and we will be powder. I swear, it's like we looking for death.

We get into the room, I jump into the shower and as I get out and find body cream, baby boy just blurts out, "Remember the first time I murdered you?"

I'm looking at him like what? Murdered me? So I've been dead this whole time? I'm a ghost. Am I a ghost? Or a zombie? Or a vampire? What am I? I watched a movie once that said that some dead people continue as if they are living. They never know they are dead. Am I one of them?

"Murdered me?"

"The first time we had sex! I can't call it love making because you said I

murdered you!”

I laugh. He’s too silly with a straight face. I did tell him he murdered me because that’s the honest truth! I didn’t lie.

“Ya I remember. What about it?”

No one ever forgets that kind of pain!

“You said it hurt but when I asked if I should stop you said no. Why?”

Why what now? That was what? Five years ago? Seriously Elik?

“Why did it hurt or what?”

I have no explanation for pain. I know it has everything to do with neurons and pain sensors and the central nervous system and the brain. Does he need me to explain from the time the body detects the pain stimulus to the time it keeps hurting because the cause of pain isn’t removed? I’m sure he knows the science behind it so why is he asking me?

“No man. Come on. Be serious. Why didn’t you stop me?”

“I don’t know. Because I wanted you to have my virginity. Because I was stupidly in love with you. I don’t know”.

“It hurt yes but I didn’t want anyone else. I wanted it to be you”.

“But you had dated other guys before me for longer. It had just been a month with me”.

I don’t know why we talking about this but alright.

“Those guys I dated before you were NOT you Elik. With you I knew. You were the one for me and there was no point in holding back anymore. I wanted you. I just had no idea how painful it would be but I know you tried to be gentle and held me through it all and after the fact. So it wasn’t as horrible as it could have been. You were and still are the one for me”.

“You mean that?”

“Of course!”.

I need to apply lotion before my skin dries out. Can we wrap this up already!

“You said I murdered you when I took your virginity. You said you had dreamed that you would one day lose it on a King size bed with rose petals and champagne and you’ll be wearing Victoria’s Secret lace and all that stuff”.

Oo kay!

“Ya so I’m recreating that for you”, he hands me a Victoria’s Secret bag.

Where does he hide these things! I packed his bag and I helped him pack the car. Where was he hiding this? And recreating the day you lost

your virginity? Of all role plays we've ever done, this is a first. I've never heard about it.

I go into the bathroom and change into the black lace Brazilian cut panties and matching bra. It looks almost plain but cute. I guess as a virgin I wouldn't have been expected to go for something sexy or daring or slutty! Makes total sense. I stand in front of the mirror looking at myself. I think I put on a kilo or four and I'm wondering if Elik will notice. He said I look great the other day and the other and yesterday and this morning but I can't help but wonder if he's lying. That's probably just my insecurities screaming at me. And he went all out and now there's a bed with rose petals and champagne of the side waiting for me. I have to repay him for the trouble. I'm sure the hotel staff he asked to set this up will be looking at me funny when they meet me in the corridors.

"Baby? You alright in there?" he calls.

"One second".

Shucks. I've been in here a while. Let me go and 'lose my virginity'. He's topless. He's totally hot I have to admit. That blackness never fails to get my heart singing.

"I just want you to know that you're sexy as hell and I want you so bad. I've been wanting you all day".

That's scary. He had me like two times in the night and this morning I woke feeling like I had gone horse riding! His appetite is both appealing and scary. I keep standing and looking down like a virgin.

"Now that you know better. What did I do wrong that first time? So I can right that wrong tonight".

Damn his voice!

"You didn't do anything wrong. It's just, well, I just couldn't take you, that's all. But you did everything right. Well except that desk was too hard!"

"I did?" he asks with a smug look on his face.

"Yes. You told me I was beautiful, you kept asking whether to stop or not, you held me close afterwards and you wouldn't stop telling me how much you loved me. You thanked me even! You took me home and ran me a warm bath and bathed me and put me to bed and made me hot chocolate. Remember? You did everything right".

He was so sweet. And I'm smiling now thinking about it although I was acting like a baby back then and letting him treat me like I was made of glass. It had hurt!

“You don’t have to do anything tonight. Let me take care of you. Let me do all the work”. I nod.

I’ll just lie there like a corpse and let him put in the work.

“I love your body!” he says. I blush.

“Turn around for me, let me see... damn... you look delicious... fuck... get over here”.

I step towards him. Like a sheep to the slaughter. The first thing that gets off me is the bra! I know he’s obsessed with my boobs but sometimes I forget just how much. He lifts me up and lays me down on the bed and brings his body on top of me. The zip of his Jeans grazes my thigh but I let that go cause that’s the instant his lips closed around a nipple. I let out a soft moan and close my eyes. Damn! I need to find insurance for that tongue. It deserves to be insured. His one hand finds its way into my Peruvian hair and the fingers dig into my scalp, holding me in place while his other fingers start torturing me. Slowly at first, gaining pressure and momentum. I’m not sure whether to grab him or the sheets or the pillow or to just throw my hands in the air in surrender. There’s a reason why those girls called him Jucipher.

His lips come up to mine and he kisses me. His fingers stay there flicking and flipping and torturing.

“You so wet”, he tells me as if I don’t know. I’m like the Caribbean beaches right now. I moan in response and spread my legs wider to let his finger deeper in. He gets off and rips my panties off me. That’s not nice! I kind of liked them! They are new! It’s too late anyway, they are gone.

“I wanna taste you”, he looks there as if he’s talking to her.

I close my eyes and let his tongue and hands take me places. Some I’ve never been and some that I frequent. I feel my toes curl and lightning run all the way from my head to my toes and right back. Damn! He deserves an award for this performance! When I’m done and he’s wet from the mini rain pour, he wipes his lips and comes up to my face and kisses me! I don’t mind the little saltiness. Guess we both perverted beyond repair. I wonder if we can be saved or if we want to be saved in the first place.

“You know what to do with your legs”, he whispers. I know.

“I love you”, he says and before I can say or think or even breathe. I feel him finding his way to inner me. I close my eyes and just focus on the feeling of our beings merging into one. I need non-screaming classes. This noise is not on. People have been said to say weird things when they have

their legs over their partners' shoulders. From nowhere I literally scream, "I want the wedding".

He kinda stops and looks at me and has that satisfied look on his face before he down right murders the living daylight out of me. I don't think it would have been possible to lose my virginity like this! He will need to try again. I'm just holding on to him when we are done. I feel so weak and finished completely. He keeps kissing my face and holding me and telling me he loves me. The number of times he says 'I love you' is equal to the number of times he used to say 'I'm sorry' back then. It's so much, I can't forget.

"So when is our wedding?"

That heavy breathing! Lawd!

"On your birthday". I literally made that up on the spot. I just hope it's a Saturday, not that it matters if it's a weekday. Those that matter will take the time to avail themselves.

"No! Seriously? Are you for real?" he looks so excited it's like I promised him a tender!

"Yes silly! And if I have our anniversary and your birthday in one day I get to buy only one present!" I say playing my fingers on his chest. He laughs.

"You're so sneaky!"

"But for real. Thank you baby. I'm literally the happiest man on earth right now, in so many ways. My precious baby is finally going to marry me".

His excitement is on 100 and it's rubbing off on me. Too bad I'm exhausted and dehydrated and I just want to curl up here and sleep. Tomorrow we head down to Botswana for some Okavango and Chobe camping then we can return to our everyday life.

Holidays go by so fast. They are here and you all excited then you blink and they are gone and it's back to real life. Back to Morningside and back to Working Elik. I don't even know why we still staying in Morningside to be honest. This was Komla's home! Elik said he would sell but for whatever reason he hasn't and I don't wanna nag. I'm a visitor here anyways, my place is in the mother city. There's so much to catch up on and I miss Cape Town.

Specifically, I miss those twins of Elik so much. They are growing too fast and school holidays are over and I feel like I'm missing out a lot on

their lives. I missed the whole school holiday! I'll have to make it up to them. We have to all move down to Joburg soon anyway because I have nothing keeping me in Cape Town after graduation really. I hope Lizzy will move up with us. She's doing an amazing job with the kids. Also, because I'm on my journey towards becoming Mrs Nkrumah, I have to be around Elik and play wife. The right address will be Dr Nkrumah but I think I'll hold on to Mrs. I guess I can be Mrs-Dr or Dr-Mrs Nkrumah. I'm not sure what I worked harder at, being a Mrs or being a Dr?

Anyway, I'm back to school hunting for the twins and I already saw the house I want in Sandhurst, Sandton. I'm not going to live in Komla's house forever. It's just wrong on too many levels. Living there will make it easy for her witchcraft to keep finding me. I need to move so she gets confused. As for the wedding, that should wait a bit, I have a graduation coming up. I'll deal with that stress later. So I'll be on a plane to Cape Town tomorrow morning to handle my own. Elik has to stay here and work. Money doesn't grow on trees after all. I hope he has so much work he won't have time for extracurricular activities you know, such as one night stands. Not that I don't trust him. Ok fine, I don't trust him. I mean I'm not that big of a fool. But what I am is hopeful. I hope he can survive a few days till he comes for my graduation next week.

As soon as we got back to Joburg, Elik nudged me to make contact with my brother Butho. I did and he agreed that I come by his house today. Ever since he gave me that *'let's be outcasts together'* phone call, we've been chatting on WhatsApp and calling, but this is the first time I'll see him in person in a very long time. I'm nervous. I don't know what to expect. But Elik will be there with me so I'll be just fine. And Lumka is coming too. Like I can't shake him off no matter what. Where Elik goes, he goes. They are like primary school best friends! It's never been a problem before but lately I just read too much into everything he says or does. He could be innocently drinking a glass of water and I'll think, *'I can tell by the way he's swallowing that he wants me!'* I'm so paranoid it's scary. If my suspicions are true then I stand to lose Elik or Elik stands to lose Lumka and Lumka stands to lose us both. There will be so much losing, I can't have that. I need to confront Lumka and contain this virus.

We get to Midrand and I'm so nervous my palms are sweating. Butho's staying by Midstream Estate! Fancy big bro! I hear some celebrities stay in this estate. I haven't seen him in years. He just became a jerk and never

came back home and left me to shoulder our parents alone. I'm so angry at him for that but at the same time I'm desperate to reconnect. I need family so bad, it's sad. I'm conflicted. I don't know how I feel about this. Chatting on WhatsApp is one thing but face to face is too real for me.

"It will go just fine baby. If you get uncomfortable, we'll leave", Elik says. I nod and hold on to his arm.

"And God help me, if he says anything foul I'll break his jaw".

I think he's not bluffing. We drive in and find the house and park by the driveway. Great! First time I see my brother in a long time I bring two men with me. Maybe I should have worn heels so I could have some height too but I thought jeans and trainers were simple and better. I don't know Butho anymore so I don't know what to expect. The wife welcomes us and we all hug and the men shake hands. It's that awkward over smiles and too many hellos. I sit in between Elik and Lumka and I feel like I have bodyguards. I feel so safe.

Butho! He hasn't changed much. Just olderish no than he was back then. He's a replica of my eldest brother. There's an awkward moment and the wife offers the guys beers and me a drink and then sits next to her husband. Introductions go around then another moment of awkward silence. Butho knows about Elik because he's all I talk about really and he's all over my WhatsApp statuses. Awkward silence. No one is saying anything. We all just sitting there looking like someone died. I start. Don't I always have the biggest mouth? I ask Butho how life is and how he's doing. I have more burning questions to ask though. I need to know why.

"You left me. You left us there alone. Why?"

I know why. I have asked him countless times on WhatsApp but I need to hear it from his mouth.

"You know umama Lastborn, I couldn't anymore".

"But you left me to take care of everything. You know Zi doesn't have money and let's not even talk about your other brother! Inflation needed you. I needed you! We needed you Butholezwe!"

I think I'm going to cry and my voice is starting to crack. Elik takes my hand and squeezes it.

"I'm sorry. I just needed to get out of there. I'd had it with umama. I'm sorry that I left you guys there but it was hell for me. You know how vile she can be".

That's not good enough for me. He's the only one who made real money

back then and I used to look up to him. Then he abandoned us without an explanation and I had to take over. That wasn't fair. That took away my chance of living a normal university life. All I ever thought about was how to save up so I could send money home. He could have met me halfway at least.

"You know Butho I don't know how I feel right now. I feel like you let me down, like you just left us there. You didn't care about me. You are my brother, you were supposed to protect me".

The tears are here now. They are never really far away.

"We'll be right back", Elik says and takes my hand and leads me through the open back door to the garden. He gives me a tight hug and allows me to cry it out.

"We can leave right now if you don't want to do this".

"I'm fine baby, let's stay".

We stay there a while until I get it together and we go back in. I'm done asking him why he left me. He had to do what he had to do. I of all people should understand that. That topic is upsetting me so might as well leave it alone. He apologises some more. Although it's not his fault really. He's a victim just like me. We catch up in terms of work on his side and school on my side. His wife, Mkhethile, is nice and I warm up to her when I get to talk to her. She says I can call her Kate! How Mkhethile got shortened to Kate beats me. She serves us biltong and roasted peanuts. I'm not hungry.

As I help her do the dishes in the kitchen afterwards we talk and she says we need to hangout more. I agree. I really like her. She says Butho always spoke about me. I don't buy it. He could have called me if he really cared that much. As the dishes stand dripping on the rack next to the sink, we go back to join the guys. One step in and we can tell the atmosphere is tense. I want to say something but Kate holds my hand and I stop.

"Look bro. I need you to be certain that you want back in Fierce's life. I can't have you come in and let her open up to you then disappear on her again. I'm sorry but I just can't have that", Elik says.

"Ummm", Butho says.

"I'm serious. I'm sick and tired of your family hurting her. She doesn't need that. She's been through enough and I won't have anything else happen to her".

I can't see Butho's face from here. Elik brings his hands together, brings his elbows to his knees and places his chin on his hands. I would be scared

if it was me being spoken to right now.

“So, it’s either you promise to never abandon her again or you opt out right now. Say the words and I’ll take her and we’ll leave”, Elik says.

I know that tone. He’s serious. What I don’t get though is where he got the authority to talk to my brother like that. Shouldn’t my brother be the one saying that to him? And why am I finding this so sexy right now?

“So? What’s it gonna be?” He’s not smiling at all.

“I’ll stay. I’ll be a brother to her again”.

“I hope you not lying to me. Trust me, abandon her again and you’ll have me to deal with”.

My poor brother! He must be terrified shame.

“That’s not a threat bro. It’s a promise!”

Lumka says crossing his legs on the coffee table and drinking his beer. Forever chilled and right now a little disrespectful! I feel a tear burn behind my eye. It still takes a lot for me to believe that someone would love me the way Elik loves me. He’s so precious!

“Great. Let’s get back to drinking beer then, now that that’s out of the way”, Elik says. *Poor Butho!* He probably thinks I brought thugs to his house.

“Oh and she’s graduating next week and you’ll be there”, Elik says.

Moving the conversation right along. Even if Butho wanted to say no, I don’t think he’s in a position to say so with the way Elik is looking at him. He nods uncomfortably. I hope Elik hasn’t scared him off. I kind of still am open to exploring the whole brother-sister thin with Butho.

“Let’s go upstairs and leave them alone”, Kate says.

I look at her but I follow anyways. She says her two kids are on a school trip to the Cradle of Humankind. I guess I’ll meet them next time then and maybe I’ll bring the twins to for a play date. After my drama with Lumka’s ex I don’t disclose much about myself at first sight. So I do most of the asking of questions. She’s only four years older than me, and works in the New Product Development department of a large food manufacturing company and loves shopping and eating and drinks on the regular. My kind of girl. We will get along. I like her. She’s also adds that she’s doing her Masters. She’s been doing it for the past five years so obviously it’s doing her not the other way round.

We have to leave as Elik has a Skype meeting in an hour and I have to pack since I’m leaving tomorrow morning. Graduation is next week

Monday and Kofi is coming down this weekend for his semester break. I miss my crazy brother in law so much and I'm so excited he's coming down. He gets me more than most. With all of them coming down to Cape Town, I'll have my house packed with boys again. But that also means more time with Lumka. Eish. You'd swear I'll be the only person graduating because I've invited everyone I know! Which is not many. But only Elik, Kofi, Lumka, Butho, Zibulo and my aunt will make it. Kate says she has to stay with the kids.

Why they give only two tickets for visitors on graduation I don't know! I need three more! That nice old man from the graduation centre who said I look like his daughter will come in handy. We get back home and I didn't really unpack so there isn't much to pack. Just stealing two of Elik's T-shirts just for no reason. As for Lumka, he might as well move in because he's here all the time. Even the guest house is referred to as 'Lumka's room'.

"I need to buy something in Sandton", I say to Elik.

"Cool. Need me to come with? I have that meeting though so you'd have to wait an hour or so".

"No, no worries, it's cool. I can go alone".

"Or let me ask Lumka to drive me. Then maybe we can talk about that business proposal".

I don't feel like driving. I did say I was getting spoiled. I even need a chauffeur these days.

"Ok love. Hurry back".

I find Lumka working on whatever and I ask him to drive down to Sandton City with me. He says yes without a question. That was easy! I need him alone so we can talk like adults without Elik overhearing things he shouldn't hear. What I'll say exactly I don't know but I'll get to the bottom of his behaviour.

Eleven

Morningside to Sandton City is just a 10 minute drive. I'm sure Elik would do that distance in two minutes but at least Lumka is driving like a normal person. I started talking as soon as we got into the car. He hasn't mentioned Thando and I wonder where she is. I haven't seen her since we got back. They were kind of together a lot before we left. She might be getting a permanent spot although Elik says she won't last long and is just Lumka's booty call till he finds his next girl. I refuse to believe that. I'm sure Lumka has a heart and I'm sure he loves Thando in his own way.

"How's Thando doing?"

"She's good I guess. She's at work".

"Why don't you get her out of that place though and maybe get her to improve her matric results and do a degree after that?"

"And why would I do that?" he glances my direction.

"You love her right? Don't you want to uplift the woman you love?" "Who says I love her?" Oh wow! I wasn't ready for this conversation to go this way. I look at him and study him as he drives. He looks so innocent and if you didn't know any better you'd think he's a victim. Like all those girls that have passed under him were the ones to blame. This man here looks like he can do no wrong. Sadly, I know him, and maybe too much.

"You know what Fierce, Thando isn't the one for me".

"Then who is?"

The traffic light is red now so we're not moving and he turns and looks at me. I fail to hold the stare but I can feel that he's staring. I look up at him and he laughs a little and resumes driving since the light has turned green. That question remains unanswered.

"You know I'm a simple guy. I don't need much in a woman. I just want a girl with a brain, a hot body, pretty face and a good pussy, that's all. Plus, she has to be loyal to the core and understand that I'm a man and will do manly things sometimes and she won't nag me about it. You know, like you and Elik".

Such standards Lumka!

"Thando can be that for you, don't you think? Help her get back to school and she can get a degree then you can tick that 'brain' box and I

think she's beautiful. And you said she's a good lay, so that's sorted", I try to reason with him.

If he becomes serious about Thando then maybe, just maybe, I'll be safe from him. Besides, I would love to see him settle down. He deserves that. He's a great guy.

"Nah. I don't have the energy for that. She's not worth it. She's a good lay and that's about it. You know, a woman should bring more to the table than just a pussy, right? She should be able to hold a decent conversation and have a promising future at least".

Gosh he's so raw. He's always been so I'm not affected.

The wine comes and I only have half a glass. My palate doesn't like it. We're sitting facing each other and every time I catch him looking at me I feel uncomfortable. Why am I nervous? This is Lumka! He would never. He's like a brother to me and I don't know anyone who supports Elik and I like he does.

"So Elik tells me that you want to start a business and he asked that I help you".

"Oh well ya something like that".

"Ok. Sell it to me. What type of business were you thinking?"

Nothing. I shrug my shoulders.

"What? If you have no idea what you want then maybe starting a business isn't for you sisi".

When did he get so harsh though?

"Can I be honest with you bhudi?"

"Of course". Sigh.

"To be honest. I don't want to start anything. It's just not for me and I don't want to pull in the type of hours you guys pull. It's just not me", I say.

"So you ok working for someone else all your life?"

"Well ya. I don't see why not".

People always make it seem like success is starting your own thing! But some of us were never meant to be entrepreneurs. We are ok pulling an 8 to 5 and getting a fixed salary! Some of us are ok with consistency and stability.

"Why? Why would you be ok with that? And Elik made it seem like it's something you wanted, so I'm confused".

"No that's what Elik wants not me. I'm fine with an 8 to 5 really. I'm not trying to be rich".

I want to be a housewife even!

“I see. Besides, Elik is rich enough for the both of you”.

“No man, it’s not even about that. Ok look. I know myself. I’m a lazy hard worker, I want to work smart more than hard. After graduation I want to lecture. That’s what I want. I’ll get to teach, do research, publish and I know I’ll be happy. That way I’ll have time to drop the twins at school in the morning then go to work and knock off at 3 and still make it to their games and be a real mother to them you know”.

I don’t know if he’s convinced.

“Come on bhudi. That’s like the easiest job in the world. You work two hours per day for three days in a week. I’ll get a teaching assistant to help with the marking and when it’s holiday or semester break, I’ll also be on holiday but still get paid. That’s what I want. I want to work but still be a mother to the kids you know”, I explain myself.

He looks at me. I can’t read him.

“How much does a lecturer make?”

“Starting salary will be like R30k - R40k per month before tax”.

“Only? Per month? What can you do with that little money?”

I roll my eyes. I need to bring someone back to reality.

“Bhud Lumka. That’s a shit load of money per month. I told you I’m not trying to be a millionaire here. And that’s what people earn out there and they still live their lives to the fullest. Even Elik was a lecturer at some point!”

“Ya but that was a hobby for him”.

I can’t. He’s only selectively hearing the parts he wants. I don’t know why he’s over here acting like he was born rich!

“That’s what I want and that’s it. End of discussion”.

He laughs at me.

“Ok I’m sorry sisi, I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to be rude. It’s just, you could make 20 times that in one month. But I understand. If that’s what you want then I think you should tell Elik. You deserve everything that makes you happy. Tell him”.

I look away. I’m so annoyed. I really thought he would understand. Elik might understand. He’s nice to me though shame. It gets confusing to people when I show up with these two men that both seem to be taken by me. Some woman at some wine farm in Cape Town once pulled me aside and asked if both of them were my boyfriends and I told her they were both

my husbands. The look on her face was classic!

“Hey. I said I’m sorry. You look cute when you’re upset though. I should upset you more often”.

I look at him and I don’t like the way he’s looking at me. Ok I’m not here to discuss a business I don’t want! I need to ask Lumka about his feelings for me. I need to tread carefully, in case I’m wrong you know. I’m known for my brain and my mouth being out of sync.

“Do you want me?” I just blurt out.

I need a new brain. I don’t process thoughts before voicing them out. I just spit.

“Wait. What?” he almost chokes on his wine. My choice of words though!

“I mean, do you like want me? Like, wanna date me? Be with me, you know? Like, you know, be my boyfriend type of thing?”

Right now will be a very good time to stop talking.

“Fierce. Are you asking me out?”

“What? No”. Oh gods no! Please no! How is this backfiring so quickly?

“Then what is this? Are you having trouble with Elik? What’s this?”

He looks calm but I don’t think his voice is calm. His face never really changes but his eyes speak volumes. Right now I think he’s somewhere between shocked and confused.

“No none of that. I’m just asking. Like you’ve been acting all weird around me”.

“Acting weird? Me? What do you mean?”

Oh Lord give me a new brain! Add a new mouth to that order, please.

“What’s going on Fierce?” he says. Deep breath baby girl. In and out. That’s it. You’ve opened that door now walk through it. Speak.

“Alright look. It’s just you always telling me all the wrong things Elik does behind my back and it always comes across as if you not happy about our relationship, you know”.

I won’t even mention that awkward hug he gave me that night. He laughs a little and gulps down his wine.

“So, from that you concluded that I want you? That I want Elik’s girl? Me?”

I look down. I should’ve never asked.

“I’m sorry. I just I ...”.

“I don’t believe this”.

Oh man. I think I've ruined a good thing between us.

"I'm sorry, I really didn't mean....".

"Ok let me break this down for you Fierce. Elik is my brother. I respect him and he's the closest person to me. For you to think I'd do that to him. Seriously? Is that what you think of me? Really?"

This was a bad idea shame. Can I press rewind please?

"You know many girls have walked in and out of Elik's life. Most of them didn't even last past one night. He didn't give a fuck about any of them. Then he met you and at first I thought you too would be tossed away in no time, but he kept telling me you were the one. I could tell that my boy was pussy whipped so obviously I welcomed you because he loved you and I thought you were a cool chick".

I swallow hard.

"So when you guys broke up and then met in Venice or whatever and did whatever you did he was over the moon, because he was getting his girl back. But you were giving him a hard time, right? Who do you think pushed him to not give up fighting for you? Who do you think forced him to realise that if he loved you as much as he claimed to, he had to get you back? I did that for you and I didn't even know you then! So tell me which part of that says I want you?"

My heart! I have no words. Is it possible that maybe he's being defensive and making me feel bad for noticing his advances? Or was I really imagining things that didn't exist?

"Fierce, you know Elik. You know how he is. He fucks around! Who do you think stops him from picking up girls at clubs and reminds him not to mess up what he has with you? Who do you think stopped him from breaking up with you when he found out about that Nigerian guy? And that other guy? Who do you think made him realise that what you did with that Athenkosi guy was his fault? Who do you think he runs to every time you guys have a fight? I gave up Lindi (his ex) because she betrayed you! I did all that for you and this is what you think of me? What the fuck Fierce?"

Oh Lawd! I told him I'm sorry. Why is he still talking?

I swallow very hard. Lumka has done all this for me? But I don't get why he's so angry. He could have said *'I don't want you. Full stop'*. We would have continued drinking our wine and talking normally. Isn't he overreacting a little? I'm just sitting here and our waiter comes to ask if we still good and Lumka tells him to go away with his hand. He's not done

bashing me! But I said I'm sorry.

"So look sisi. I love you, you know that. And I'll do anything for you, you know that. But that's only cause Elik will do the same for me without hesitation. You're my brother's girl and me and you are cool, or so I thought. I sometimes worry that Elik will destroy you but that doesn't mean I want you for myself. You are innocent and pretty. You are everything to Elik".

I stay mute. What can I say?

"Sometimes I tell you because I assume you already know or I just want to know that you are with him to stay and you'll never walk away no matter what. Secrets always have a way of coming out anyway, wouldn't you want to know everything upfront?"

I really have no words. I feel stupid for asking.

"I'm sorry bhudi. I never should have. I'm so sorry about this".

He has no idea how sorry I am right now. I'm just glad I asked him and didn't tell Elik. This could have been far worse. And I think had a fight broke out among the three of us, Elik and Lumka would have chosen each other over me.

"I'm insulted I should say. Sweetheart, I clean up Elik's fuck ups all the damn time! Do you know how many things he has done that I covered up and made sure you never found out? If I tell you half of it right now you'll be done with him for good this time!" he gulps down more wine.

Ok now he's angry for real.

"So, granted you sexy as fuck and you're a nympho and I hear you screaming down the walls everytime Elik's fucking your brains out, but does that mean I wanna fuck you too? Huh?"

I know it's a question but I think it's rhetorical. So I stay silent and looking down at my almost empty wine glass like a lost cat. Oh dear. I wasn't ready for this at all. Not even a bit. I was never ready. He's never been mad at me. Not even once. He's always nice to me and he's my hideaway when Elik and I fight.

"I need a smoke", he gets up and walks outside.

Perfect Fierce. Just perfect! Did you see how angry he was?

My brain is working hard trying to make sense of things. What things have Elik done that I should never find out about? Do I run after him and apologise? Do I leave him to calm down all on his own? What must happen now? Will he tell Elik? Will Elik be mad at me? Does Lumka hate me now?

Will we ever be the same again? I decide to stay put and wait. I hope he doesn't leave me here. Uber is scarce because of meter taxis. I might have to walk down to the Gautrain station to get an Uber. Good job Fierce! You just had to go and ruin a good thing with your overly active imagination.

When Lumka comes back 20 or so minutes later, he looks more relaxed. I'm still shook. He shredded me to pieces. That's an understatement. He grated me then ground me into a fine powder. That escalated way too quickly. I still want to know the things Elik's done that were covered up. It's really bothering me. And now my only reliable source thinks I'm nuts for accusing him of wanting me. So I doubt he would be forthcoming with information.

"I'm sorry bhudi. I really didn't mean to upset you. It's just, I was confused. I'm truly sorry".

I'll kneel if he wants me to. I'll even buy him a PS chocolate written '*I'm sorry*' if it will make him forgive me. That calm face that I'm used to is not there. He looks pissed. I've never met this Lumka before and I don't know how to interact with him.

"You honestly think I'd hit on you? Don't you know Elik? He would kill me with his bare hands. You know that! And I'm kinda young and still wanna splash my money some more, so no can do", he smiles.

Teeth! Wow. That's a start. He's smiling. Phew! That was a close shave!

"Bhudi, I really hope this doesn't change anything between us. I really love having you in my life. I love you. You've always looked out for me and I should never have thought that. I'm really sorry".

"It's all good Fierce. You caught me off guard that's all. It's just, man, Elik! Man. I'd be dead".

"I didn't tell him or ask him anything. I won't. There's nothing to tell or ask anyways. This was just me being stupid. Please forgive me", I give him puppy eyes. He smiles or did he just blush?

"We good?" I ask.

"Yup! Now let's go".

That's not very convincing. I don't think we're really good. But I'll work at it. He's Elik's right hand and since I'll be marrying Elik, in a way I'll be marrying Lumka too. So being at peace with each other will do us both a lot of good. His phone rings and on the second sentence I already know he's talking to Elik.

“Let’s go. Your man wants me to bring you back”, he says to me.

“Can we get the bill please”, he says to the waiter.

I really wish I hadn’t asked him. We get up to leave.

“So we good?” I ask again.

“Yes baby. We good. Really”.

Baby? Not sisi? I’ll let that slide. I give him a long big hug and I’m relieved when he hugs me back. I just stay there feeling his breath on my neck. He’s such a sweetheart and I was wrong obviously. Silly me. I’m just glad that I still have him and I’ll work hard on repairing our relationship.

“Can we pass by Checkers?” I brush his arm.

“Hay no. I’m not going there”.

“Please, pretty please. I just want something small. We won’t even get in, what I want is right there by the tills”.

He says no and I beg and beg till he sighs and says “Ok fine, let’s go little bully”. I think he’s coming back to me. He wasn’t lying about not going in so I leave him outside and hurry in. I get a chocolate that says ‘*PS: I’M SORRY*’.

“See. That didn’t even take a minute!”

“You were gone a whole 10 minutes! I almost left you”.

Oh well, even by the express till there was a queue. I have no control over that.

“Close your eyes and hold out your hands”.

“Fierce!”

“Just do it”.

He sighs but does. I place the chocolate in his open palms, the words down.

“Now open”.

He opens his eyes, looks at the chocolate and turns it around and just breaks into a smile. He looks at me and back at the chocolate. He stands there looking at it and turning it around in his hands. I’m not sure if he’s smiling because he likes it or because he finds this silly. Is it too cheap for him? Is it too small? He likes white chocolate though and this is it. Why isn’t he saying anything?

“Fierce!” he says looking at me, still playing with the chocolate. I honestly can’t read his face, gosh, this is so frustrating. The day I get superpowers, I’ll make sure to choose mind reading! He hugs me quite tight and keeps me in the hold. I hug him back and rest my face on his chest. I

can feel his heartbeat and I think he has forgiven me.

“You’re special. You know that?” he says when he finally lets me go.

He takes my hand and we walk. I’m glad he forgave me. Chocolate really is a miracle worker. I wish I was a man sometimes. These creatures seem not to get upset for long and treat things that threaten to end the world in my eyes as nothing.

When we get to Morningside he says he’s not staying, he has to go home.

“Look Fierce. I’m sorry if I said anything that offended you. It’s just, you shocked me. Elik loves you and he’s very lucky to have you”.

“I know. I’m sorry too”.

“Forget I said anything. I was wrong”.

I smile. Forget? He thinks I can just delete things from my memory just like that? No. Elik needs to tell me what things he’s done! I find Elik still working. When he works he works.

“You back?” he asks, still looking at his laptop.

“Yes”. Isn’t it obvious? I walk to the bedroom and change into a T-shirt. I hate clothes, it’s really worrying. I go out to the garden and come back. I just can’t stay still. I want to know what Elik did. I’m going crazy over here and he’s working? He has no right to be sitting there in his study while I’m here losing my mind because of him. I go back to the study.

“Elikplim”, I close his laptop. He knows when his full name is called out he’s in trouble. I’m standing with a defensive stance. Legs slightly apart and firmly rooted, hands folded across my chest.

“I’m working baby, you can’t just...”, he turns, probably to yell at me. My face says I’m not here to *just*. It’s about to be a battlefield he must put on his armour quick.

“What’s up?”

“Tell me everything you’ve done. Don’t leave out anything”.

“Everything I’ve done where now?” he looks confused.

“Everywhere! I want to know everything you’ve ever done!”

“You’re not making sense at all. You want to know everything I’ve ever done? From the day I was born?” he looks shocked.

“Oh well ya. That would be a good start! I mean I got all day and night. So start talking”.

I’m dead serious and he’s laughing. He’s really laughing at me! He thinks I’m playing right now?

“From the day I was born? Are you serious? You being silly. I have work to do if you don’t mind”, he opens his laptop.

This man! This one! It’s a matter of time before I kill him. I’m actually getting angry and I’m not exactly sure why. I don’t think my request is practical but how else can I phrase it?

“Fine! Isn’t work is more important than me so go ahead. I’m leaving. I’m going to Cape Town!” I purse my lips.

“Cool. Safe journey”, he says without even looking up at me. Aaaaghrrrrr!!! I get out and bang the door. OK I pulled but these doors don’t bang. They slow down just before they gently close. So infuriating! I go to the bedroom to grab my handbag. I’m not going to lug my suitcase around, I have clothes in Cape Town. I put on a dress, it’s easier to wear and grab my handbag and walk out. I see he thinks I’m joking. I’m going to Cape Town right now. Well if we can call Sandton Cape Town for today. I get an Uber to Sandton city, go to Doppio Zero and order a hot chocolate. I’m back in this Mall. I’m going to sit here and let Elik worry about me. Let’s see how he likes that. An hour later, still no message or call or anything. Maybe I should go back home and take a nap. It’s getting late. I order another hot chocolate. Four hours later and it’s almost 7:30 pm, and I’m tired of saying, “I’m still fine, thanks” to the waiter. I’m not even hungry so I’m just sitting here staring at my phone. Elik calls. About time!

“Where are you?”

“I’m in Cape Town”.

The waiter looks at me funny but he doesn’t know me so I don’t care.

“You really left?”

“I told you I was leaving! Didn’t I?”

He laughs a bit.

“You really need to grow up Fierce! You came home, picked a fight all on your own, got mad all on your own and left the city? Please grow up and get your ass back here tomorrow morning!” he hangs up.

What exactly is wrong with me? Whatever happened to my head? Why am I like this? Maybe I should call him back and say I was joking, I’m not in Cape Town but I’m here around the corner. If I hadn’t burnt bridges with Lumka, I’d be calling him right now. I know he said we’re good but I’m not sure if I can call him to my rescue just yet. Maybe if I make Elik feel bad he will apologise then I’ll forgive him and go home. Let’s try that. I hope he’s online.

'I can't believe you let me just leave like that! You didn't even try to stop me. You so selfish!'

'Not today babe. I have work to do', he replies. '

Oh! So you going to hide behind work instead of working things out? What's wrong with you? We're in this mess because of you', I type furiously.

'What mess?' he replies after 5 minutes.

'You know all you have to do is say sorry. I feel like you don't understand me and I don't know why you're being like this!'

'But I'm not sorry' .

He's driving me nuts. Why is he being so difficult!

'Elikplim Nkrumah, you hurt me. You mean to tell me you don't see that?'

'No I don't', he replies.

This is exhausting! Can he just say sorry already and we end this and I go home. I want to go home now. 10 minutes, he's online and no response.

'So now you're ignoring me?', I type.

*'*Laughing emojis* Is it that time of the month already my love?'*

Gosh. Why do men always think because a woman is in a bad mood it means she's on her period?

*'No it's not! It's you Elik! You're selfish and you don't consider my feelings. You think I care? No I don't so *middle finger emojis x 10*'*

'Now you're just pissing me off. Go to sleep Fierce' .

I feel like pulling out my hair. My next message gets only one tick. Did he block me or did he switch off his phone?

This is not working. They will be closing here soon so I need to think fast. I can't just stroll back into Morningside and be like, "Hey baby. Guess what! I lied. I was in Cape Town! Oh! And sorry for going off at you for no reason. My bad!" That won't work with Elik.

'When you're done with Sandton, get your ass home', a message from Elik comes through.

Flip! I really need to do something about his ability to track me. I got too happy after we made up last time I forgot to fix it. What if I was out cheating? This would be the end of me mos. That's my cue to go home.

I walk through the door and it's dark. I get the lights. Elik texted me 30 minutes ago so he can't be sleeping already. He's not in the kitchen so I check the living room next. It's so dark in here. I get the lights and Elik is sitting on the couch with a glass in his hand and a three-quarter full bottle of

Hennessy in front of him.

“Hey”.

He doesn't respond. I just want to go to bed. I suppose I should apologise but pride won't let me. I want him to apologise! It doesn't make sense at all but that's what I want.

“Elik”. He ignores me.

Him not acknowledging my presence right now is not sitting well with me. I walk over to him and snatch the glass from his hand.

“Give that back”, he says without even looking up to me.

“I'm here. Are you going to say something?”

“Give my drink back Fierce”.

I put the glass away, far from his reach and return to standing in front of him with my arms crossed.

“Go to bed baby girl. We'll talk in the morning. I'm not in the mood for your games”.

I take the bottle of Hennessy.

“I think I'll throw this out on my way to bed”, I grab the bottle and head to the kitchen. Just as I make it to the kitchen he catches up, grabs me by the arm and turns me around. He takes the bottle and puts it aside and pushes me against the counter. Ouch. That hurt a little.

“The fuck is wrong with you? Why are you doing all this?” he says shaking me.

To be honest, I also don't know. Can he please tell me when he solves that puzzle?

“Let go of me. You're hurting me”, I squirm.

He maintains the grip.

“Why are you doing this? What is it? Speak woman!” he shakes me.

I need him to let go of me right now. I reach for a water bottle on the counter and hit him on the head with it. Oh man! It's empty and it's plastic, so damage done is zero. I could have hit him with that Hennessy bottle but I'm not trying to hurt him. I just want to show him that I'm capable of hurting him if he doesn't take his hands off me! Why I'm punishing him I don't know because he didn't do anything shame. It's all me. As the water bottle lands on the floor, he pins my arms to my body, guess to make sure I don't hit him again.

“What's wrong with you?” he yells at me.

He's never hit me before but judging by that look in his eyes right now,

I'm almost certain today is the day I get beaten. I can just feel it. Maybe I should hit him first and run away. I could knee his groin right now but I wouldn't dare do that. I don't want to hurt him really.

"Let me go Elik. I'm leaving!"

He loosens the grip and laughs. That *'I've never seen such'* type of laugh. I storm towards the door. I'm going, I don't know where to but I'll get there.

"Fierce. What the fuck? Where d'you think you going? Can you just stop this nonsense already!" he raises his voice.

Before I can decide on my own whether I want to stop or not, he grabs me and pushes me against the wall.

"Elik", is all I say. I meant to say "Don't hit me" but what if he takes that as a challenge and actually hits me?

Twelve

He tightens his grip on me and pins me to the wall, I can't move.
“Elik please, I'm sorry”.

I have to apologise in case he wants to rearrange my face right now. I'll rather say I'm sorry than continue fighting and wake up with a black eye.

“Why are you doing this? What's that shit you were on about in the afternoon? Why were you lying about being in Cape Town?” he yells at me.

He pushes my body harder towards the wall and brings my chin up with his finger so I'm looking up at him. He looks at me hard and I look back into his eyes. I want to close my eyes but no one wants to get slapped with their eyes closed. I need to see it coming so I can duck maybe. Damn! His eyes! He's upset and I'm scared. He waits for me to answer but I regret to silently inform him that no responses to his questions will be given today or on any date in the future due to the lack of facts in thy own brain. There's no way I'll tell him what Lumka said! Mama didn't raise no fool!

His look has changed. It's like he's not angry but is seeking some sort of understanding. That's strange. He can be angry it's fine, I won't blame him. I've been a pest today. I remember the first time we kissed. He looked at me like this afterwards while I blushed and kept wondering if he would kiss me again.

“I'm sorry”, I say, the words barely audible.

“I don't get it. Why you giving me all this attitude?”

I shrug my shoulders. I solemnly swear not to discuss the Lumka thing. It backfired badly with Lumka and he's by far less dramatic than Elik. Not a risk I'm willing to take. I'll forever hold my peace, thank you very much. He keeps my chin up and keeps staring at me. It's like he lost something in my eyes and he's searching for it. I don't think he's angry anymore. Annoyed maybe, wanting to slap me across the face maybe, but definitely not angry.

I'm still trying to read his face when his mouth comes down on mine, hard and deep and demanding. He just takes. I wasn't expecting that. I'm not really kissing back but I'm not resisting either. His one hand reaches behind me and finds its way under my dress. He grabs my ass so hard I feel a little pain. But he's still kissing me hungrily so the pain and the pleasure are at equilibrium. I push at his shoulders so he can step back but the effort

is wasted. He stays there, pressing me against the hard wall. His other hand finds my breast and cups it and squeezes a little too hard. He kisses me again, harder this time. I'm sure my lower lip will wake up bruised. Is he meaning to hurt or pleasure me? I can't decide. Is this his idea of punishment? In this case I'm going to mess up a lot! I'm starting to enjoy it. Do I respond or do I just stand here and get done? There should be a manual for these kinds of things!

When his tongue finds its way into my mouth, my whole body is like 'Fuck it. Let's do this'. It feels like I'm drinking Hennessy right off his tongue but I don't hate the taste, instead it has me wanting more. He takes each thigh and lifts me up. My legs lock around his waist, my back stays pressed against the wall, my ass stays grabbed hard in his hands and his tongue finds its way back into my mouth.

"I hate you", I whisper when his lips give mine a second break.

It was meant to be a shout but it came out way too weak. He gives me that 'tell me something I don't know' look. He looks me in the eye and bites his lower lip in a seductive way and has on something like a smile. It can be interpreted as he wants to fuck me right here right now but it could also be he's thinking where to hide my body after he kills me. He kind of was upset a minute ago.

"You're so sexy, you know that?"

His voice sounds deeper and he's so close I can feel his breath on my face.

"So sexy". He lets my legs slide down till I find my footing. Then he turns me around so my face kisses the wall. I let out a supposed to be ouch but it escapes my lips as a moan. He stands there behind me, pushing me into the wall and his hand closes around my throat, choking me and forcing my neck to lean back.

"What's wrong with you? Why are you acting up?"

Seriously Elik? How am I expected to respond with my throat choked? I push my ass back and grind on him then bring his free hand to my breast. That deep breath I hear is more like it. Let's just breathe and stop asking each other questions. He chokes me harder and my hands claw at his, trying to loosen the grip on my neck. I seriously can't breathe! After a second or ten of me gasping for air, he lets me go and turns me around. I look at him with a '*what the hell?*' eye.

"There's a good girl".

He pulls me into his arms. I silently hope this is not a closing hug. Are we done already? No ways.

“I hate you”. The tone suggests that I love him though.

“Hate me later. For now, let me eat that pussy”.

He holds me so tight, I’m blushing like a maid. He lifts me off my feet and carries me to the dining table. A vase goes splattering on the floor as I take its place. He finds the zip behind my dress and yanks it down so hard I think it broke. My legs are dangling off the table and he’s standing in between them, keeping my beginning-to-shake knees apart. The top of my dress goes down exposing my twins.

“Damn ma”.

I shiver a bit and cover them but he pushes my hands away and gives each one a long kiss. I hoist myself up towards him. I want to hold him and tell him I’m sorry and I’ll be a good girl from now on. I even want to tell him everything about Lumka.

He pushes me back down. I hate and love his strength. Damn it. His one hand stays pushing me down while the other tries to tug the rest of the dress off me. It doesn’t work so he has to get me off the table and I step out of my dress.

“What’s wrong? Hmm? Talk to me”.

“Nothing”.

“So why are you acting up?” He’s too calm.

I look down. I also don’t know.

“You’re way too cute for drama ma... Tell me what you want”.

I look up at him and blink fast, flapping my eyelashes like a doll. He did say I’m cute after all.

“I want you to fuck me”, I whisper.

“I didn’t get that”, he says. He did!

I repeat. Gods he’s sexy!

“You’re the only girl that can make me angry and horny at the same time”.

I don’t remember why I was mad. If there was a reason in the first place. He grabs me a bit too hard and draws me in for another kiss that leaves me panting. He smells of alcohol but when I bury my face in his chest, the masculine scent of his perfume hypnotises me.

Damn, he’s got this foreplay thing under control! He’s grabbing me like he wants to hurt me but he keeps kissing me like he never wants to let me

go. When he rips off my panties, I make a decision to stop wearing lace or else I'll run out of underwear! I resist a bit when he picks me up and puts me back on the table. I hold on to him as he nibbles my earlobe

“I won't hurt you. Trust me”.

I relax and lie there spread eagle. He takes off his T-shirt and I just watch. He's too slow! We are in a state of emergency here! I feel a deep rooted need to run my fingers over his chest but he tells me to 'STAY' when I try to get up. He pulls a chair and sits right there with my pussy spread out for him. I never get used to the different feelings that run through me each time his set of lips meet my other set of lips. He's kissing. He's licking. He's sucking. He's nibbling. He's smooching. He's plain right eating me up like ice cream. I really must upset him more often. I could live with being eaten like groceries every day.

“I love you”.

I almost say 'I love you too' but I realise he might not be talking to me as such, so instead, I gasp for air and moan his name. I close my eyes and visualise what he's doing to me right now. The mental picture alone has me almost squirting in his mouth. As his tongue goes in deeper, I can't hold back anymore. I wrap my legs around his head forcing him to stay there. He pulls my legs apart and stops. Great! Now I'm feeling like that moment when you want to sneeze and you can feel it coming but the sneeze just doesn't get there. He pulls me up and my legs go around his waist and our eyes are level. It's fine, I'll forgive him.

“Wanna taste yourself?”

He pushes two fingers into me and brings them up to my lips to lick. Then he kisses me. My hands reach down for his sweatpants so I can pull them down.

“No, not yet. I'm only getting started with you”, he says.

“I just wanna...”, I start but he brings his index finger to my lips.

“You've been a bitch today so you have no right to talk”, he says into my ear. Damn his voice.

“Lie back and spread eagle”.

His middle finger finds its way into me and moves in and out and up and down and round and round till he finds the spot he's looking for. As he rubs and flicks I can feel that 'sneeze' coming back. He presses down my pubic bone with one hand with his thumb pressing down on my clit. It's like he's proving a point to me. I feel an intense wave of energy running through my

entire body, my toes curl, my back shoots upwards, my legs tremble and I scream out 'Elik'. I'm raining down on him.

"Don't move", he says as he steps back and out of his clothes. I wasn't going to move. I'm still trembling and trying to recover from that. I turn my head to the side and watch him. When he's looking like that, how can I not want? My eyes just lust over him and I bite my lower lip. I just want to get off this table and worship him with my mouth and thank him but he said I shouldn't move. He comes back and pulls me over the edge and pushes my back back down on the table, leaving my ass hanging in the air.

"I'm so wet", I whisper, for no reason at all.

"I know. I love it".

Before I know it, he's rammed all of him deep into me. I gasp and squeal in shock at the sudden intrusion. He went too deep too quickly, I'm sure he hit something. He stays there kneading my breasts as he waits for my body to acclimatize to him. He's such a lover.

"Elik".

My vocabulary always gets limited when I'm naked. I can't wait anymore.

"Yes baby".

"Fuck me". He looks down at me.

"Please". I hope he's not gonna make me beg.

He leans over me and I sink back deeper on my back and he sinks deeper into me. He thrusts hard and my waist hits the edge of the table. That really hurt. I let out an ouch. He must have heard that because his lips close on my nipple as he repositions me. The thread of pain from my back and the pleasure running all the way from my nipples all the way to down there have me confused and not knowing whether to cry or scream or just moan and hold his head down with both hands.

"I love you".

"I love you more", he says.

I sit up and lock my legs around his waist. He lifts me off the table holding my ass in his hands for balance and me holding onto him with my arms around his neck. We stand there in silence. I can feel him throbbing deep inside me. That plus his heavy breathing on my neck has me going gaga!

"You're the best thing that ever happened to me", he says.

I tighten my hold around his neck in response. When he starts making

me bounce on him, I scream out. I'm not even moaning anymore. I'm crying and groaning and whimpering and shuddering. When he hits the right spot it's so intense I want it to stop but he doesn't stop. An intense wave rolls throughout me, unlocking feelings of pleasure on its way. He doesn't stop until I'm splashing and blasting all over his dick and my inner muscles are clenching and twitching and my legs are shaking and I'm screaming my voice away. I feel done. Completely finished. It's been two already and I'm drained and wobbly. And my heart rate still needs to come down.

"I'm not yet done with you baby girl". I'm not quite sure I can take anymore.

He carries me onto the couch and lays me down on my back and gently pushes my thigh aside with his knee and finds himself back into me. It's not hard really, I'm all wetness.

"I love you", he whispers as he starts moving.

"I love you too". I really do, with all my heart, body, mind and soul. Now he's just loving me. I'm back to the start line but my body is responding pleasantly. I close my eyes and listen to the sensation. His hands are everywhere, one moment grabbing my thigh, the next squeezing my boobs, the next behind my neck, the next choking my neck. I'm all his and I want to be all his. At least not much is required of me right now. I hold on to his back and pick up his rhythm so I can go with the flow.

"Turn over", he whispers and gives me a moment to flip over. He pulls me to the edge of the couch and I get into formation. My eye catches his and I say a silent 'I love you'. As my legs rise and flatten down towards my head, I appreciate not having eaten earlier. He gently slides back in and his mouth closes around my nipple. When he's all the way in, his hands reach under me and grab my ass, while his mouth closes on mine, swallowing my moans. The thrusts that follow are thorough and ruthless and unforgiving. My moans grow louder and louder.

"I'm gonna cum", I scream out in bouts.

"Cum with me baby", he says.

My fingers dig harder into his back and our bodies melt together. He groans, I scream, we moan and our hands dig into each other's skin. We crash and share our ecstasy. I never wanna let him go, ever. I may have 99 problems with him but sex is not one of them. And those 99 will be solved with me on my back and my legs flying in the air!

The only sound in the room is our deep breathing and panting. When he finally pulls out, leaving me a wet mess, he rolls off and holds me in his arms.

“Look at me”. I obey.

I know I look innocent and vulnerable right now curled up into him with my thigh in between his and my head resting on his arm.

“You alright?” I nod. I’m perfect. I just can’t remember how to talk right now. He kisses me on the forehead and intertwines the free fingers of his with mine.

“You are everything to me”, he says. I smile at him. He’s too much.

“I can’t wait to wife you”.

I give him a brief kiss on his lips. Speech still hasn’t returned.

“I love you, with everything I am and everything I have. I’ll always love you”, he pulls me in for a tight hug.

“I love you too”, and I mean it.

He is my heartbeat. I can’t imagine a me without him. I just wouldn’t be whole. We stay there a while cuddling. We just exchanged our energies in the wettest of ways and we need a moment of silence to realign our chakras.

“You said you were leaving earlier. You can go now. You’re dismissed”, he says, gently caressing my back. I can’t help but laugh! Gosh he’s so silly!

What was I mad at him for by the way?

Thirteen

I have to get to Cape Town. Graduation is around the corner and I don't even have a dress. And lately I haven't been a good stepmother to the twins. Those boys are going to grow up messed up shame. What with their parents never around! They will have abandonment issues. Elik can't take me to the airport because: work. My flight is at 11 am and I wake up at 10. There's no way I will make it to the airport on time. I might make it if I just get up and put on clothes without bathing. But after last night and this morning, that would be very disrespectful to the public. I change my flight to 8:30 pm and pay the price difference. No more going to Cape Town now.

After last night, I just smile when I think of Elik. Damn him for being so good. I can't leave without one last ride. So waking up late could just be my blessing in disguise. I have all day to come up with a plan to blow his mind away and uncle Google has all the answers. I don't like all the ideas that come up until I settle for one. I forget one important thing: Bad Luck is my middle name!

I prepare a turmeric, yoghurt and honey face mask and then shave my legs. I waxed a few days back so I'm sorted down there. I fill up the tub and throw in bath salts. I soak in and have a cup of cucumber, ginger, mint and lemon infused water to detox. I'm quite sore from last night and I need to be unsore by the time he gets home. When I step out of the bathroom I see missed calls then a message from Elik.

*'Safe flight angel. Call when you land. Thank you for last night *wink* Can't wait to have you again. Love you'*

He really is precious. I should be the one thanking him. I only put in 10% of the work and he did the rest. He won't have to wait long though. I go through my lingerie and find a pink set. I pair it up with suspenders and the highest heels I have. I do my makeup and brush my hair. When I'm done and look like something dragged from a gentleman's club, I realise I don't know how long exactly I have to wait for him to come home. He might only be coming home in the evening, if he comes at all. I mean, the cat (me) is away so technically the mouse (him) can bring the cheese (girl) home and feast in peace. That thought alone! I know I've made peace with his questionable morals but it doesn't mean it doesn't hurt when it happens. It leaves me feeling insecure and inadequate. It's just a sucky feeling.

It's past 12 noon when I hear a car pull up in the driveway. I quickly run to turn the key on the door so no one can open from the outside. Just my luck. He came home. The universe doesn't hate me as much as I think after all! I don't care what he's coming home for, I'm just grateful that he did and all this hard work I put in dolling myself up doesn't have to go to waste. I go back to and spray on a bit of perfume then run to the door again. I'm so excited and all stomach in, chest out. He will like this. He likes anything written 'sex' on it! I can tell someone's trying the key. I smile to myself just imagining the look on his face when I open the door and he sees me. I stand there popping my hip to one side and smiling like I'm in a Colgate advert. I learn the meaning of the phrase, *'Don't try everything you see on TV!'*

"Bab...y", my words dry out of my mouth.

I wasn't prepared at all. Never ready. Not even one bit. Four men in suits stand staring at me. Lumka, Clive, the accountant and Elik. My mouth opens and closes like a fish because I'm practically naked here. Elik steps in and closes the door, shutting his people outside.

"Baby!" he looks at me.

This is the most embarrassing thing ever.

"I wanted to surprise you. I didn't know you'd be bringing people", I want to cry.

"It's ok baby", he reassures me.

I look down. I want to get off these heels now.

"Don't worry about those guys. They didn't see anything".

How old am I? 5? I saw how their jaws dropped at having an 85% naked girl open the door for them.

"Why are you not on your way to Cape Town? ... You know what, go to the bedroom, I'll come to you", he gives me a brief kiss.

I scurry away. I'm so embarrassed I want to crawl under the bed and hide. I put on a gown, take my laptop and call Kofi. I need to speak to someone and since my social circle is extremely limited I bother my brother in law quite a lot. Elik mentioned that when Kofi finishes his Masters, which is very soon, he'll buy him a car. So maybe I'll talk to him about that. We greet and chit chat. I'm just happy he's coming home. I can't wait.

"Details please. Spill", I sit comfortably.

Who says guys don't? It's a lie! He tells me about a girl he met while out dancing, who's supposedly an undergrad at his university. He says things went great and he smashed but he sneaked out of the girl's apartment

this morning while she was still sleeping. Bad Kofi! Bad! I don't know why I'm listening to him instead of telling him to stop following in his brother's footsteps!

"Anyways, I'm mad at you Kofi!" I make an angry face.

"What did I do now?"

"Why didn't you tell me about the new baby? I was the last to find out!" I look fake pissed.

"Elik made me swear not to tell you. And I know better than to cross him", he says looking down.

Ooo kay. Why wouldn't I be told about a car? I'm a bit confused.

"He told me the other day and I've been meaning to shout at you for not telling me in the first place".

"He really told you? How are you taking it?"

He's losing me fast here. How do I feel about his brother getting him a car? It has nothing to do with me.

"I don't have a problem with it".

He sighs deeply.

"You're a special breed Fierce! They don't make them like you anymore. If I was a girl, I don't think I would be ok with my man having a baby with another woman. You realise you back to sharing full time, right? He's been rolling with that girl for many years now! But at least you'll be the Main this time".

My eyes pop open. What girl?

"What baby?"

"Elik's new child mos, with that girl, what's her face? She's still pregnant, right?" he says. "Elik has a child on the way? What? How? When? With who?"

"But you asked about the new baby, so I thought...".

"I meant the car! What's this about Elik having a child? Tell me".

"Yhooooo! Shiiiiit!" he hangs up.

Elik! What have you done this time? Old me would storm in there, meeting or not, and ask him about this, but new me is grown. New me waits and thinks and goes crazy all by herself. Elik got someone pregnant? So, you mean to tell me this whole time, I've been acting like I'm the queen of the Nkrumah kingdom yet he's cheating on me? Wait, what if he's not cheating on me but is cheating on her with me? What if I'm the side piece? But he's always assuring me he's done with that life. But again, we all

know, you can only keep a man that wants to be kept. You can do it all, wash dishes inside out, clean till your knees are black, cook like you're preparing a feast for a king, respect him and even do backflips and somersaults in bed. If he wants to leave, he will leave. But he hasn't left and I was with him all the time for 2 weeks straight. Where was this other woman then? Kofi must have been bluffing. No way Elik can do this to me. I'm pretty sure Komla felt this way the day she found out about me.

But if it's true then the scripture that says *'You can feed a dog sausages and croissants and yet still find it outside looking for leftovers in the bin'* has been fulfilled. I'm hurting myself with my thoughts but my mind just won't quieten. I curl up into a ball and lie there hugging a pillow and convincing myself that I didn't hear right. I know the new Elik and there's no way he would do this to me. He loves me. I won't assume and I won't jump to conclusions. I'll wait for him to tell me all this is nonsense. The meeting goes on forever and when the guys leave, Elik pops in to say he's leaving too. I tell him my flight is at 8:30 and he says he'll be home before then. I have to wait some more.

It's 5 pm and he's still not home and I've been blowing up his phone but he hasn't called back. I'm not leaving without answers so might as well prepare to miss this flight as well. I find a pair of shorts and a tanktop and get into bed. My heart has been heavy all day and Kofi won't take my calls. He gets home at 7 and he brought me a box of chocolates. At a different time, this could have been a sweet gesture but I'm agitated and worked up, I don't appreciate it. He 'wakes' me up ever so gently and asks about my day and volunteers information about his.

"Aren't you going to be late for your flight? I thought I'd find you ready and take you to the airport".

I get up and go to the bathroom to look at myself in the mirror. I look into my own eyes and it's like I'm going to cry. I look so sad, it's sad. I hope with everything in me that there's no child anywhere.

"Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"That you're having a child with some woman".

"Who told you that?"

"It doesn't matter. Is it true?"

He sits on the bed and I stand in front of him, forcing him to look at me. He can't look me in the eye and there I have my answer. So, it is true! I feel

like my whole world came tumbling down.

“Why?” I don’t understand at all.

“Why what?”

“Why would you do this?”

“Let’s talk about this in a civilised way”.

“So, it’s true?” I don’t believe this.

“It was a mistake”.

Wow! So he won’t even deny it? I move towards the wall and use it for support as I sink down to the floor opposite him. Just when our life had become normal and drama was behind us. He just had to.

“When?”

“After the last time we got back from Ghana”.

He even remembers when! Oh my gosh!

“Where was I?”

“Cape Town”.

“Why?” Maybe if he tells me a reason I might understand because right now, I don’t get it. Tears are already starting to burn my eyes as I look at him sitting there looking all innocent and hanging his head down. My heart is shattering slowly but surely and the lump in my throat is growing.

“Why Elik?” I ask again in case he didn’t hear me the first time.

“I was in a bad place baby. The whole thing with Kofi’s mother was killing me”.

“You could have come to me baby. I was there. You could have called me and told me you were not ok. You know I would have been on the next flight here. You know I would have taken care of you”.

“I know”.

“I was there. I’ve always been there. That whole thing with your mother, I was right there with you baby. I was right there in Ghana, remember? From the beginning of it. I drove all that way to Cape Coast with you, remember? It was my arms that held you when you cried baby. I was there! When we went again, you left me alone in that hotel and went out and found yourself someone for the night, remember? So how could you not been able to call me?” My tears are everywhere now.

“I needed to talk to someone and she was there and things happened”.

That sentence just pierced my heart. He can’t talk to me anymore? I see what happened here. I got promoted to Komla and this mystery woman got promoted to Fierce so he went to her for talking. That just hurts. I always

thought he needed me. Only me.

“I’m sorry baby. I can explain really. It’s complicated”.

“Why didn’t you tell me then?” I yell at him. He keeps quiet.

“I was pregnant Elik! Pregnant and taking care of your children in Cape Town! And you were down here getting another girl pregnant?” I yell some more.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Phew! Tears won’t get you answers.

“So she’s pregnant?” He nods.

“And when the baby is born, what then?” He shrugs his shoulders.

All I can think about right now is my own failed pregnancies. Now another girl is going to give him something I’ve been failing to. This time he’s torn my heart into shreds. I can turn a blind eye to just cheating but to a child I can’t.

“How could you do this to us baby? We were doing so well and now look at us”.

He looks down and stays quiet.

“I already had some ideas for our wedding”.

“We can make it through still. We can work through this”.

“How?”

“You’re with me and she’s my problem not yours. You don’t have to deal with her. I’ll protect both of you from each other”.

Oh no he didn’t! He cares about her! I can feel the throne shifting beneath me. A kingdom can’t have two queens.

“What am I supposed to do now? What do you expect me to do?”

“You don’t have to do anything. I’ll take care of you both”.

He says that like it’s the most natural thing on earth. I know I only have myself to blame. I bought the dream when he sold it to me. I should have left him the night I saw that video of his wedding! He expects me to stay? Really?

“First you married Komla and made children with her. I take care of those children. My own children died Elik. Three of them! All dead! Now you want me to stay with you and watch you raise a child with some girl?” I swear I’ve never cried so much. It’s a miracle that I’m still talking.

“I’m sorry”.

“I know you are. You always are”, I’m on my knees now. Sitting wasn’t working anymore. I get up and walk towards the door. He stands and blocks my way.

“I love you Fierce. I’m really sorry that you had to find out this way. Please my love, stand with me through this”.

So he’s not sorry he did it, he’s just sorry I found out ‘this’ way? Awesome.

“I love you too. I love you so much and look at what that love has done to me. I love you Elik, so much I gave up everything I believed in and fought to be with you. Even when everyone thought I was stupid for being with you, I stayed. Because I loved you and I thought you loved me too. I won’t stay this time. I can’t”.

“Come on baby. Don’t do that. I need you”.

“I know you need me. But if you love me like you claim to, then please let me be. Let me go”.

“I’m really sorry baby. I promise. I’ll do anything. Name it and I’ll do it”.

“I don’t want anything. Please, let me go”.

“I’m not going to leave you and be with her”.

He sounds desperate but it’s a little too late. I’ll be a fool to stay this time.

“But you have to Elik. She’s the mother of your child now. You grew up without a father. You know what that’s like. Don’t do that to your child. Be with her it’s all good but I won’t stand by and watch”.

I’ve been talking too much but I really need to let this out. He knows I’m saying ‘he has to be with her’ but I don’t mean it, right?

“Of course I’ll be with her, but I’ll be with you too”.

I swear he was born just to hurt me. I can almost hear Komla laughing at me! I’ve heard of people saying karma this, karma that. I never thought that karma would ever get me!

“I forgive many things you do baby but this one, I don’t see how I’ll be able to. I don’t deserve this baby. All I ever do is be there for you, love you and try and make you happy! Hell! I was half naked in the afternoon in front of your friends because I wanted to do something that would make you happy. You are my priority always but I’m just an option to you. Clearly, I’m not enough!”

“Come on Fierce. I love you. I just like her and I can’t abandon her now when she’s carrying my child”. His words keep hurting me more. I need to walk away.

“I can’t lie to you. I won’t stick around and watch another woman have

your baby. I had two miscarriages. Have you forgotten? Have you forgotten what that did to me? I could have had your children. I wanted that more than anything. So, I'm sorry but I won't stick around and watch another girl do just that".

"Give me a minute to explain. Sit down and listen".

"No", I try to push my way through.

"I'm not asking you. Sit down!" he commands.

I don't want to sit because of his tone but I guess it won't hurt. He sighs like five times.

"Ok look. I know you think I lied to you this whole time. I didn't. I just withheld the truth. Huge difference. And I did that for you baby girl. To protect you! Let me tell you the truth now. She's pregnant and I'm sorry but I can't abandon her. But that doesn't mean I'll abandon you, don't get that twisted. I just need to strike a balance with the both of you. You are my girl baby and she's carrying my child. Both of you are mine now".

I blink fast. What the hell? Both of us are his? Who is he, claiming humans for himself? He thinks he's a god? He doesn't look like he's aware that he said something wrong though.

"Who's she?"

"Mbali", he drops his voice and looks down.

If I thought I felt pain before it was nothing compared to what I feel when he drops that bomb on me. Mbali. So he's been keeping Mbali for almost as long as he kept me? My arch-enemy? Ya ne.

"Mbali! Of all people. Mbali?"

So from Komla's time, Mbali never really left? We were in a love rectangle that whole time that got reduced to a triangle? It hurts even harder because it's her. I can almost see her pretty face in my head. I hate her and he knows it!

"I know it's hard to understand baby but please understand. I have to do right by her as well".

"Do you love her?" My poor voice is disappearing fast. He looks down and bites his lip.

"Elik. I asked you a question".

"I don't know... But I know I love you", he quickly adds.

What a wow! I don't know why Komla keeps crossing my mind every time he speaks. Is this how she felt? If it is then I wish I could call her right now and apologise. No one deserves to feel so much pain.

“Mbali. It just had to be her. What did I ever do to you Elik to deserve this?” I bury my face in my hands. I don’t believe this.

“I can explain baby. It’s not you at all. It’s just Mbali gets me when you don’t. She’s, she’s different”.

I cannot believe what I’m hearing right now. I am different! Isn’t that why he chose me? Because I’m different? That’s what he used to say. Now he’s telling me she’s different too! I feel the crown slide off my head. I’ve been dethroned. Just like that. I feel like I’m going to have an asthma attack and fits and a stroke all at the same time. I can see clearly now. I lied to myself. I’m not his alpha and omega till kingdom come. I’ve always been a side that grew a big head and thought the ring on her finger meant something.

“I need to use the bathroom”. He kisses me on the forehead one more time and lets me go. I reach for my phone on the bed and go to the bathroom, lock the door and sink onto the floor.

Lumka tried to warn me and he tried to save me. I should have listened. I need to get out of this house. I hate how hearing his voice on the other side of the door is making me feel. It’s like a stab through my heart. I rub tears from my eyes and open Uber and request a car. It says 5 minutes away. That gives me some time. I switch off my phone and put it in a box in the cupboard where no one will look for it. I can’t take it with me and get tracked and I can’t take the car as well and get tracked. I’m wearing small shorts and it’s probably cold outside but who cares. My heart is sore, what is a little cold? I open the door and push past Elik. He grabs me and begs me to listen but no can do.

“Come on baby. Ok, I’m sorry. Let’s talk about this and resolve it. Please ma”, he says. I look at him through my glassy eyes. He holds my arms a bit too tight. “I can’t lose you. I won’t! You’re mine Fierce”, he says. Aren’t we too entitled! I actually smile at him. A ‘you are so lost, you can’t be saved’ smile.

“I’m sorry baby. I can’t talk right now. I want to go outside for some fresh air. Please don’t follow me. I want to be alone”.

Being polite is the only way I will be able to get him to listen and not follow me. If I make him believe I’m ok with this, then he will let me go outside alone. He lets me go. He follows me until the kitchen then stands there against the wall looking defeated. My taxi is outside already! Five minutes is short these days.

The car stops outside a house I know all too well. I stand there ringing the bell and hoping someone is in there. I feel like crying so bad and I'm starting to feel cold. The gate opens eventually and I get in, hugging myself to keep the cold out. The door is already open and Lumka is standing there looking shocked to see me.

"Fierce? What's up? Where's Elik?"

I mean to tell him but the tears just start coming.

"He...he...he...", I can't speak right now.

"It's ok sisi. Give me a hug".

I throw myself into his arms and he holds me and tries to calm me down.

"It's Elik isn't it? He did this to you, didn't he?"

I nod.

"Bastard!"

A bit too harsh considering that's his best friend. No? When I calm down he leads me indoors and sits me on the couch. He disappears and comes back with a sweater and a blanket. Such a life saver! He's treating me like a child.

"Let me quickly call Thando and tell her I won't be coming to fetch her anymore". I'll appreciate that.

"You want coffee?" he asks.

"Do you have wine?"

"I only have dry. You only take sweet".

"Bring the dry".

He makes the call and brings the wine and two glasses. It tastes bad but it's warming me up from the inside out. He looks cold so I tell him to come and share the blanket.

"What happened?"

"Elik is having a baby with Mbali".

"He told you?" sounding shocked.

"No, he didn't. I found out my own way". I close my eyes so I don't really taste the wine.

"I'm sorry".

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't my place to".

"Does he love her?"

Maybe if he says he doesn't the pain will reduce.

“I don’t know. He said he didn’t when I asked him last time. But he’s been on and off with her for many years now, so I don’t know”, he says. ‘Just like me’, I add in my head.

“That last trip to Zambia we made. We weren’t going to Zambia. We went to pay damages at Mbali’s home”.

Wow! While I was busy babysitting his children, my man was paying damages for another woman. It just keeps getting worse!

“Does he love me Lumka?” For the first time I forget to call him bhudi.

“He does. But nawe all you do is cry and forgive, cry and forgive, so ya”.

So I’m to blame for this? I’ll have another glass.

“Why do you do this to yourself Fierce?” he asks, shifting to face me. I shrug my shoulders.

“Is it the money? Is it because he was your first? Does he put you down that good you can’t leave him? What is it?”

“It’s none of that. I love him, sometimes I don’t even know why myself”.

“So you’re going to forgive him for this?”

“No. I can’t. I’m done this time”.

He laughs. He doesn’t believe me?

“Let Elik walk through that door right now and I bet you, in 30 seconds you’ll be melting in his arms! What is it about him? Do you know how many girls he’s slept with since you two have been engaged?”

“I don’t want to know. Please”.

I’m already struggling with this pain, I can’t afford to accommodate anymore.

“Fierce, all I’m saying is you’re gorgeous. You deserve a guy that will see your worth, that will treat you like a queen all the time, that will never hurt you. You know. Don’t worry about money. You’ll be making your own soon and besides, Elik isn’t the only person with a bank account! You deserve a guy that will realise what a gem he has in you”. I look at him.

“I deserve you? Is that what you mean?”

He looks down but neither admits nor denies. We finish the bottle and he goes for another one. Precious Lumka. Then I start crying and telling him how horrible Elik is. I’m so hysterical, he has to move closer to me and hold me. His friend really hurt me good this time. I calm down eventually.

“Elik is asking if I’ve heard from you. What should I say?” he asks

looking at his phone.

“Tell him, you haven’t heard from me. You didn’t see me. Tell him you don’t even know me”, I lean in on him. I pull the blanket over my head.

“Do you see me? Can you see me?” I ask from under the blanket. He pulls the blanket off my head and just smiles at me.

“You’re so sweet”.

“So, in the afternoon you guys saw me?” I laugh hard.

“Of course. Sizzling. How Elik goes and cheats on that makes no sense”.

I laugh. Aren’t he full of compliments today!

“You’re drunk. Let me get you a bottle of water”.

“I’m not drunk. Not even. See”. I stand up and try to stand on one foot. I fall back on the couch laughing. I’m so drunk! I go back to being emotional and complaining about Elik then recover and go back to laughing.

“That’s enough wine for you”.

He takes the bottle away when I try to reach for it. I get up and reach for the bottle onto him. It suddenly looks like a good idea to sit on top of him.

“You have nice lips”. He does. It’s an inappropriate comment to make but blame it on the alcohol. Maybe if I kiss him, I’ll feel better. I kiss him a little.

“Fierce no”. But the way he said no sounded more like a yes kind of no. I like a challenge so I take this as a game and keep trying to kiss him.

“Let’s get you to bed. You’re drunk”.

He leads laughing me all the way to the guest bedroom.

“Will you sleep with me? Not sleep with me sleep with me, silly! But sleep with me, you know”, I giggle. Alcohol is really bad for my health.

“I’ll bring you water and you’ll feel better in the morning”.

“Please don’t leave me. I don’t want to be alone”.

“I’ll get you that water then I’ll sit with you till you fall asleep. Alright?”

I feel better and more together by the time he comes back.

“Was Elik serious about marrying me?”

“Ya he was. Elik will never let you go, you realise that, right? To him, you’re his and no one else should ever have you. Do you understand what that means?”

“He’s crazy! I’m done with him! He can go to hell!”

“You always knew what kind of guy he was but you stayed with him

anyway. He's my friend yes but even I know he's a jerk".

"He really hurt me this time. I never thought he would ever do this to me".

"And yet you'll be waking up under him very soon", he says. "No! What? Never again!"

"Yea right. I know you're hurting right now but you and Elik will work this out. We all know that".

"I told you I don't want him anymore. I'm done. Done! Capital letter D!"

"You tried to warn me. I didn't listen. Why didn't you just tell me all this? I could have left a while ago".

I'm still making sense!

"Because at the end of the day Elik is my brother and I told him I wouldn't tell so I couldn't!"

Bro code seriously?

I stand up and balance on him when I almost fall. I land on his lap. I force myself on him and hug him the way I hug Elik when he's sitting. Legs around his waist and hands around his neck. When he hugs me back, his hands under the clothes, holding on to my bare back, I know I'm in the right path.

"I'm so hurt". I hold on to him and he holds me back.

"I know. I'm sorry. You honestly don't deserve this. Sleep, you'll feel better in the morning", he stands up with me and lays me on the bed. I pull him down and he lands on top of me.

"Fierce".

Not in a bad tone. Maybe annoyed, I don't know. He looks down at me.

"You're gorgeous. You can have any man you want. Know your worth", he says, balancing himself on his elbow. He just looks like my next mistake right now. I pull his head down and kiss him. He resists a little but he kisses me back. He kisses me some more. Next thing his hoodie I'm wearing comes off and it takes the tank top off with it. I'm left with that bra he saw me wearing in the afternoon. His hands are all over me and I'm not even thinking. He kisses me some more and I'm getting lost in him. His one hand on kneading my breast and the other disappearing into my panties. He just works at it and I just receive and take all the pleasure he's giving with closed eyes. He kisses me harder and I reach my climax and I moan "Elik!"

He pulls his hand out as I convulse in his arms still. That felt very

different. He pushes me back onto the bed and moves away from me. Why is he pushing me away? He wants I know, he's been poking me through his jeans!

"We can't do this Fierce. It's Elik you love. We can't do this to Elik".

"I don't care about Elik".

"I like you, a lot, way more than I should, but you belong to Elik and that's that. I can't cross that line". He gets off me.

Just great. Aren't we all loyal to this Elik! He rules all of us and we must just bow down and sing praises of him. Such a jerk! Why isn't Lunka drunk? We were both drinking!

"Don't you want me?" I take off my bra. Maybe he needs convincing.

He looks for a very long time like he's debating with himself. His one hand follows his eyes and lands on one of them and he pulls me for a kiss.

"No Fierce, we can't", he says after a moment. He pulls a pillow and puts it over my chest! Seriously?

"I want you sweetheart. But not like this. You're drunk! And let's be brutally honest, you're going to wake up regretting this and run to Elik and tell him. He will forgive you maybe, but me, he'll never forgive. That will be the end of a very long friendship and business partnership. I can't have that".

Oh brother! I roll my eyes but hold the pillow, covering myself. I just got rejected.

"What if I don't tell?"

"Still. You know I like you and I would drop Thando, or any girl for that matter, in a heartbeat for you. But you don't love me, you love Elik. You hate him right now but that's who you love".

Oh man! How many times did I tell him I'm done with Elik! Is he deaf?

"Put on your clothes. Elik will come and fetch you in a bit".

"What? No! Don't tell him I'm here! I don't want to see him!"

"You're probably going to hate me for calling him now. But I know you'll understand when you sober up. I won't be able to resist you all night so it's best he comes and takes you. It's for the best. For everyone".

I roll my eyes at him. He's such a party pooper! I put on my bra and top. His loss! The hoodie suddenly looks too complicated to wear so I leave it alone. I lie down and curl up.

He sends a message. Now I know it's to Elik. His phone rings immediately after.

“Ya man, she’s here. She’s sleeping”.

“She’s been drinking”.

“Na, she was hysterical when she got here but she’s alright now. She’s sleeping”.

“Sure. See you in a bit”.

“You sleeping?” he asks, sitting next to my head. I remain quiet. I’m no longer talking to him. He called Elik on me!

“You’re a special girl Fierce. I know I shouldn’t say this but there’s times I wish you were mine. I would treat you so much better. You deserve so much better”.

He knows I’m not sleeping, right? I can hear him.

“I’m sorry I told Elik you are here. It’s for the best believe me”.

He kisses me on the cheek and leaves the room. I don’t care about anything anymore, I just want to sleep. No one loves me.

I pass out eventually and the next time I wake up it’s Elik’s voice talking. He shakes me till I open my eyes.

“Let’s go home baby”.

My head hurts. Why did he wake me! I squint my eyes and see Lumka standing by the door.

“I’ll take her home, it’s all good”, Elik says waking me up.

“I’m not going anywhere with you”, I snap. I may be drunk but I still remember.

“She’s out of it man. Just stay the night here with her and you guys can go in the morning”, Lumka says.

Why did he call Elik though! He really hates me that much? They both go outside and talk. I can hear talking but I can’t make out words. The decision is Elik will take me home. He has to carry me because I refuse to walk. He puts me in the back seat and I don’t even see the way home. We get home, he puts me to bed and keeps saying he was worried sick about me and I should never disappear on him like that again.

“Sleep. We’ll talk in the morning. You know I love you right?” he says as he puts me into bed.

Alcohol so! It should be banned. I remember that I’m angry but I feel good. I guess that’s why people drink. I don’t know how to explain it but when Elik gets into bed beside me, I turn around to face him. Just seeing his face in front of mine sends me straight into tears. The heart never gets

drunk. It stays feeling. No one has ever hurt me this much! All that does is make him pull me towards him and say a million sorries and give me promises of a beautiful future. You know tonight I give up on myself. I'm so done with myself! I think I'm done trying to fix myself because it's like something inside me doesn't want to be fixed. I shouldn't be letting Elik touch me. He's the reason I'm crying. He keeps saying he's sorry and that we will be alright. And as Lumka predicted, some 30 minutes later I'm under Elik.

I thought the pain would be better afterwards but it's not. It's still as intense as before if not worse. I kept wondering if he does this with her. Halfway in between I even wondered what it would have been like with Lumka. Yet I didn't want him to stop. So messed up! The cuddling afterwards is the worst. As he breathes down my neck and holds me close to him, all I can do is cry silently. After a long struggle with tears and thoughts and confusion, I finally fall asleep. I have a flight to catch in the morning. It was good while it lasted but I'm done, for good this time. I need to walk away while I still can. I might never find someone who will love me like Elik has but anything is better than this. He's Mbali's project now. You can't save a life that doesn't want to be saved. Guess it's true that, *'You lose them how you get them'*.

Fourteen

Woke up at 4 am and started packing my things. I'm so out of here. I love him but love on its own is not enough. 10% of me wants to stay and try and understand him. We've really been through a lot together. He's my world, my life and my heartbeat. The thought of walking away and starting afresh from zero is terrifying. What if the next man I find is worse? I could say I don't need a man but that would be a lie. I need a man more than most. I'm kind of addicted to matters of the flesh and if I stay single I might find myself in the arms of another married man then some wife out there will cry. I seem to attract the married more. I need someone like Elik that will be equally addicted otherwise I'll be penis hopping in no time. The one thing I know I'll miss is his body. My priorities though!

Lumka has been on my mind. He rejected me! Not in a bad way though, he wasn't harsh about it or was he? I was quite drunk and don't remember everything. He was right though. Had he bedded me, I would be regretting that right now and I would be feeling guilty and end up staying with Elik. I'm so embarrassed by my failed attempt to get him to bed me! I've never been turned down before! But at least now I know he likes me, and I'm single and ready to mingle, so if he plays his cards right he might just bag himself some me. And since I'm so hurt and angry and heartbroken, I'm most vulnerable. If I was him, I'd take the chance. Maybe we could even date and rub it in Elik's face! But with everything I know about him, I don't know. But he's always been good to me and we vibe really strong. Look at me, wanting my ex's bestie. Maybe I should give this dating thing a break. I mean I tried hey. But being single will result in me being lonely and miserable and before I know it I'll be back in Elik's arms. Maybe I can have me some Kofi. That will sure break Elik's heart. But na, I'm not attracted to him that way. He's my little brother! Sies Fierce!

Elik makes me so angry, sleeping there looking all damn fine! I want to hate him but I can't. I love him but hayi I'm done. I need a break. A very very long break from him. By 5 am I've showered and packed and I'm ready to go. I'm trying to ignore the hangover I'm feeling. I retrieved my phone from the bathroom and I'm ready to go. I want to wake him up so I can say goodbye. I'm not going to sneak out like a thief in the night. But I know better than to wake him up. He will be all grumpy and we won't get

much talking done. I sit on the edge of the bed and wait for him to wake up. I'm even dressed like I used to back then. Trainers, boyfriend jeans and a small T-shirt. I'm tired of waiting for him to get up and I just had a brilliant idea! I find a scissors and go to the bathroom. I undo my cornrows and comb out my afro. Then I cut my hair. Chunk after chunk of hair falls to my feet. I'm done, for good this time!

I look horrible when I'm done. It looks like a praying mantis ate my hair! I try to fix it with Elik's clippers, but not much improvement is done. Oh well. At least I've made my statement and I'm DONE. Looking at my hair lying on the floor makes me sad. I invested a lot of time and coconut oil in growing that afro! Anyway, it's gone now. Time for a new dawn. My poor heart is sore to a point where it's numb. I'm building the walls around it one brick at a time. I owe it that much after all the pain I've exposed it to. I will shelter it and make sure it never breaks again.

Elik is awake when I get back and sitting on the bed, probably cursing the person who invented waking up! Gosh this man hates waking up!

"Morning beautiful", he says. "Fierce. What happened to your hair?" he says when he looks up at me. I just look at him and fold my arms.

"You're leaving me", he says.

Isn't he smart! He figured that all on his own! Let's clap hands for him. He looks around and my bags are all packed and I'm ready to go.

"Morning". I'm very pleasant. I have a bucketful of hurtful things I can throw at him right now but again, I love him. I can never use things like his mother or his family against him. I was there when they broke him and as much as he hurt me, I won't leave him a broken clay doll. I could use his whorism against him I guess, but no, I'm bigger than that. I'm in pain but at the same time I feel liberated. I feel like I've been given a second chance in life. I can't remember what I did in the past three years or so! I just lived.

"I've been waiting for you to wake up so I can say goodbye".

He stands.

"No, sit. Please. I won't take long".

He sits. Gods he looks so honest, I want to hold him and tell him I'm staying.

"You cut your hair!"

He sounds hurt. I'm glad. He knows what that means.

"You're seriously leaving me baby? But yesterday night we, umm, I thought, well, I thought we were working things out".

Because sex fixes everything, right? Well, I don't know what it was to him but to me it was breakup sex. I just needed one last ride for the road. And why is he acting so shocked? He didn't think I'd stay for this nonsense of his, did he? I can't stomach the thought of someone being pregnant with his child! After what I went through, I won't stand by and watch. He's fully awake now and it's fun watching the shock on his face. He never thought little Fierce would grow legs and get two stepping, shame. Must be fun being him, walking around like he owns some of us!

"Elik, you are my lifeline, you know that and boy I've loved you with every single piece of me! Remember what I said to you in Accra? I told you one day I'll leave. This is that day for me. I quit! It's Mbali's turn now. And I wish you two the best in life".

"You're not serious! You can't quit what we have! Come on baby".

I'm unable to can.

"Baby, I want you not her! I can't be without you, you know that!" he says. I'm not even going to entertain his words. It's just noise. "Elik, this is probably the last time we see each other like this. I want you to know that I appreciate everything you've ever done for me. You are a good guy and I don't hate you. Not at all. I'm just sorry I wasn't what you wanted. I hope one day you'll find what you're searching for", I say. I hope he never finds it and dies miserable and lonely. "Fierce Nkomo, slow down. Are you breaking up with me?" he says. Oh dear! Did I stutter? "Bye Elik", I say and try to figure out how to carry these bags. "You can't leave. I'm sorry baby, I'll fix this, I promise. I'll leave her, I swear. Just don't leave me baby please", when he got in front of me I don't know. "No. No need to leave her. Isn't I'm removing myself from the equation. I hope that stupid bitch can love you as much as I did because you deserve to be loved", I say. I hate that girl, my goodness! "I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry and I swear to you I'll stop seeing that bitch. I'll do right by you, baby please", he says. He sounds like a broken record right now! The number of times I've heard these words! At least he agrees with me that Mbali is a B! Yet it's a B pregnant with his child! I feel sorry for that child shame.

"Bye Elik. Take care of yourself. Treat her better than you treated me".

Lie. I hope he treats her worse! I hope he dumps her as soon as I leave and deletes her from his life forever. I can hear the righteous saying *'how can you wish that! She's with child'*. Well, middle finger to that. I have no time for feeling sorry for anyone right now, young or old, born or unborn. I

have bigger life problems over here.

“Baby, I’m sorry for what I said yesterday. I know I hurt you. I didn’t mean it that way. Do you want me to choose between you and her? I will choose. I choose you baby. You alone. I’ll never see her again if that’s what it will take for you to stay”.

Had he sold me this speech yesterday, I might have stayed. But he said what he said, so I can’t hold on to anything he says. I can’t unhear the words he said yesterday!

“You can’t leave baby. You can’t do this to us. We have a wedding coming up. How about Peter and Paul? What do I tell them? Kofi is coming down for your graduation, what then? We have a life together Fierce, you can’t just leave!”

I’m not sure if he’s telling me or begging. Now that he mentioned wedding, I remember the ring on my finger. This piece of shiny metal that gave me false hope! Taking it off makes my eyes water. I have a flashback of the day he proposed. It was beautiful and I’d fallen in love with him, I’d said yes to being second wife. I’d vowed never to leave him and as I take it off I wonder if I’m making the biggest mistake of my life or not. He is my soulmate, I have no doubt. But my soul is a widow because his died a long time ago.

I take his hand and put the ring in his palm and close his hand over it. I’d bonded with this ring. It was now a part of me and every time the going would get rough, I would look at it and remember everything Elik said to me on Signal Hill. Then I’d find strength and hold my man down. So bad, my man would go and sleep with someone else and come home in the morning and I would hug him and make him breakfast. Looking back, I’ve been such a fool! I blame myself for what Elik did to me. I enabled him. I made him see that him cheating on me was fine and it was no big deal. I get why he doesn’t understand why I’m pissed off this time because this has been our life for a long time. That ring represented my heart. It was a huge part of me. Giving it back to him, cutting my hair. I don’t know what can shout ‘I’M DONE’ louder than that.

But Elik so. He’s been a part of me for so long, I’m scared of this solo journey I now embark on. But it’s a new dawn for me. I’m not expecting it to be easy but as long as I keep walking and not look back. Looking back will only turn me into a pillar of salt like Lot’s wife, all bitter and sour! I order an Uber and I think he’s still in shock because he just watches me

leave and keeps saying stupid things like, "I know you're mad at me baby girl and I know it's all my fault. I'll fix this. I can't wait to wife you". When the Uber guy puts my bags in his car, he is begging and grovelling. I'm on the verge of saying, 'I forgive you baby'. I get into the Uber and put on my earphones as we head to the airport. *'Tell me we're ok – Akon'* is on repeat and tears come now and again. At some point when he cheated and I found out and I was an emotional wreck, Elik used to play this song for me. It used to make me cry then and it still does today. I'm so terrified. I don't know how I will survive without Elik. I'll drown I'm sure. I feel like asking the driver to take me back so I can have my man back. When we get to the airport, I don't know what to do. As I sit at the lounge, waiting for my flight, I take out my laptop and write a document to email to Elik. I will finish it later.

I miss him already and three times already I've picked up my phone and almost called him. I hate that he's not calling and begging me. I'll say no but at least I'll know he had begged. Another part of me wants to call Lumka but after last night I'm a bit embarrassed. I delivered myself on a silver platter and he said *'No thanks. Not hungry!'*. Ouch! The day goes by so slowly and with every passing minute I miss Elik more and more. I even start wondering if it would be bad to marry him and he takes Mbali as number two. Would that be so bad? I mean, he had her this whole time and I never noticed because he gave me all the attention in the world! If I use logic only, emotions aside, he respected me enough to keep the side chick away from me. That's respect right there! What if I was always meant to share? What if Mbali and I will actually get along and be like sisters and be besties even? I mean I don't have friends so what if this is a crooked way in which the universe is giving me a friend? I need to banish such thoughts from my head! Fire fire to you crazy thoughts. Be gone!

Everything in this house reminds me of him. I'm even lying in bed right now hugging a pillow, wearing his T-shirt. I can't even listen to my Akon because I keep hearing him singing along. I miss him so much. I don't know how I'll get through this. I find my phone and open WhatsApp and there are four unread messages from him. I won't respond, but I'll read.

'So you really left? You really cut your hair? You really don't want me anymore? You blocked me? What can I do to make it right?' the first one reads. Such a questionnaire!

The next:

'I know I messed up big this time. I don't even know why I said half the things I said. I'm sorry my baby. Let's talk about this please. Call me and we work this out. Please my love' .

This one is longer:

'When I saw that you cut your hair, I got scared. I know what that means. I realise I've been a fool. I don't deserve you Fierce and I keep hurting you. Nothing can justify what I did to you this time. It's starting to dawn on me that you may be slipping away from me and that's scary. I never thought you would ever leave me. I'm a fool baby, I see that. I replayed all the things I said to you yesterday and it breaks my heart that I said all that to my baby. The truth is, I love you. I was just being defensive because I got caught. I DON'T LOVE HER! I love you and I know it's too much to ask, but please baby, I'm on my knees begging. Can we try again? Please this one last time, take me back. Please give me one last chance and I will never hurt you again. You are everything to me. I'm nothing without you. I love you and I need my girl back'.

This one has my tears coming.

'I'm coming to Cape Town this evening. I need to talk to you. We need to work this out. I can't lose you Fierce'.

I don't want him here! I don't want him anywhere within my 50 m radius! I respond to the last one.

'We are done Elik! Get it through your thick head. We are over! I don't want you anymore. Which part of that don't you understand? I don't wanna see you, I don't wanna talk to you, I don't want anything to do with you!'

'You are too cute' , he replies and I almost slam my laptop on the floor.

'Fine. I won't come!' he writes.

Good! A part of me wanted him to come though. I'm dying here, crying alone. I need him more than ever. Only him can put me back together. How long before I heal? I can't bear the pain. A message comes through.

'I love you Fierce. You are the perfect girl for me. I know I messed up this time. I'm sorry baby. I'll make this right, I promise' .

His denial is getting out of control! Let me send him that document I drafted earlier so I can block him and move on with my life. I do that, then go through our Victoria Falls pictures and cry myself to sleep. I wake up to Gmail notifications. Oh, Elik responded to my email. Great! At the moment I wrote it, it was a brilliant idea! I even chose my words wisely. But when I

read Elik's response to it, I feel stupid. My email read:

'Dear Prof. E. M. Nkrumah

Following our breakup, I have taken it upon myself to draw up a document detailing my demands. It is strongly advisable that you respect my wishes. You owe me that much at least. This document outlines the Terms and Conditions set by Dr Lastborn F. Nkomo on her official break-up with Professor Elikplim M. Nkrumah.

Kind Regards.

Dr L.F. Nkomo (PhD: Chemical Engineering) '

Then I attached my document, clicked send and closed my laptop. All good! Elik's response is here alright! Before I even open the attachment, the body of the email tells me it isn't a 'Yes ma'am I accept' response! I open it anyway. He created a table with two columns. He copied the points on my document onto one column then made notes on the other! He marked me! In red! It reads:

'Dear Dr. L.F. Nkomo-Nkrumah

Your email was received and your grievances were taken under consideration. I hope the response I'm giving you is favourable. I would like to point out that it was extremely difficult to decide whether you were trying to insult me (Which didn't work because it was so funny) or you were just trying to let me know that you miss me (In which case, I miss you too cupcake).

Anyway, find attached corrections made on your voluntary, unsolicited assignment. Out of 10, I would give you a 2, just for effort.

Kind Regards.

*Prof. Elikplim M. Nkrumah
(BScEng., MScEng., PhD., Pr. Eng., Sc.D.) '.*

He gave me 20%! 2/10! I've never seen such a person shame! I go through the corrections and I'm convinced that he was high when he wrote all this! I was being serious here and I get this in response! So he just

copied and made his brutal comments on the side. Such savagery!

1. FIERCE: You won't freeze my bank account or steal my money from it! Taking without consent is stealing! So if you touch my money you are a thief!

ELIK: Your current balance is R*****. Tell me now, what's there to steal? I don't steal coins Cupcake! One day when you have money in your account maybe we can revisit this point. For now it's null and void.

2. FIERCE: I will keep Peter and Paul and continue being their guardian until their father grows a brain and proves beyond reasonable doubt that he can take care of them.

ELIK: Brains don't grow from nowhere! So if you were hoping that brains grow and you were watering your head, eating fertilisers and pumping growth hormones into your big head thinking your brain will grow, I'm sorry to burst your bubble.

3. FIERCE: Mbali will never come anywhere near Peter and Paul! If she does, I'll cut her up into pieces and feed her to the dogs! I'll run her over and throw her body in the ocean for hippos to feed on!

ELIK: Whose dogs will you feed her to since you don't have any? Are you allowed to feed human remains to other people's dogs? Also, hippos in an ocean? Are you for real? Plus hippos are mostly herbivorous and semiaquatic. Sadly you wouldn't know because (Refer to point 2 above).

4. FIERCE: You won't call, text or contact me in anyway, ever! Only send a professional email if it's something to do with the kids!

ELIK: Saying I should never contact you again then saying I should contact you via email in the next sentence is confusing! Where's the sense in that? Make up your mind. Again, refer to point 2 above.

5. FIERCE: You are uninvited to my graduation ceremony. You have displayed moral and academic bankruptcy; therefore, such honourable ceremonies are unfitting for your kind!

ELIK: My kind (Professors) are the reason such ceremonies exist! So that your kind can get some form of recognition and aspire to be like my kind! Besides, it's the university's graduation ceremony not yours. You are 1 in 7000 graduates. You make up 0.00014% of the population so your vote is insignificant.

6. FIERCE: You will not haunt me Elik! You will leave me alone and let me live my life in peace and in return, I'll leave you and Mbali in

peace.

ELIK: I don't haunt people, I'm not a ghost! And I'll live my life with you NOT her! Let's get that clear, shall we?

7. FIERCE: The wedding is off! We are over. Done. Finished. Never to be ever again!!!!!!

ELIK: The wedding is still on. Which reminds me, have you found a wedding planner yet? If not, please baby find one so we can start planning.

8. FIERCE: If you contravene any of the above, I'll sue you and I'll get a restraining order against you. I swear.

ELIK: Here's Clive's number if you need a lawyer: 0833395263.

I have no words!

I'm woken up by the twins bouncing on my bed. They are happy that their aunt Fierce is back. I can't. I just breakdown looking at them. They look like Elik so much! Except they are such angels and he's such a demon. How can I give them up though? Elik doesn't know how to take care of them and Komla just disappeared. I give them a big hug and they tell me not to cry. I offer to drive them to school. Me and them are on borrowed time. Their father might just decide to take them away from me when he realises we're not getting back together. I drive in pyjamas. It's not like I'll get out of the car anyways. As I drop them off and give them an extra-long hug, I feel my heart palpitate. They mean the world to me. I breakdown in the car, watching them in their blazers and backpacks looking ever so identical. I can't let them go.

How do people deal with break ups though? I'm not qualified to deal with such. I feel a deep emptiness inside me and a fear of facing the world alone. I'm terrified. Don't people know that I also want to close my eyes then when I open them I'm suddenly healed and I don't remember who Elik is? I wish that more than anything but we were never designed like that, were we? Or am I a factory reject that's why unlike other mighty women who break up with people and wake up just fine, I have to go through all these emotions?

If I said I don't love Elik I would be worse than Saphira and Ananias combined. I love him so much it's burning me from within. I love him so much I hate him for it. Good thing is I know he's hurting too. He may hide behind corny jokes and 'I'm sorries' and put up a brave face. But in my moment of weakness last night I video called him and as he smiled at me

and said "I promise to get us back together baby", I saw right behind that smile. He was terrified and unsure. I know his eyes very well. And I saw fear in them. I think he's scared of losing me. He apologised over and over and asked that I take him back but that's not why I had called him. I'd called him because I was a mess and I wanted to let him see how he had shattered me. I cried the whole time through that video call and he wiped a tear when I reminded him of some of the things we'd been through.

I get that most girls put on a brave face after a breakup and stop talking to their exes immediately. But I'm not most girls. I'm not a representative of the majority. If anything, I'm in that 1% that's considered a disgrace to women. I follow my heart and my heart told me to call Elik so that's exactly what I did. I don't care that he sees how weak and destroyed I am. In fact I need him to see that so when I don't take him back, he'll understand. Yesterday. I cried myself into a mess and locked myself up in my room. As those twins I love kept banging on my door screaming "Aunt Fierce, open. It's Peter and Paul", I hugged a pillow tight and cried. I couldn't let them see me like that. Their father destroyed me. Ever cried so hard you throw up?

When I get back home, Lumka calls. Sigh. Can this Elik crew just give me some space please. If I didn't know any better I'd say this man really loves me. He keeps 'checking up on me'.

"You sound sleepy", Lumka says. I don't sound sleepy, I sound sad!

"No I'm awake. Just dropped the twins off at school", I say, getting back into bed.

"How are you coping?"

I want to give the default 'I'm fine' response but I'm so far from fine I can't even pronounce the word.

"I'm a wreck. It hurts so bad".

"Ya hey. I can imagine. Want me to come to Cape Town?"

He would do that for me? But why?

"But you have work to do!"

"Hayi I'm not working this week! It's time Elik worked too. I do most of the work around here when you guys are on vacations! I need a break".

"But he works though!" I instinctively jump to his defence.

"I didn't say he doesn't". I keep quiet.

"He's the brain of the company but he works the least but makes the most money. We do all the work!"

That sounds fair to me. Elik works smart not hard. They shouldn't hate, they should emulate! He's the reason they got all the tenders they ever got!

"Oh! You deserve the break then I guess".

I don't know what Elik would be without Lumka! Lumka keeps him together I think. I feel like all we (Lumka, Kofi, me) do is tiptoe around King Elik and hail him and go out of our way to make sure he's happy and pampered. How he got us in his net I don't know, but we worship him and sometimes we don't even see it! At least I'm out of that net now. I'm done worshipping false gods! And I think Lumka is getting fed up too.

"So? Must I come down to Cape Town? I think we need to talk".

"Umm. No, I think I'm good. Don't come".

I'm in no position to be with him. I'm not drunk anymore and sober me doesn't want to walk that path yet. He says it's all good, I should let him know if I need him.

"So you and Elik? What's the story?"

"We're still broken up".

"Really? That's not what he said to me. He said you are a bit upset but you guys are good".

"Elik is delusional! I broke up with him. I tried Lumka. I really can't anymore. I'm done".

"You're not done with him yet Fierce. If you were, you would detach from him completely".

"What do you mean? I have! I blocked him and his number is on auto reject! I'm through", I defend myself and he laughs.

"You're so innocent, it's adorable sometimes. You think blocking Elik on Whatsapp is detaching? You are living in his house, driving his car, mothering his kids, and probably his face is still on your wallpaper (True). You are far from detaching".

"It's my house and my car! As for the kids what would you have me do?"

"Give them back to their father! How are they still your problem?"

"But they are kids!" I argue.

"So? They are not your kids!"

That's harsh. He doesn't understand the bond between me and those chipmunks. He should just stay out of it!

"And sell that house and trade in that car and start over. That way you'll really be done with Elik".

Isn't he too desperate for me to get done with Elik?

"Can Elik take these away from me? He once said he could. Can he?"

"He can yes. But I won't let him. After all the shit you put up with, he has no right to do that".

Awww. I think Lumka is on Team Fierce!

"Where will I stay though?"

I was doing my budget on the flight yesterday and I will be broke pretty soon. I'm praying that Elik will pay the municipal rates for this house and pay my insurance and continue financing my fuel card and continue paying Lizzy and the maintenance guy and maybe just drop a few thousand Rands in my account every now and then as a 'post breakup gift'. Just until I get a job you know.

"I can rent you an apartment until your sale goes through and you buy another house for yourself".

"Elik won't like that".

"Fuck Elik man! The moon and stars don't revolve around him! Stop considering him in everything you do. Think of yourself for once Fierce. Take care of yourself sisi", he snaps.

He's getting too big for his boots. Who does he think he is shouting at me? I know he's right but eish, the truth burns like a hot iron. The thought of moving out and selling seems so hard to do.

"I'll send you details of a guy who can help you trade in your car. He'll get you something basic and you'll cash out the difference. You can't afford that Jeep without Elik and you know it".

Sigh. This is becoming too real very fast. I feel like Lumka is putting pressure on me. I have a brain thank you! I can do these things and make these decisions on my own!

"Ok". He's right I know.

"Do you still love him?"

"Of course I do. How can you ask?"

He sighs and I feel the need to defend myself.

"I'm no longer with him but I love him still. I need time to get over him. It's not going to happen overnight! You know how much I went through with him bhudi. It's not a switch! I can't just turn the feelings off!"

"If he walked in there now, would you take him back?"

"No. I don't want to".

We stay quiet a bit.

“Tell me. Do you regret the other night?” he breaks the silence.

“There’s nothing to regret. Nothing happened”.

“Come on. Ok, had we gone all the way, would you regret it?”

This conversation is uncomfortable. Can he wait till I’m drunk then ask me again?

“I don’t know. And you called Elik isn’t, so now we’ll never know!”

“It’s not like you didn’t want me to. You went home and you let him fuck you, even though you claimed to hate him!”

“What? How do you know that?”

So these guys discuss me like I’m some prostitute?

“Elik told me in one of his rants. Saying he thought you’d forgiven him because you gave it up so he was confused when you woke up and left”.

Oh lawd. This is uncomfortable. Can I at least tell Lumka that I thought about him somewhere in the middle of the act? Will that make him feel better?

“You realise he doesn’t know you guys broke up, right? He thinks you’re just acting up but will come around. As always”.

“That’s fine. He will realise soon enough”.

“Let me let you go sisi ne. I’ll send you the details of that guy in a bit”.

“Ok. How’s Elik doing?” The words just come out.

“Elikplim Nkrumah!”

“What?”

The way he said Elik’s name was like someone in disbelief.

“Hayi nothing. It’s just, I don’t see how he managed to capture you this deep. He has you in so deep no one can reach you”.

“We are over. I just want to know he’s alright and not self-destructing!”

“Fierce! You know sometimes I wish you could stand in front of the mirror long enough to see what I see when I look at you! Then you wouldn’t sell yourself so short”.

Is he still making moves on his best friend’s new ex? That doesn’t sound right at all. I lie and say there’s someone at the door and will call him later. There’s something uncomfortable about talking to him today. He reminds me that he’s there for me before he hangs up. I’m going through a major break up here! I need support! I don’t need vultures. Why doesn’t he believe that I’m done with Elik? I AM DONE.

Let me call Kofi. At least he gets me. He’s in Joburg now. He came down for my graduation but I don’t even know whether he should attend it

or not, under the circumstances. I might as well just uninvite everyone! Butho said he won't make it anymore and gave me some lousy excuse. It's all good.

"Hi Kofi. How was your flight?"

"It was good".

Silence.

"Look bro. I can't tell you how sorry I am for breaking you and Elik up. I'm sorry. Please don't tell Elik it was me who told you".

Why is everyone scared of this Elik? I'm not scared of him! We need to stand up to him and put him in his place! He's running all our lives and we can't do anything without being scared of what his majesty, King Elik, will do to us. It's enough now! Awa! I could break Elik apart easily if I wanted to. I could turn him to dust just by snapping my finger, Thanos style! I know him inside out and I know exactly how to hit him where it hurts the most. He's told me things that if I repeated would blow his world up in smoke! But again he told me all those things when he was vulnerable and when he trusted me. So I know I can't do that to him. I don't hate him. Not yet at least.

Oh I'm still on that call with Kofi.

"I would have found out anyway boo, so don't beat yourself up about it".

"So you guys are over over?"

"Yes. For good this time".

"I find that hard to believe. I know you Fierce, from the time you guys started".

"We broke up. For real". Why doesn't anyone believe me?

"Wait. I'm a bit confused. From the airport last night, we drove past that girl's place and Elik called her out and broke up with her. He said he needed me as a witness. So I thought he was doing it because of you".

"Seriously? Tell me more. What did he say to her?"

I sit up. I prayed hard this morning that Mbali's pretty ass gets dumped! And I got the response last night? I got the answer to my prayers before I even prayed? Now that's what I call efficiency!

"He told her that he would take care of the baby but wanted nothing to do with her".

Now that's a classic Elik move! I smile to myself. Welcome to the singles club Miss Mbali! Too bad Elik either has to go and apologise to

Mbali or find someone else because I AM DONE. In capital letters.

“How’s he doing though?”

Lumka refused to tell me. I need to know. It’s always good to know how your ex is doing. If he’s throwing a party day after you broke up then you know he’s celebrating your exit! If he’s sad and moaning, then that’s very good. Let him suffer as you do!

“He says he has a lot of work to do. He’s stressed I think. He’s just in a mood and is shouting at everyone!”

“Take care of him for me. Please. Don’t let him drink himself stupid, please”, I say. “You still love him though, right?”

“Always will”.

“Then hear him out. He loves you and he needs you Fierce. Obviously, you guys will get back together, so talk it out already and spare the rest of us the drama”.

“No Kofi. It’s over between me and your brother. There’ll be no drama. I gotta go”.

He’s pissing me off! How dare he asks that of me?

Why is everyone assuming I’ll take Elik back? He can take his sexiness, his perfect blackness and his irresistible charm back to Ghana for all I care! He honestly thinks the world can’t survive without his beautiful eyes and his perfect lips? Well, I have news for him. I can’t wait to see the look on people’s faces the day they realise I’m never taking him back. And the nice thing is that Elik won’t even see this one coming. He will keep waiting for Fierce to ‘come around’ until he’s 90 years old, he’ll see!

I’m not going to be angry about this. I’m not dimming my light for nobody! I’ll wear my smile and pick up from where I left off all those years ago. I’m going to do what I know best. Laugh at myself. My afro can’t have fallen in vain! That hair was my crown and me letting it drop on the floor was my sign of surrender. I gave up my kingdom so Elik and his new queen can reign in peace and leave me out of it. Except, looks like Elik dumped her already! Again, none of my concern!

But this break up business is not for me shame. I cry buckets and the pain is so deep it’s physical. Did you know you can feel a heartbreak physically? You feel like someone is cutting your heart with a blunt knife. The pain is too much. Then you get people saying. ‘*Move on*’ as if you can suddenly stop crying and log in to your brain, select ex-boyfriend and press ‘delete permanently’. Wouldn’t that just be the life? I miss him, a hell lot

and I'm not even going to beat myself up about it. I should be allowed to miss him. Google says it's normal. I can't just reset. It's a process and maybe I'm weaker than most. I haven't called him though and he's still blocked. I'm considering blocking Lumka too and Kofi! Those Elik disciples! I thought about Lumka long and hard and no, I don't want him like that. He's a good friend but to hop into my ex's best friend's bed is too low even for me. Maybe I could date Father Francis. People have dated priests before and they didn't get struck down by lightning! Besides, Father Francis is not a stranger to such sin (I still know what he did that summer!). Wait, why do I think every man in the world wants me again? Maybe it's years of being described as gorgeous, sexy AF, beautiful, smart, funny and all those sweet nothings Elik used to fill my head with. Hearing that every day is enough to boost your confidence so high you think you are every man's dream. Hence my shock when Lumka said, 'No. I'll pass!'

But Lumka wants me, that one! And he has it bad shame. So bad he's willing to rent me an apartment and rescue me from a guy he calls his brother! But I have a heart and maybe that's the problem. If I get with Lumka it will be to hurt Elik and when I'm done with him, both Elik and Lumka will be hurt. I care a lot about both of them so I can't. Sometimes I wish Elik had a father so I could find him and become his mistress and get pregnant by him. Let's see how he would feel about having me as his stepmother and having a little brother who's my child!

Speaking of Lumka. I call the guy whose details he sent me and after giving him all the details of my car he says he can give me a pre-loved Honda Civic and pay me an amount that sounds reasonable in exchange for my Jeep. I agree. I know he's hustling me because there's no way the value of my car has dropped that much. I say I'll speak to Lumka and ask if the price I'm being offered is good and he immediately ups the price close to the normal value. So I agree and there goes my Jeep. I don't know what's more heartbreaking between losing Elik and losing my car. It has so many memories. I keep losing a part of me each time. First my ring. In hindsight, I should have just kept it and pawned it.

Can't stay in bed all day. Life is a bitch but what option do I have than to get out of this bed and go out there and kick ass. Campus awaits.

I'm done showering and ready to go when a message pops on my screen. Can't people let me grieve in peace? Mbali! Is she sure she wants to pick a

fight with me? I will destroy her if she doesn't know me. Poor girl! Elik dumped her ass already and she thinks of lashing out at me? She sent me a picture of her stomach and called me out of my name and said Elik and her were not going to let me stand in their way! She says she knows he will be back! Shame! A scorned side chick! She has no clue about Elik ne? I've been there boo, but see, me I always knew my place and never trespassed. I respected Komla even though she didn't respect me. This one is trying me and I don't have energy for her.

So I just respond: *'Oh sweetie. Calling me a bad bitch is not an insult. It's a compliment! So thank you very much. Nice stomach by the way. I'm not sure what you want me to do with it because even though I'm a Doctor, I'm not a medical practitioner so I can't help you. Here, go through this list if you are looking for an MD *Link to doctors on Discovery website*'*. Then I block her.

I'm in no mood to pick fights and have useless pictures finish space in my phone's storage! I'm warning her. She shouldn't try me! Who said I wasn't growing? I could have chosen to insult her back and start a full blown war and have us drag each other all over social media. But if you've dated Elik for as long as I have, you know you don't fight women over him. Because you'll fight this one, then when you are done another pops up then another and before you know it, it's a knockout challenge! I ain't got time for that. I need to channel all my energy towards healing my heart.

If I stay here any longer, I'll end up calling Elik and knowing him, I might end up being the one apologising. He has that much power with his words yes. I'm off to campus so I can reconnect with my lab mates and share in the excitement of graduating. I should be back when the twins come back from school. I need to spend some time with them.

Fifteen

I get to campus and I almost make a U-Turn. I think I'm lost. There are cops and even soldiers everywhere! And students are running around and I don't think it's just for fun. My car is thoroughly searched by the gate. I wonder what they are looking for. I make it to the lab after an interrogation by the soldier security guy! I was gone for what, 2 - 3 weeks and the university turned into Afghanistan! I find Bunke and Brain in the lab. It's hellos and where have you beens? Bunke says the protests got out of control last night and police have been making arrests and chasing students up and down.

“What protests? What do they want now?”

The last protest was earlier in the year for extending registration or something like that.

“Fees must fall”.

Not again! “Anyway, how have you guys been?”

“Same”, Bunke says. I need to stop looking at Bunke like this honestly. It's worrying.

“You're not wearing a ring anymore?” Brain says. He just had to be that observant!

“I don't wanna talk about it”.

“What are you doing?” I turn to Bunke to escape that other line of conversation.

“Was about to run these for stability”.

“Let me do that for you”.

I miss this. This right here is where I belong. My heart is in a happy place right here. I set up a sample to run for four hours, then make coffee. Before I can even drink half the coffee, there is a knock on the door. Not a knock but a bang bang bang. Bunke and I look at each other then at the door. He says we must open the door otherwise they will break it.

As soon as he opens, four students come in and tell us to get out. They keep referring to each other as Comrades. So I think we're really in a war. Why are they shouting so loud? We can hear them. We are right here! And why are they speaking Xhosa? The three of us happen to be immigrants here. I can speak Xhosa but still. It's the principle. They must have noticed we don't *'thetha'* cause they switch to telling us to *'Get out'*. I'm confused

now. I thought the police and the soldiers were the enemies in this war. But it's other students? Hectic! I'm glad they don't touch anything because the equipment in here is worth millions and our supervisor would have a stroke if anything got damaged.

I ask for just four hours so the sample can finish running but they say no. Just four hours is all I ask for. Am I being unreasonable? They are unreasonable for saying no! I have to force stop the Turbiscan! Just great! You know these are second year students telling us PhD students to get out. Where do they get off telling us that! We get out anyway. We know how to pick our battles. When armed with a knife you don't go to a gun fight!

They are breaking cars in the admin building so I know I have to drive out. They might think my car belongs to a staff member and just break it or set it on fire. With Elik gone from my life, I won't be able to repair it. I say hurried byes to Brain and Bunke. They don't let me out of the gate. Apparently, no one can enter or leave. Just great! I entered 30 minutes ago though! They set new laws in that short space of time? I can't think of anywhere to go where I'll be safe. I go and park outside postgrad rez and go to Bunke's room. He lets me in, thankfully. This room though. This bed. This guy. I refuse to remember. You know the devil hates me! Bunke takes off his hoodie and his T-shirt lifts too and I see that rope after rope of muscle on his body. I used to cling on to that muscle. I look away. What's wrong with me!

First I was yearning for Lumka then I considered Kofi then I thought Father Francis might do and now Bunke! I need to get it together. I need rebound sex though. Something hard, more like what I know Bunke can give. It's the only way to get Elik out of my head. I'd give him so good and channel out all my anger out on him and get my revenge on Elik! Fear of rejection though keeps me grounded. *'Get it together Fierce! Stop gawking at the brother like that!'* I reprimand myself. He tells me to be comfortable. I'm comfortable alright.

"So B. What's the plan after graduation?"

He says he's starting a postdoc fellowship in Florida from June. Brain got head hunted by GIBB and Ndivhu will be lecturing somewhere in Gauteng from next semester. Way to go Brain! GIBB is one of the top engineering companies in the country!

"And you?"

The truth dawns on me very fast. I have no plan. No direction.

Nothing.

“I haven’t gotten anything yet”. I haven’t even looked!

“It’s ok madam, there’s still time. What do you want to do?”

I shrug my shoulders. I have no clue.

“Don’t you want to ask Prof if you can do your postdoc with him on that Seychelles collaboration? There’s another fellowship for Germany still open”.

Seychelles sounds good. Germany sounds alright too. I can’t believe I let so many opportunities pass me by.

The fact that all three of my lab mates are sorted and I have nothing is such a hard slap across the face. I need to do better. Bunke suggests we watch a movie. He gets chips and biscuits and throws them in a bowl, we get into the blankets, Netflix and chill. I have such beautiful relationships with people I used to sleep with though! Ok that’s a lie. Only with Bunke. I don’t talk to Athi and soon I won’t be talking to Elik. Oh wow. I’ve slept with only three guys in my life. I’m a saint after all, who knew! As for Athi, I demand my sex back. He used to waste my time.

I’m laughing at a line said in the movie when I see white smoke coming into the room from under the door. My first instinct is to get up and jump out of the window, because well I don’t want to be burnt alive. Bunke says I must stay quiet, it’s just carbon monoxide from the fire extinguishers. How can I relax? Exactly how much carbon monoxide are we talking here? If the levels surpass Oxygen doesn’t that mean we will die? And you know it doesn’t give you a warning it just puts you to sleep. Forever! He gets up, gets a towel and puts it across the floor to close the bottom of his door. He says they will pour in water next. Apparently, it’s to force the person inside to open the door and when you open you are forced to join the ‘struggle’ and fight for the fall of fees. Now that is not fair. These comrades must learn to be fair! Even if fees fall it won’t benefit foreign students so why would I spend my energy *toyi-toying* for something that won’t benefit me? Our fees could actually go up if fees fall! It’s not on.

I want to go home and play with those mini Elikes! But no one is allowed to leave campus so I’m stuck. The movie ends and we put another. I’ve watched these with Elik and I’m fighting the emotions haunting me. Everything reminds me of him. I need to skip the country and go far far away if I’m to ever forget him. This has to be the longest time I’ve spent with Bunke, awake, in a confined space. And as always, baby boy is so

chillaxed. He gives me that eye every now and then but he doesn't make any move on me. The stunt grenades and rubber bullets are still flying outside and from our WhatsApp group chat Ndivhu says they torched the main gate, the security offices, financial aid offices and clinic. Then they stoned all the windows in the admin building and they totally destroyed the Multipurpose Hall. Now that's bad because how will we graduate if the hall is destroyed?

He sends a video of students looting the student centre cafeteria and stealing food. One actually makes it out with just a bottle of water and is caught by the police. Imagine going to jail for stealing water! Water! How will you answer the prisoners when they ask "What are you in for?"

Evening comes and I guess I'm sleeping here tonight. I keep checking my Jeep App to see if any '*hard impact detected*' has been reported. I need to trade it in so it should stay undamaged! I guess I'm sleeping with Bunke tonight. Not sleeping with him as in you know, but sharing a bed. A part of me wishes Elik tracks me and sees that I'm on campus all night!

We get to catching up and he asks me about the ring since Brain pointed out. I tell him I broke up with Elik. That statement alone would have been enough to get the point across but I get to venting and telling him about Mbali and how Elik is a serial cheater and how he still doesn't believe I dumped him and is acting like we still together. I go on and on and on. He's such a good listener! When I loop back to telling him about Elik, I can't help crying. I never ask for hugs. I position myself on someone in such a way that they have no option but to hug me. I wish I had a bottle of wine but there's nothing alcoholic in this room.

"He was never good for you madam. I'm glad you've left him".

Who died and left him the knower of what's good for me and what's not?

"How's your wife?" I ask when I calm down and realise it's just been about me.

"She's good. She's coming down for graduation".

"That's nice".

"She insisted and my mother wouldn't stop nagging so ya".

I will never again buy the whole '*I don't love her nonsense*'! Men lie! Women lie too but men, hay shame, they take the trophy. You know married guys should just say, 'I love my wife but I want to sleep with you too' and we'll sleep with them with a clear conscience! Not this whole 'I don't love

her', 'I'm going to leave her for you' nonsense. See. Elik never sold me that dream. He used to tell me straight up that he loved Komla but he loved me too. Honesty is a virtue.

I sleep in my jeans. Sorry Bunke, you ain't getting none. I'm not letting any man slither between my thighs anytime soon. These male creatures are like snakes. They seek holes every time. Hence if it doesn't benefit getting banged then it's a no go area. I'd rather run back to Elik if I got that thirsty. It's better to be used in a Jeep than just to be told 'Madam' on a student rez bed.

Woke up around 4 am in the wrong bed and Bunke was still sleeping. I barely slept, nightmares had me tossing and turning. Real nightmares where I'd wake up screaming and panting and kicking. Like everything I locked away seemed to escape. From the memory of Replace, to my mother, to Komla. It just all flooded my mind as I slept. It got so bad Bunke had to hold me in his arms so I could feel safe. But they are not Elik's arms so I didn't really feel that safe. So after my last nightmare, I decided to call it a night and wake up. I grabbed my laptop and wrote a to do list:

1. Apply for as many overseas postdoctoral fellowship programmes (I need to start afresh in a new country).
2. Make a plan about Peter and Paul (Maybe boarding school? Are there any that take kids that young?).
3. Get an agent to help me sell my house
4. Be celibate for at least a month to get Elik out of my system (Now this will be interesting).
5. Hit the gym harder (I need a revenge body. I need Elik to die when he meets me in 6 months).

I'll leave it at that for now. We often get over zealous and write 101 to-do things and end up doing none because we don't know where to start. I look at Bunke sleeping peacefully, his hand around my thigh. Then I remember that curses are real. If I need my path in life to be clear, I need to stay away from things that could possibly jeopardise that. So I revisit my To-Do list and add:

6. Stay away from married men!

My next guy should be tall and dark, that goes without saying. He should provide me with his bank statement, copy of his title deed, credit

check and copy of his highest qualification. And most importantly, I need to see a certificate of non-marriage! I write my diary entry, since I'm still awake, I might as well. They say words are pegs with which we hang our thoughts on a washing line. So let me do some hanging.

'Dear Diary.

It's me again and it's about Elik again. I hate him and I love him. I hate that I love him but I love that I hate him. As always, jargon! To think I was loved so dearly only because he knew I would never leave is a tormenting thought. I tried to be strong. For me and for him. I held him down and held the kids down. I held the whole fort down. In the process I forgot to hold the most important person down. Me. I admired how he admired me. But now looking back, I realise every time he slept with someone else behind my back, I lost a part of me. Yet I forgave him and stayed. I put on a mask and each time it happened, I pulled the mask closer towards my face till it was so deep in my skin, it was my face. In the end, what broke me wasn't him cheating. I had no issue with that. What broke me were his words, his arrogance and his deformed ego that made him believe he owned me. So I hope he's happy that he destroyed the one who loved him. Because now, the mask has fallen off and I can see my worth. And I'm worth my weight in gold! He kept giving me every reason to leave but I kept creating every excuse to stay. I must admit, I became very creative over time. Like a lovesick idiot I clung to him. When I asked about her, he should have told me a beautiful lie maybe, he could have sold me another dream maybe or even given me fake hope. Then I would have cried myself to sleep but woke up loving him even more. But no, he became honest and that honesty was my undoing.

Mood: Heart-shattered'

Ok enough writing for today. The sun is coming up soon, I can tell by the rays penetrating through the blinds. I think I can get in an hour or so of sleep. My head feels heavy and my thighs hate me right now. Sleeping in jeans is no fun.

The next time I wake up it's 11 am! Almost half the day is gone. I look out of the window and it's quiet. Almost too quiet. Maybe the comrades are tired from all the work they put in yesterday or are they all arrested? Not my concern, all I'm glad for is I can go home. I can't shower here because Bunke and I are past the sharing-a-towel phase. I'll bath at home. Bunke

walks me out. It's dead silent outside but the remnants of war tell the story of the guerrilla warfare that happened in the recent past. A police car over there, bins overturned, rubbish burnt in the middle of the road, litter sprawled all over as far as the eye can see, a shoe lying on its side there (probably left behind by its running-from-the-popo owner). Issa mess. Looking at this sight before me, I feel like I'm looking at my life. If I was asked to paint a picture depicting my life, mine will look exactly like this. Backpack on back and keys in hand, I give Bunke a hug and thank him for granting me one of the basic human rights – shelter.

“Take care of yourself madam. Maybe come around later and we look up things you can do after graduation?”

I don't see why not, as long as the war won't resume. I'll have the mind to park outside campus if I come back. Just as I let the hug go and prepare to leave, the door of the car parked next to mine opens and my fine ass of an ex gets out. I freeze. I must look guilty as hell! Like when did he get here? How long has he been out here? What the hell is he doing here in the first place? He looks pissed. Bunke has seen him too and steps in front of me. Ain't I one lucky girl? My ex protecting me from my ex. Elik grabs Bunke by the T-shirt and I don't know who to vouch for. I think Bunke would win this fight but I'm not going to stand here and be a referee in the battle of the exes.

“What are you doing with my woman?” Elik says. *His woman?* Where's this woman he speaketh of? Cause it surely isn't me.

“Elik just stop!” I intervene.

I'm not going to have two grown men fight for me and be the talk of campus! I can't afford anymore drama. Elik pushes Bunke back and I'm screaming for them to stop it. The security guard comes out. Just great! They need to cut it out already.

“Elik, look at me”, I try to get in between them. Thank heavens he looks down at me.

“Let it go. I didn't sleep with him”.

I know that's what he's angry about. Someone tapping that which he thinks is all his is sure to drive him CRAZY! He lets Bunke go and I plead with Bunke with my eyes to just leave this loony of mine be.

“Sorry B. I'll call you later”.

“I'll fuck him up if he tries that again”, Bunke says. I'm like whooah! Bunke knows swear words?

“You sure you’ll be fine?” he says. I assure him I’ll be fine while I hold on to Elik so he doesn’t do anything stupid! Bunke leaves after I beg repeatedly.

“Look at me and swear you didn’t sleep with him”, Elik says.

Why is he so angry? We. Are. Not. Together! To extinguish the fire though I let him hold my chin up as I swear. I didn’t. He holds the stare for a while and just looking into his eyes has a lot of my shelved emotions coming out to play. I’ll breakdown if I keep looking so I look away.

“I waited since 7 out here! What the hell were you doing in there?” he snaps at me.

“I was sleeping!”

“You slept here? Bloody hell Fierce!” he snaps some more. You’d swear I cheated on him!

“There was a strike and I couldn’t leave. I didn’t even sleep in that guy’s room! I slept at Ndivhu’s girlfriend’s room then I passed by him to get my flash drive!”

I should add *‘Lying with a straight face’* and *‘Thinking on my feet’* to my CV. He sighs.

“I’m sorry... I’m losing you baby”.

Losing is the wrong word. Lost is the correct one. And since when does he fight!

“Walk with me”, I say when he lets me go.

I let him take my hand and we walk across this ruin of a campus. Gosh the memories we have here. This right here is where it began and today I’ll put a final end to it. A few students pass by as we cut across the student centre towards the lake. We could have gone to the staff diner, the very beginning, but everything is shut down. My heart is beating fast because I’m scared of letting myself down by not sticking to my decision. We get there and sit like two lovers in a park. You’d swear we never broke up with the way my head is perched on his shoulder.

“I’m really losing you, ain’t I?”

“You’ve already lost me”.

“No”.

“Yes. You understand why we can’t be together anymore, right?”

“I do. But it doesn’t make it ok. One last chance is all I ask for. I’ll make it count”.

Unfortunately, my chances are out of stock. In fact, they have been

discontinued!

“Fierce. Look at me”. I turn and fold my legs on the bench and face him.

“Do you love me?”

“More than anything”, I say. That’s the honest truth.

“Then why are you shutting me out?”

He honestly didn’t ask me that!

“I can’t be with someone who won’t let me in all the way. I’ll forever be at your doorstep and that’s not fair. Look at me, all I am right now is pure sadness. I was loyal, faithful, honest, open, kind and full of love for you more than you can ever understand. What did I get in return?”

I never thought we would break up because of a girl. I mean back in the era of Komla, I used to pride myself on being the other girl. But now it’s flipped and I don’t want him with another girl!

“Let me tell you the whole truth nana”.

I look at him with eyes saying ‘speak’. He sighs and clasps his hands.

“I love you baby. I do. To be frank, I never thought you would ever leave me. It came as a shock when you actually did. I’m lost without you. I’m scared of what’s going to happen to me. I’m going to go spiralling downwards without you to ground me”.

A little too late. To be frank, I’m scared for him too.

“You made this choice baby, not me. You chose Mbali”.

“I didn’t! I chose you!”

“Still! She was important enough for you to keep and to even bang raw Elik! Did you ever consider me? Do I even know what sorts of diseases you brought home?”

I used to eat that thing of his! Eeeww. I need to wash my mouth out with soap.

“She got pregnant by mistake. The thing broke! And I gave her money for a morning after pill but she ‘forgot’ to buy it!”

I feel like laughing at him.

“You love her though! I asked you and you said you love her”.

“I didn’t say that! I said I don’t know. I didn’t know then because I’d never thought about it! I went and thought about it and no I don’t love her”.

“Ok, I’m lost. What is it about her?” He sighs and sighs again.

“Cybertron”, I hope the word still stands.

“Ok cybertron”, he says. “I want to be honest with you baby but I’m

ashamed to voice it out loud. What kind of man am I?"

He looks at me first then down. His eyes are glossy with tears. I'm thinking, please Elik don't break down on me now. If he breaks down I won't be able to leave him. I'll have to put him back together and that takes a very long time. Before I know it, it will be next year.

"Tell me. You know I'll never judge you. I may not understand what makes you do half the things you do but I'll never make you feel ashamed for it. You know that".

He looks at me and then looks away. I take his hands in mine. He needs the encouragement I see.

"It's not like I've been with Mbali all these years. I haven't. I really had cut her off back then. Then I decided I would do everything to be faithful to you, but you know my struggle. I hurt you twice, remember? Then when we talked in Sun City, I realised I was destroying you. I vowed never to do that to you again. Because I love you and I hated myself when you would wake up all bruised and hurt".

Ya that wasn't too fun.

"Then I went back to getting with different girls and Lumka sat me down and bit my head off for mistreating you. So I stopped. But I still occasionally wanted to blow off steam and that's where Mbali came in. I could go for months without talking to her and yet everytime I would pick up the phone she would avail herself".

So Mbali is a glorified booty-call?

"I'm not proud of it. I'm sorry. I wish you could see my heart. I'm very sorry".

I don't know how to console him without insulting him so I reserve my comments. We sit there in silence listening to the water from the fountain falling onto the water in the lake.

"Why can't you see that I love you Fierce?" he says eventually. His eyes stay fixed on me, resting on my face like they are home. But as he speaks, I see sorrow building up more and more in his face. I fold my arms and look into the dirty lake. Winter is coming and the breeze is colder than usual today. I hope it won't be cold on graduation day. I can't look at him. I don't want him to see the grief I wear. He hurt me brutally yet here I am, still protecting him.

"I love you", he says again.

It sounds like he means it. I know he loves me but I'm not sure he

knows what love is.

“You say that like it means anything”. My voice is low but he’s close enough to hear so we are good.

“Baby, what is love to you? Sex? Is that it to you? You say you love me yet you gave me up as soon as I asked you about her”.

He looks down.

“You know, there was a time I gladly stood up for you against anyone who dared judge you! I shielded you every time, but you turned around and broke me. Then you took the pieces and broke them again”, I turn to look at him.

Let him see. My eyes are cold and my face is emotionless. This is the face I wear when my ears are closed and my mind has put up barriers. Let him see how dead I am. He killed me. I can see my pain mirrored in his eyes but what can I do? What can a dead girl do?

“I never meant to hurt you Fierce”.

“I know! You never do! Yet you did anyway and the pain I felt turned into fear and that fear is slowly turning into hatred. Maybe a strong hatred for you is exactly what I need to break us. Don’t you think? I’ve built solid walls around my heart to protect myself from you”.

I can’t afford to cry now. Please please.

“Baby, I’m sorry. I’m sure there’s a part of you that knows I’m hurt too by what I did. Let me in ma, please. Let me take down that wall around your heart. Let me prove myself to you again. Please. I don’t see how I can go on without you”, he says taking my hands.

“I need to find myself again” .

“Please Fierce. Please don’t leave me baby”.

“I can’t stay. You hurt me! Your words cut me deep. I know you think what you did with Mbali is justified because she wasn’t a one night stand like your other hundreds. But it’s no different hunn”.

“But Fierce...”, he starts. I hold up my hand. I’m not done talking.

“The girl you met in the staff diner that afternoon. The one with the big eyes and an even bigger heart is dead Elik. I’ve taken her place. I’m nothing like her. I’m done with this. With us”.

“You’re really leaving, aren’t you?” he runs his hand over my no-hair head. He looks at me for a while and I see the tears building in his eyes. Oh brother! Seriously! He blinks and a tear falls and he covers his face with his hands. I didn’t want this because now I can’t just up and leave. I take him in

my arms. He leans over and I hug him and give him a kiss on his head. He will be just fine. But gods I hate the thought of any other girl being with him!

“You are handsome and hot and loaded and you sure know how to make a girl feel special. You will survive without me”.

My own tear falls out and onto him.

“We can’t be together. All we do is tear each other apart. I’ve been building you baby but in the process I forgot to build myself. It’s time I put Fierce first. It’s time I worked on me. I can’t be with you while you are with Mbali. The thought alone makes me hate you”.

Once I would have run through fire for him. But now, my love for him is just ashes! He dries his face and sighs.

“I broke up with her. She’s history baby. You are my future”.

He’s sweet. But I’m sorry, my taste buds are burnt.

“So you’re really done?” he asks, sitting up straight and looking at me.

I can’t find the words so I just nod. I need to avoid those beautiful eyes of his. He tries to say sorry some more and beg some more but I assure him I’m done and it’s for the best.

“At least you have Lumka and Kofi. I have no one”.

I don’t know why I just said that.

“They hate me. Lumka won’t stop making me feel terrible for what I did to you and as for Kofi, he hates me for messing up with you. You were our family baby. You held all of us together and they hate me now because I destroyed our stronghold”. Hay shame. I almost feel sorry for him.

“I messed up baby. What can I do to fix this? Tell me please”.

Awww he’s actually begging. Old Fierce would be melting right now.

“If it’s any consolation, I’ll always love you and no one will ever love me like you’ve loved me”.

“So you’re going to find a replacement for me?”

“Nope. I’m done with men. I’m even considering being a lesbian”.

“Perfect! Can we like have a threesome then?”

Mxm! He’s still silly. It’s good to know he’s still in there somewhere behind those sad eyes.

“Can we be friends at least?” he says, back to serious again. I turn to face him. I wipe away a tear that just ran out.

“I know myself. You are my weakness. If I’m to ever move on can I ask that we never see each other again from today. I’m making a plan about

the kids and I'll email you the details when I get a school. We can't talk, we can't chat and we most certainly can't be friends. Please understand".

He just looks at me like I've lost my mind.

"I don't want to see doves cry Fierce".

That's a thing we used to say. We used to say we make such beautiful love that the day we will break up, even doves will cry.

"Me neither. But let them cry and maybe when their tears dry, I'll be the woman you deserve and you'll be the man I deserve".

Damn you tears. Now I'm starting to cry. Busy wasting water. He holds me and says sorry for the millionth time and I cry my eyes out till they are all puffy and my throat is drying. When I'm better I say my byes. I can feel that I'm losing my defences, so I have to get two stepping.

"Let's go home baby".

"Which home?"

"Newlands. I need to see the boys".

"You can come see them later after school but you can't stay. You need to find somewhere to sleep. I can't have you in my house".

I'm waiting for him to protest the 'my house'.

"Alright. If that's what you want that's what I'll do".

"Take care of yourself Elikplim", I kiss him on the lips, one last time. How I'm going to unlove him, I don't know. He may be an asshole in the eyes of everyone but he's perfect for me.

"Please take this ring (takes it out of his pocket). It's yours and I want you to keep it. That way no matter what happens, a part of us will always be together", he slides it on my finger, kisses my hand and lets me go.

"I love you". He catches my eye and holds the stare.

"I love you too". I hold the stare briefly and when the tears threaten to fall again, I let go.

"Wait". He reaches into his back pocket and hands me a paper. I wonder what it is. I want to sit down and maybe talk some more. But I know I should leave him alone to lick his wounds. It's the most humane thing to do. I know that I am ready to move on, perhaps if he sees me walking away it will give him the power to move on too. I leave him sitting there. That walk to post grad rez alone to get my car is the longest I've ever taken. I left my heart on that bench. I feel like I'm drowning and I don't even fight the tears as they fall. Crawling back is so tempting but I need to keep holding on to the solid hope that I can stand on my own. While I'm at

it, I have to break ties with Lumka and Kofi. They were never my people to start with. I need to seek my own crowd. Hope I can find sad, lost girls trying to make their way through life like me and maybe together we can rise from our ashes like phoenixes!

Only Elik has the power to leave me so weak inside. I need to keep walking. I lost my everything and my heart will never heal from this blow. I'm certain. Not even losing my own mother hurt like this. I'm a wreck you see. I'll miss his eyes in particular. His eyes look like that's exactly how eyes are supposed to look like! Like a miracle that was meant to be. With each step, my mind clears and becomes more resolute as if the distance I'm creating right now has an emotional echo. I get into my car and unfold that paper. It's a note:

'FN

I'll wait for you. If it takes a thousand lifetimes, then that's how long I'll wait. You taught me how to love and I can never use that lesson on anyone else. You are my perfect girl and I'll love you forever. It's always been you, baby.

EN'.

Sixteen

I thought to myself, you know what I'll deal with my Elikiosis syndrome later, today I keep calm and graduate. The past few days have been awesome because my house is full. Yes MY, Elik has no claims here. My aunt is around and Zibulo and Inflation and Butho. They all can't believe my place. The mere fact that I have somewhere I call mine is like whooah to them. They all think I've made it in life and I'm already dreading the asking for money phone calls. Butho only came because apparently Elik called him up and gently threatened him and told him to brother up and be there for me or face his full wrath. A part of me wanted Butho not to come so we can see this full wrath of Elik. He has no reason to be acting all protective here! WE ARE DONE!

Ok that's what I keep saying. I'm hoping if I say it often enough I'll also believe it. In the meantime, I'll put on a smile and walk like I'm perfectly fine. What's that they say? Fake it till you make it. I'll act whole till I'm whole. Not such a bad idea. The truth is I miss him so much. I need him just as he needs me. I just want to run into his arms and hear him tell me how sorry he is and how much he loves me. We've been to hell and back and dealt with serious things like drugs and near-death. What's a lousy baby? I'm not upset about a baby on the way. I'm upset that he didn't tell me. And yet I understand why he didn't tell me. I was going through a rough pregnancy at the time and twisted as it sounds, I know he was protecting me. So why am I still so upset?

Oh I remember, I need to stay upset so I can walk away and find myself. I need to stay away from Elik so the masses can praise me for being strong. Maybe I can even be a feminist you know or an anti-man motivational speaker! Who am I kidding? I wasn't designed to sleep hugging a pillow! I need a human. I need Elik. Yet I also need to stay away from him. It's a disaster in my head. I'm so confused it's driving me nuts.

All I know is I need to find myself. Who am I by the way? Fierce? Right! I need to find myself I keep saying. But did I ever lose myself? Or did I just grow up and life happened? Adulthood is hard! Where exactly am I going to start looking for myself? Did Elik make me lose myself? So if he did, shouldn't I go back to him so he can help me find myself since he's the reason I'm lost in the first place? But did he make me lose myself? Didn't I

all on my own get lazy and comfortable and focused more on slaying and on drawing eyebrows instead of building my career? Didn't I have countless arguments with Elik, him saying I must take the money and do something for myself so I don't blame him in the future? Didn't he spend sleepless nights helping me interpret my data and plot my graphs? Didn't he teach me how to use the software I used for the data of my last research chapter? Didn't he proofread and edit my thesis? So how exactly did he make me lose myself? Questions no answers. So all I'm left with is confusion.

If I'm being fair, I found love like never before in Elik. I had this man, broken and all, who was willing to stumble and fall and yet get up again and keep trying. I found an honest (brutally so), truthful (not always in a good way), loving (in every way), protective man who loved me the best way he knew how. He had no idea what love was yet he opened his heart anyway and learned. So no I didn't lose myself because of Elik. I found myself because of him. I laughed hard, I cried hard, I played hard, I worked hard. We were united by our love for nerdy things and for travelling. Like three months in our relationship, he joked that his five year plan was to make sure I had an orgasm in each continent of the world. And he fulfilled that five year plan. With Elik I lived. If I'm to move on without him, I need to be honest with myself. I should be prepared to lose him forever and I must do whatever I do for me. He's not the problem here, he never hid who he was. The problem is me. I didn't do enough to help him. I knew everything yet I didn't drag him to counselling or at least for exorcism or even to a *sangoma* at least! I thought my hugs were enough to heal him. I said I don't want to think about Elik today yet look at me!

And my father is here too. My aunt says him and Elik spoke and Elik thought it would be great if he came down for my graduation so that at least one of my parents be there. My mind just had to loop right back to Elik! Elik! Running my life as always. I know he means well but again, WE ARE NO LONGER TOGETHER!

My aunt was also saying something about an important meeting my father, Elik and my brothers need to hold. She was about to tell me the details when the twins came from school and ran into my arms screaming "Aunt Fierce". My precious bambinos. No one will ever understand the love I have for them. You should have heard me trying to explain who the kids are to my family. That was hard. And questions like where is their

mother were pretty hard to answer. I couldn't exactly say we had her deported and deemed an undesirable person, could I? I don't know how I feel about my father being here. I still feel betrayed. He failed me. My aunt urged me to be ok about it and to talk with him when I can. I don't know if I'm ready for that. I have a lot on my plate as is. And since when is Elik responsible for shipping my entire family here? He's an ex for crying out loud! I have barely said a word to my father. I don't know where to start.

Kofi is here too! He said there's no way he was coming down all the way from Germany for a graduation ceremony he wouldn't attend. He said he knows Elik and I will be back together soon so why should he stress. I see delusion runs in their family! The twins have already warmed up to Inflation and are showing him around and making him play games with them. My poor little brother. English will make him strong shame. The reunion between Zibulo and Butho and Butho and my father was awkward and touching at the same time. Butho had cut everyone off! Except my aunt of course. You can't cut off my aunt! She's the mother of outcasts like Butho and I.

No one (except Kofi) knows I've broken up with Elik. They all keep asking about *umkhwenyana* . I told them that he's on an extremely important business thingy in Zambia and will unfortunately miss my graduation. I leave it like that. Today stressed will be spelled backwards. DESSERTS. I don't think Butho likes Elik much. I don't blame him though. I'm pretty sad though. I wish my mother was here and Elik. I mean, the latter single handedly edited my thesis from back to back. Harsh as he was, he saw me through. And deep down in that barely-there heart of his, he loves me. And sadly, I love him too. Can't walk backwards though, I need to keep my head held high lest the crown falls. I may no longer be a queen of the Nkrumah kingdom but royal blood still flows in my veins. I am a queen.

Anyways, enough stressing. Today is all about me. I'll stress about Elik tomorrow. I solemnly swear that no Elik will be thought about today! I wonder how he's holding up. I worry about him a lot. I feel like I neglected him and frankly if he kills himself or goes spiralling out of control, I'll kill myself. Just pull a Romeo and Juliet once and for all. Kofi says he's not fine and is drinking too much, but what's new? Again, clear up thoughts, I said no Eliking today please! My brain doesn't listen.

I woke up at 5 and sat in my garden and meditated. I quieted my

thoughts, sat in the half lotus pose and closed my eyes. I just sat there for an hour in a state of bliss. I looked deep within myself and searched my soul for answers. After that I felt more alive and happier and ready to face the day. Bring it on life, I'm ready for you. It's graduation! And my aunt has never been happier. This is the first graduation she's attending and she keeps crying, making me all emotional. She needs to stop because she's messing up my make now shoo! The twins can't attend the ceremony because they have to go to school. Besides, it's not a kiddy event.

I ask Lizzy to make a big lunch so that when we come back we can all sit outside and toast to yours truly, the new doctor. As soon as we get to campus, I abandon everyone. Kofi knows this campus so he will be the usher for the day. I run to post grad rez to join my lab mates. I look so fine in this red gown! If I do say so myself. My dress, my shoe, my wig, my makeup. All carefully thought out. I'm popping flavour and dripping sauce honey!

Ndivhu, Bunke, Brain and I stride to the hall. The brotherhood! We made it! All of us made it. There was no doubt with Bunke and Brain but me, I almost didn't make it. As for Ndivhu, I never got over his style of working. He never worked really but got done! That's impressive! We keep doing random high fives and doing the whole 'remember that time...' thing. This is the best day of my life. I feel like I've waited for this day for eternity. PhD kicked my ass so many times and if anyone deserves this red gown, it's me. I worked for this and frankly it's the one thing I can proudly say wasn't bought with Elik's money.

We're ushered to the front row and I sit with Bunke on my right and Brain on my left. I know people make graduation sound glamorous but the truth is, it's boring. Graduation is boring! There I said it. We have to suffer through all the Diplomas then all the Bachelors, then Honours, then Masters in the Faculty! You clap till your hands hurt and you are clapping for people you don't even know. And ya ne, some girls don't know that there's a thin line between sexy and trashy. Why would you wear a barely there dress on your graduation then fail to kneel down for capping because you are afraid the dress will show people things that should be kept private? And if your boobs need support why wear a boobtube and then now keep pulling up because your twins are almost falling out? And high heels will show us things. Beautiful girl, graduating cum laude but the heel is showing her flames and she's walking like she's auditioning for the role of a drunkard in

a sitcom. Not classy at all. That's what happens during graduation.

I'm sitting here now just looking at what people are wearing because I'm so bored. We're not even done with half of the graduates and I want to sleep. It's been two hours already. I go through the graduation booklet! Our names are there towards the end, with a summary of our life stories and an abstract of our research. Thankfully, my life story only tells the journey of a girl who made it from nothing and went through three black gowns and rose to the red gown. It's a cliché beautiful story of humble beginnings and hard work and 'black child you can'. I'm glad it's just that. Imagine if they wrote my entire life story there!

But Ndivhu's name is not here and I have checked back to back, three times already. Oh well, maybe they forgot it. These things happen. What's important is not what's on this booklet but on that one on stage. As long as he gets his Doctorate, that's what's important. They are only starting with the Masters graduates now. Lawd! I'm getting really bored. I text Bunke,

'Hey handsome!'

I elbow him and tell him to check his phone.

'Hi!' he replies.

'How are you?'

'Good?' he responds.

*'Do you miss me? *wink wink*'* .

'Yes' .

*'What do you miss? *wink*'* .

'You' , he says.

Wow, this is such a boring conversation.

*'I'll stop chatting with you if you continue to be so boring *rolls eyes*'* .

'K' , he says.

'Potassium? What has potassium got to do with anything?' , I type.

'What?' he responds.

Mxm! Elik would have gotten that! How will I ever replace my king though? All these other boys don't get me, they just want to hit hit hit.

*'Get lost B! *angry face*'* , I text.

'K' , he says.

Ok I'm done with Naija boy!

I'm so tempted to text Elik. Just to let him know I'm graduating today. He probably knows but I would love to just let me re-know. I truly wish things were different between us and we were still together. But that boat is

sailing. Masters graduates are done it's PhD now. They start with the three guys in Electrical, then the one guy in Civil, then the two guys in Mechanical then it's us. I'm so excited now, I can't breathe. Before they move on to calling us, the Dean who's calling out names says, "Before we proceed with the awarding of degrees to our graduates, I would like to call forward Mr Sean Nicholson. He has something important to say. Mr Nicholson, please", he says and sits down.

Naturally, we all turn our heads to see this Sean person interrupting our graduation. There goes on stage a good looking, slender guy with good hair. I'm starting to think a lot of guys look good. Must be the single in me looking for its next target. Ok, all eyes on Sean.

"Greetings to you all and congratulations to all graduates", he says fixing the microphone.

We are all looking at this graduation interrupter with red eyes. Wait, I think I know this guy. He sang the opening duet with some girl. Well, whatever. Can he say what he has to say and get lost so some of us can walk the runway please!

"Thank you all for this opportunity. I'm here to relay an important message to a special someone. Can I ask Fierce Nkomo (the Nkomo pronunciation came out as something else!) to please stand, as this message is meant for her".

The people on stage start whispering to each other and Bunke and all are looking at me. Wait, Fierce is me, right? Is there another Fierce Nkomo here? Why are they looking at me like that? I also don't know what's going on! Let me just stand and we get this over with. If I'm the wrong Fierce, I will just walk right out and pretend I was going to the bathroom. I'm praying it's not a message from Komla! Please no. Not today.

I stand. You know what, let me just walk to the empty middle and hear this guy out so we can all move on with our lives. It's dead silent now, the only sound is my heel against the floor. I stand in the middle and wait. Man, I can be so confident sometimes! One gift Elik gave me. I stand there, proud and tall and uncaring who says what, to receive this bizarre message from a guy I've never met before. I hope he doesn't ask to marry me. I don't know him!

"Ms Fierce", he says.

"Doctor!" I mumble under my breath.

"Professor Elik wanted me to tell you that he's truly sorry for what he

did to you. He said to wish you the best on your graduation and to tell you that he knows you look gorgeous as always. He says I must remind you that you are his lighthouse and without you he will forever be lost at sea”.

Oh Elik! Is there a reason he has to be so sweet and go against norms? People are mumbling but they stop when Sean lifts up his hand to say ‘shut up all of you, I’m not done’.

“Prof Elik also asked that I sing this piece for you before you walk on that stage. It’s called *Stay by Tyrese* . He says each word is from his heart. He said to tell you that he would have sung it for you himself but he is very humble and doesn’t want everyone talking about how beautiful his voice is, hence I will sing on his behalf”.

Yep, that sounds a lot like my Elik! Sean person signals to the band. I guess they organised in advance because they know which beat to play. *Tyrese and not Akon?* That’s a first! Well, I can do Tyrese, he’s black enough and tall enough. I wonder how much Elik paid this guy! And my gosh, standing here with all eyes on me is getting uncomfortable. I can feel all eyes boring into my flesh and I wonder what my father and brothers are thinking right now. The VC is sitting there looking at me smiling! I guess this is the most eventful graduation he has ever presided over!

But Elik! Disrupting graduation just to say sorry in a song? I don’t know why I’m so charmed though. He’s such a hopeless romantic. Sean starts singing and I feel my tears building. I think I was given more tear glands than the average human. I can cry at the snap of a finger over a small thing. I can’t cry now though. My mascara! I’m just looking at Sean and thinking, he sings really good! Tyrese would be so proud! I try and listen to the words as if it’s Elik singing. Oh man. Who’s cutting onions in this hall though?

As he says “Thank you” and takes a bow, the hall bursts out clapping. I don’t know if it’s because Sean sang so well or it’s this whole act of love from this unknown Prof. Who knew academics could also be so romantic? I for one used to think academics are bland. Some people here are even thinking Sean is my boyfriend because I hear them shouting “marry him” at the back. Like people don’t listen vele?

I smile and nod at Sean. He delivered the message well. I will take it and put it aside for now. I’ll think about it after graduation. That was too beautiful for me. He knows music hits the right spot with me. Elik though! He knows the right strings in my heart to pull. This was beautiful. What’s that Sean said earlier? That Elik said I’m his lighthouse? That’s the sweetest

thing I've heard in a while. And why do I suddenly want to 'STAY'? He really is making this break up harder than it already is. And how did he put all this together? I smile some more because I know he's watching from somewhere. Graduation is live streamed and there's no way they will miss moments like this!

Then the Dean of Engineering takes over again and thanks Sean and makes some unfunny joke about love and education. It doesn't even make sense and no one laughs. He clears his throat and moves right along.

"Graduating with a Doctor of Philosophy in Chemical Engineering are the following: Dr. Brain is called first. He goes on stage. They read his life story and abstract. I clap hard. All these other people don't know what a brilliant mind this man has! No one deserves this PhD like he does. I clap very hard. Next is Dr. Bunke, I clap. Ndivhu and I stop and hold hands as we hear about his research. Bunkechukwu! Is it just me or people's handsomeness is magnified when they wear red gowns? As they cap him, I almost cry. It's been quite a journey!

I'm next I know and I feel like standing already before my name is even called. I'm so nervous I feel like I want to pee. This is it. I can't describe the feeling. The Dean whispers something to the VC and hands him what looks like a piece of paper. The VC stands. What was that about? Am I so special the VC will have to call me up himself? Now I really feel like I will pee. Can they call me already! The suspense is killing me down here. I feel like just walking onto the stage anyway. But I stay put, my knees shaking under the gown. The VC stands and takes the microphone from the Dean.

He says, "For our Doctoral graduates, it is customary that if a member of the family holds a Doctoral degree, they can come forward and present the degree to their relative".

Wait! What? Who's this family member I don't know of? It can't be Butho! He's not that kind of doctor! Or are they calling Ndivhu before me so this is his not mine. That would make sense I guess. I'm looking around confused but I have to listen as the VC continues.

"In the case of Lastborn Fierce Nkomo, I call forward, Professor Elikplim Mawufeasi Nkrumah, PhD: Robotics and Mechatronics, National University of Singapore".

I get all choked up and I don't think I'll be able to stand. My knees are buckling and I'm just sitting. What's gonna happen when I stand? Elik is here? Today? Or is this some huge mistake? So many thoughts run through

my brain. I want to cry but I also want to laugh out loud.

Or maybe he organised for this before the break up happened? So what's going to happen now since he's not here today? How did he pull this off in the first place? Oh my goodness! How could the graduation centre be so gullible! How did Elik trick them into this? Since when is he my family? Yes he's been more family to me than my own blood but still Home Affairs doesn't know that. I will be lying if I say I don't melt as Elik goes up the stage through the stage door! His red gown flying behind him like a cape, a mortarboard on that brilliant head of his and a smug look on his face. He looks so majestic I almost kneel and hail his royal highness. A black suit can be seen under his gown. He looks picture perfect. I want to get on this chair and shout *'That's my man y'all'* . Then I remember we broke up. People are clapping and cheering and I don't know why. I stand up, straighten my gown and walk up to the stage. He meets me and gives me a hand up the steps and smiles so charmingly I want to suddenly forgive all his bullshit. Damn him for looking this good!

He hugs me far too long and I'm sure the graduation procession members sitting here on stage are wondering what exactly is going on. I try to be serious as I face the front as expected, so the crowd can see me. I hear ululation and a loud whistle, and I know my aunt and father are still here. I spot them and wave briefly. Elik reads out the topic of my thesis then my abstract. He sounds so professional and serious! Then he starts reading my life story and when he reaches the end, he adds his own lines that are not there! His voice is seduction incarnate! He should be facing the crowd not me! But do you think Elik cares? He comes and stands next to me as he adds his own stuff while pretending to read!

"Fierce is a beautiful, intelligent and amazing girl. She is the full package and will make the finest engineer in the world. Look at her! She has a sexy brain and a body that could bring any man to their knees. She is everything and she most certainly does not deserve all the pain a foolish man she met in the staff diner one afternoon put her through. All she ever did was love that fool of a man but he hurt her repeatedly. That man knows he was stupid and should have never taken Fierce for granted. He knows that she deserves the best of the best, and he will give her that or die trying!"

It's so quiet right now and I can hear fidgeting behind me, people are shocked by this bizarre speech. And what the hell is a sexy brain? A brain

dressed in lingerie? But he's not done fake reading.

"With all due respect, that man would love to stand on this stage today and let the gorgeous Dr. Fierce Nkomo know that he loves her with everything in him and hope she will find it somewhere in her beautiful heart to forgive him and guide him back to solid ground. All he asks for is one last chance and he swears in front of her family, you graduates, the VC, Deans, honourable dignitaries and parents, that he will love her the way she deserves till kingdom come".

He sounds so serious I can see how it's confusing to the crowd. It's like he's reading but I know he's not. I'm so weak though. I just keep smiling there and blushing. He's such an idiot. But he's my idiot and I want to be an idiot with him. He stops 'reading' and looks at me. I smile. How can I not?

"Cybertron", he says.

"Cybertron", I whisper.

"I love you", he says. He actually says that into the microphone and people cheer and whistle and make all sorts of noises. People really love love shame. I just blush. I know he does and he's starting to make me emotional now. He clears his throat and goes back to being serious. And when the crowd calms down he goes back to graduation.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Dr Lastborn Fierce Nkrumah!" he says. I give him the eye.

"Oh I'm sorry, I mean Dr Lastborn Fierce Nkomo! The only female doctor we are capping today".

Like what is Elik doing though? We are academics here and we take graduation quite serious! I'm sure the graduation centre will reconsider this allowing of relatives to present graduates next time. The procession members give me a standing ovation as I kneel in front of the VC for capping. He wishes me well and welcomes me to the world of doctorship and wishes me the best in life and love and says I should go and get married and make children. I spend two minutes kneeling there more than the average graduate. We having a chat with the VC, this is the 4th and last time he will cap me and he just says he's so proud of me.

The whole hall is in an uproar and my aunt is ululating and soon joined by other women and Kofi and my father are whistling. I just know it's them. Kofi's such a child that one! Elik stands behind me as he puts the hood over my head and drapes it across my shoulders. He's standing way too close.

"Don't move. I have a hard on", he whispers in my ear. I don't know

what to do with this man! I smile for the camera.

“I love you baby girl”, he says as he continues to fix the hood across my shoulders. I think I love him too but those are decisions to be made later.

“Did you love the song? Did it mean anything to you?”

I nod. I loved it and it meant a lot. I’ll download it and listen to it later and re-evaluate my feelings. As I’m about to walk off, I see my little brother, Inflation running towards the stage. What now? He starts reciting my clan names! I’m sure my aunt put him up to this! I’m going to bite her head off! Usually I would be embarrassed but today I’m proud and I’m happy that my people are proud of me. I’m all smiles. Elik seems to be enjoying this circus as he keeps giggling behind me. I’m sure I will be on the front of the Campus Bulletin tomorrow! Eventually I walk off the stage and Elik follows.

“Congratulations!” he says as I pose for the photo outside the hall. He just pulls me in and kisses me before I know what’s going on. Because I’m emotional I kiss him back.

“Thank you”. Not for the kiss but for the congratulations!

“You look beautiful by the way”, he says.

“Thanks”.

I’m done with the photoshoot and I need to run back, I need to watch Ndivhu graduate.

“Can we take another one together”, Elik says as I’m about to dash off. Ok fine. We hold each other, smile and flash. It’s done. I have to run so I can see Ndivhu.

“Baby! Wait”, he calls.

“What Elik?” I turn and almost snap.

I really have to go as in right now. He hugs me. Damn, this man smells nice! And after all these years, why do I still get butterflies every time he touches me? Is it normal to get butterflies when your ex hugs you?

“Can we talk?” he says.

“Not now. My friend is graduating any second now and I really have to go”.

I run and thankfully they haven’t called Ndivhu. The VC stands as I sit down and catch my breath. I think we need security guards at graduation! Elik followed me! He tells Bunke to move over so he can sit next to me! Bunke gives him the eye but thankfully moves over. And thankfully there were empty chairs. He takes my hand in his and I just let him. It’s no use

fighting him I know.

“Ndivhuwo Mashudu!” the VC calls out.

Ndivhu stands and walks proudly to the stage. He even cleaned up nice today and traded those raggedy skinny jeans of his for a decent suit. I can't help myself, I run to him and hug him just before he goes up the steps. I'm truly proud of him, I honestly didn't think he would make it. Of everyone, he shocked me and taught me never to judge a book by its cover. I hug him and the VC gives me the 'that's enough' eye. His eye also seems to say I should let the poor man graduate in peace. I think I'm going to cry as I sit down, we made it! Against all odds. We made it! Elik takes my hand again. He knows he can let me go, right? I'm not going to run away! The VC is speaking now.

“A doctoral degree is the highest academic degree awarded at university level. It is a prestigious award bestowed upon graduates of the highest calibre. It is an honour and is regarded with the utmost respect. An engineering Doctoral graduate is one who has shown the ability to conduct an independent innovative research, has mastered techniques relevant to his/her research, has the ability to interpret literature and findings in a justifiable manner, has a good grounding in the theory and application of engineering techniques as well as scientific methodologies and has presented a document of high technical standard”.

This is so unnecessary though! Those interested in PhD know what it entails, there is no point in lecturing people. Poor Ndivhu! He has to suffer through all this before he can get capped. Sucks being the last graduate of the day ne? The VC is not done talking.

“Plagiarism is tantamount to academic theft and is by no means tolerable. Fraud is a crime of the highest order in academic institutions and is punishable by expulsion and revoking of unmerited degrees”.

Why is the VC telling us all this though? We know. We are all graduates here, we know. But the old man is still not done talking. Elik drapes his arm over my shoulder. I'm not going to run away, can he stop.

“Upon thorough investigation, by internal and external moderators, it was revealed that Ndivhuwo Mashudu duplicated 87% of a thesis from Massachusetts Institute of Technology!”

What? I throw Elik's hand away. I stand with my hands over my mouth! Ndivhu! How could he? Surely, he knew he couldn't get away with this! You can get away with plagiarism in undergrad, but after Honours you can't

really. Ndivhu what have you done to yourself!

“By the power invested in me, I hereby refuse Ndivhuwo Mashudu, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Chemical Engineering. Furthermore, in accordance with the Higher Education Act of the DHET section bla bla, I strip him of the Masters in Chemical Engineering as well as the Honours in Chemical Engineering he currently holds. Ndivhuwo, you are suspended with immediate effect and you will not be allowed to register in any academic institution for a period of 10 years”.

The hall erupts into chaos and I’m shook. How did Ndivhu do this? Why? Didn’t our supervisor run a plagiarism check before submitting for examination? How did he plagiarise another thesis? Was it the same topic? What exactly happened here? I have so many questions. I don’t understand. Now he has no degree whatsoever! Why Ndivhu? Why didn’t he just suffer through like me? But that explains a lot. I honestly never saw Ndivhu put in the work! Brain and Bunke also have their hands over their mouths and we are standing. Ndivhu runs off stage and I start to walk so I can go after him to make sure he’s alright.

“Don’t”, Elik says grabbing my arm.

“This is your day. Enjoy it!”

He’s right! I sink in my chair. I’m shook. When the ceremony is over, I’m still traumatised by Ndivhu! I tell Elik to give me some space, I need time with Brain and Bunke. He kisses me on the cheek, gives Bunke the eye and says he’s leaving since I don’t want him around me. Ndivhu!

Seventeen

As I step out of the hall to find my family, I spot Elik standing with another red gown wearing person. Maybe an old colleague? I keep looking at my sweet Prof and it's taking every strength in my soul to not run into his arms. The mystery person turns around and I break into a smile and run to him. I'm very huggy. It's Lumka. Dr. Lumkani, looking fresh and flawless in his red gown! You know sometimes I forget that he is a Doctor! For real! Even with Elik, only a few outside our circle know he's a Prof because we don't throw those titles around. And mostly, because judging by their actions you would never think they have brains. I stand with Elik on my right and Lumka on my left.

"Congratulations Doc! I came late because you know Elik. He had me doing favours for him and I was lucky to get here just in time to see the two of you turning the graduation ceremony into your own love affair".

A mere congrats would have sufficed! Elik is pulled aside by someone I don't know.

"You taking him back, aren't you?" he says sounding disappointed.

"No, it's cool. I know it's him you love and honestly you and me would have never worked. You would have compared me to Elik in everything".

True. I just nod. In his own way, Elik loves me just as in his own way Lumka thinks he loves me. Lumka just had the whole conversation all on his own! We take family portraits and Elik and Kofi are in some of them! Like, I don't know what to do with these guys.

"You did well Fifi. I'm so proud of you", my aunt says.

"Thank you", I smile.

"And you chose well! You and *mkhwenyana* looked so beautiful on stage together. I love you two so much!"

Didn't she hear he was busy trying to apologise in third person up there? Maybe I should just tell her the truth.

"We broke up", I blurt out.

"Really? It didn't look like it though. I saw that man on stage with you. Just the way he looks at you, even a blind man can see that he loves you!"

I wish I could tell her how complicated it is but she would never understand. No one ever does. We take more photographs, and get congratulations from strangers and mood is on 100 for everyone. People

keep pointing at us and saying *'it's them'*. I'm a sucker for love and love playing along so I hold on to Elik like we're in love.

He doesn't look too happy though. Is it because I haven't forgiven him? Oh well, he fucked up big and I'm not sure if I'll ever be ready to forgive him. Ok fine I've forgiven him, but I still need to decide whether I want him back or not. Shelf the thought, no stress today. I think Inflation is hungry but he doesn't want to say. I know my little brother. I ask Elik to walk me to the ATM. Besides, I need him away from my family so I can tell him to cheer up. Losing me is not the end of the world! He takes my hand and I don't resist. My father is here and I'm not going to show him I failed with Elik like my mother predicted! Just in case he reports back.

"Baby", Elik says as we pass the auditorium. He pulls me inside, away from the crowd.

"Look nana, I'm sorry your father is here. I'm sorry I didn't tell you about it".

I fold my arms and purse my lips. He has no business discussing anything with my family! But I refuse to be stressed today.

"You know I'll never let them hurt you again. You know that, right? Just trust me, please. Can you do that?"

I nod. No stresses today. I know if it was up to Elik we would be making out right now. What with the way he's standing so dangerously close to me right now, so close you can't tell the edges of gowns apart? His breath is in my face and I love it. I know I shouldn't love it but I love it. This ex of mine is confusing the hell out of me.

"I love you Fierce", he says, looking at me with those eyes. Yup! That's my cue to leave before I start mumbling senseless things like 'I love you too'.

We make it through the crowd and I see Bunke and a woman talking.

"Come, let's say congrats to Dr. Bunke".

Let me just rub Bunke in his face maybe he will get upset and I don't know, maybe leave? I hug Bunke but he doesn't hug back. Awkward! I greet the woman and extend my hand to shake but she ignores me. Awkward. And that blue eyeshadow! I get that she wanted it to match her dress, but she didn't need to use the whole pallet!

"Hi. I'm Fierce" I'm over excited today.

"I'm Bunke's wife", she says, not smiling.

Eh! Ok! She loves being a wife so much she even introduces herself as a

wife? Doesn't she have an identity of her own? Maybe they had a fight because they both look unhappy. This is too awkward. I never should have dragged Elik here. He doesn't know it's Bunke I used to sleep with but he knows him from that day outside rez. This move I'm trying to pull here is childish.

"Fierce? Is this her Bunke?"

She looks dangerous. Why is she so angry?

"Is this the ashawo (prostitute) that led you into temptation?"

Me? Ashawo? She's crazy! Yes I fucked her husband repeatedly but so what? She's not the first wife to have her husband slept for her by other people! What's her problem! Bunke nods.

"Ashawo!" she says. That word doesn't even bother me because it's not in my language so it's empty.

"Idiot", she says. This woman is trying me! Someone hold me back! I'm going to kick this woman so hard she will land face first in egusi soup in Lagos!

"I go beat her up o!" she says. She no go beat up nobody! Can't she see she's embarrassing some of us here. I want to grab her stupid face and scratch it with my nails but Elik holds me. She's lucky! This right here is the reason I don't aspire to be a wife. I think that change of status in your relationship makes you somewhat psycho. I saw from Komla and now exhibit 2 is in front of me. She has raised her voice and has attracted a crowd. I mean drama couldn't let me have a break on my graduation!

Stupid Bunke just had to go and confess things he wasn't asked! Things his wife would have never found out about. Geez! It's not like we even dated. It was just sex and it was so long ago! He looks at me with 'I'm sorry eyes' but I will never forgive this embarrassment. How could he do this to me? Just because he decided to grow a conscience and feel guilty doesn't mean he had to pull me under the bus with him. And now Elik knows!

"Dude. Control your woman!" Elik says.

He sounds very angry and yet so calm at the same time. Bunke says something inaudible.

"What was that?" Elik asks. "Trust me you don't want to mess with me. I'll end that stupid career of yours before it even begins!"

What's scary is the fact that I know he can. He then says to the wife, "And you! You never ever touch my woman! You understand? Have a little class!"

I'm glad he didn't start a fight. He's quite the fighter these days. His protectiveness is so sexy right now.

"Come baby, let's get outta here".

Lawd I want him back! Can I take him back right here right now? I give Bunke an angry eye before we walk away.

So Elik didn't put 2 and 2 together to see that Bunke is that guy he hates who used to sleep with me? Or he did but doesn't care? That was quite dramatic and unnecessary.

"Don't cry baby. Don't let bitter people get to you. Today is your day and we celebrate you. Forget everything else".

I'm not crying. But I guess he knows I get worked up easily and could just start crying any second. So he's saying 'don't cry' in advance. We end up at hi bank's ATM instead of mine and he withdraws way more money than I need. We get Inflation a pie and juice and we go back to find the others.

"I got you a young present just to say I'm proud of you".

He takes my hood and blindfolds me with it and makes me walk. It's hard to walk in heels without seeing where you are going. We get behind the major sports hall and my aunt is already screaming out in joy. I wonder what this little present is. As the hood comes off my eyes, I just start crying and throw myself at him.

"Thank you", is all I can say.

A BMW X6! He bought it for me? I'm overwhelmed and can't think straight. I don't even know what to say. See, Elik and I would have been good, I would have made him a decent wife, I know. But he just had to mess up! Now I'm thanking him with hugs only because kisses are for lovers. He really wants me back ne! I wonder how much I'll sell it for when I start spring cleaning him out of my life.

Graduation lunch is at Cape Grace, same hotel Kofi, Elik and Lumka will be putting up in. The speeches made over this lunch leave me in stitches. These guys never loved me! The way they are mocking me! I can tell Butho is annoyed, he needs to take a chill pill that one. Elik isn't happy. He just holds my hand instead of eating, now I have to eat with one hand because my other is held.

Elik asks that I walk him to his room and I do. He has to stay here because he can't sleep with me. We are broken up! In the eyes of everyone we are still together though so I need to come up with a good reason why he

won't be sleeping at home with me. We get to his room and he sulks and sits on the bed. Seeing him like this is really breaking my heart. I give him a hug then sit on his lap. He asks if we have a chance and I'm honest with him. I don't know. I need to find myself, to figure out my future, to travel the world and to kick start my career. I promise to be his friend, that's all I can offer right now. Best friends maybe? I'm a doctor now and I'm making hard doctor-like decisions.

He kisses me on the forehead and says, "I'll wait for you baby girl". I leave him there alone.

"That was quick", Lumka says when Elik joins us shortly after I sit. I look at him and shake my head slightly. He can't insinuate we went for a quickie! We have grown-ups around this table! What's wrong with him! Elik + Fierce = Friends.

When we go home at the end of the day. I'm the happiest girl in the world. Because no matter what happens to me, I know I've been loved, thoroughly. I wanted to share my bedroom with my aunt but she says you never share a bed you share with your man with anyone! Oh well! She can go on with her beliefs and superstitions and leave me out of it. I'm sleeping with the twins tonight so Inflation can have their room and also to protect my body from Elik. Last thing I need is me relapsing and him ending up in bed with me. I put the kids to bed, read them a story and by the time I come back, there is a serious meeting.

Why wasn't I invited? What business does Elik have holding a meeting with my people though? I'm asked to 'excuse them, they will talk to me tomorrow!' In my own house! Ouch! So I go to bed. I doze off still waiting for Elik to come and say bye so he can update me on the agenda and minutes of the meeting. I wake up and it's 11 pm and the twins are sleeping peacefully. I'm not sleepy anymore. I go down to the kitchen for water and it's so quiet. I go back to bed and I just sit there getting lost in my thoughts. Fuck! I'm so horny!

I can't really use a vibrator now with kids in the same bed. I'm a better mother than that! Maybe a shower will help. The whole time in the shower I'm fantasising about Elik getting all up in me and touching me all over. This is very bad! You know what, fuck it, I'm not going to sit here and starve yet I know where I can get some willing D! I get out of my pyjamas and only put on a gown and slippers. My new baby needs to be taken for a spin anyways. Elik actually bought me the X6! He was so against it when I

first told him I wanted it. I make it to the Cape Grace and having these people let me in is a mission. They even had to call the manager and I had to explain to him that I'm here for sex and nothing else and I'll leave right after. I tell him I'm not a prostitute! He looks at me funny but he lets me in anyway. I know where I'm going. I knock on the door. I keep knocking until the door flings open.

"What!... Ummm Fierce. Come in", Lumka says.

"Were you sleeping?" I walk right past him into his room. Thankfully he's alone. You never know with these men around me.

"Ya. What's up?"

I hold the gown around me. I'm naked underneath and he can't see.

"I wanna talk", I say.

"Now? What time is it?" he rubs his eyes.

"Sit. It won't take long".

He sighs but sits. "Look bhudi. I've been doing a lot of thinking. I like you a lot but that's it. LIKE. What happened last time was a mistake. I LOVE Elik. I'm here to say I'm sorry if I led you on in anyway. Your bond with Elik inspires me and I can never come between you two. And I know you will find the girl for you one day. That girl is just not me".

He looks at me but that's all I came to say. I give him a quick awkward hug then I say bye and sorry again and scurry out of that room. I'm sure he will wake up thinking he dreamt this and it didn't happen. Phew! That was hard. I know I need to knock on the next door. It's almost midnight but who's watching the clock, right? That one opens faster than the last.

"Baby", he says.

He wasn't sleeping. From the look of things here he was on his laptop and there's a half empty glass of alcohol on the bedside. He looks shocked to see me. My heart just breaks because this man I see here is one that only me sees. He appears all arrogant and full of himself out in public but close the door and the real Elik comes to life. A miserable, broken, drained, unsure piece of art. I can't help running into his arms. I just want to hold him until he's ok. I know what life has done to him. I was there sometimes and honestly, I don't know how he still gets up every morning and goes out there to bring the money home! He's the strongest person I know. For a man to open up the way he has, takes a great deal of courage. Why did my soulmate have to be this shattered though? It doesn't help that I'm also another lost soul aimlessly wandering the earth. So how can the lost lead

the lost home?

Oh and what he did there on graduation was everything to me. He's not forgiven yet though! I'm just not so upset at him anymore. I just need him to be ok.

"Fierce?" he says when I let the hug go.

"Shhhhhh", I put my index finger to my lips. Who said he could talk? He looks at me not understanding. He'll understand soon enough it's alright. I undo the belt of my gown and let it drop to the floor and I step out of my slippers. He looks at me and I see his eyes come alive. I bite my lower lip because ummm I'm not quite sure what to do next. Maybe if I switch off the lights he won't see from my facial expression that I have no clue what I'm doing. We always do it with the lights on because someone is a visual creature. Well, tonight isn't about him. I'm just here to use his body for my own enjoyment then get back home. I switch off the light and it gets very dark. Perfect. Tonight is all about feeling not seeing. I pull him towards me and bring his neck down. I think he got the memo now because he kisses me. Gosh he kisses so hungrily, can he chill out a bit. He's not in control here. I am! His lips and mine lock and our tongues find each other. I feel his hand ride up my thigh and it stops on my bum. He grabs and I move his hand away. Not yet honey. I'm here to take and he should just shut up and give!

I pull up his T-shirt to take it off. He catches on very fast so he takes it off himself and my hands slide all over his body. This body, this! It's my bane. When I have him right where I want him, I lean forward on him, my bare breasts crushing on his chest. I stand with my feet on top of his feet, trying to reach up to him. He grabs me hard and lowers his face down to me.

"No touching", I say.

I keep kissing his body from his neck, dooown until I'm on my knees. Him I hate, his body I love. I need light for this part so I get up, get the lights and get right back to kneeling. I pull his jeans down, fighting with the belt like I'm fighting for my last breath. Eventually I get to him, hold him tight in my grip just the way he taught me how, and stroke. My finger circles around that little bead of pre-cum, I bring it to my tongue as I search for his eyes, boy does he look needy! He's already getting hard but I still need to work at him some more. Slowly at first I kiss with the tip of my tongue. Gosh I enjoy giving head, it's not normal. I think it has something

to do with his reaction to me. My hands do the stroking and my mouth does the job; a perfect division of labour of my body parts.

His mmmms and ‘damns’ tell me he’s enjoying this. He’s getting really big and soon I won’t be able to take his whole length in my mouth and I’m not gagging for no one today. He’s been a very bad boy!

He grabs the back of my head to steady me and I stop what I’m doing. I said no touching! He let’s go and I resume. I didn’t think he could get any bigger but now he feels so full in my mouth. I’m licking, I’m sucking, I’m flicking, I’m blowing, I’m worshipping. I’m a girl on a mission. I need a second PhD, in giving head, even if I do say so myself. His breathing is heavier now and it’s such a turn on. And his hands keep touching me but quickly letting go. He’s at my mercy and I’m loving every second of it. When I take him back in my mouth, he rams it all in. I gag. My poor throat! Now he’s misbehaving so I stop. I think it was involuntary but still! I said he shouldn’t do anything!

“Sorry baby”.

Strike 2! I said no talking! He doesn’t listen well, does he?

“Shhhhhh”. I get up and wipe my mouth while holding the stare.

“Stay”. I turn around and walk to get the lights. Let him see that ass. That’s exactly what it’s gonna look like when I walk away from him. I need us to mellow in darkness. I want to feel not see. I take his hand and lead him to the bed and push him on it. It’s no longer as dark, my eyes have acclimatised. I still can’t see colour but I can see shapes and outlines. Most importantly I can feel. I’m on top of him in no time and move forward until each of my knees are on the side of his face. I then come down on his face slowly until he holds me and his finger feels around then I feel his tongue running over my clit. It’s like my entire nervous system just got awakened as feelings rush through me like electricity.

If I’m to accommodate him in the depth of me, I deserve to be eaten first. And this man right here knows how to eat pussy! I let him grab me as he pulls me down till all of me is spread over his mouth. He’s free to use his hands now. Sanctions have been lifted.

“Stop”, I whisper and he obeys.

I get off him and quickly turn around and slide my upper body forwards until my mouth closes around him. I don’t even know why I thought I could pull a successful 69. I never can! He sits up with his back against the headboard and pulls me up. My face is down and my ass is up in the air and

I'm all open up like a sunflower. His royal hardness is just there in my hand and I'm doing nothing. To think I thought I could take control! He keeps going till I can't take it anymore. My body lets and I wettilly and screamingly and shakily orgasm. He holds me there as I drizzle and convulse all over him. That spank when I hang in there holding on to his legs, reminds me of many beautiful nights gone by. Many nights of contortion and insane yoga moves. He keeps massaging my ass and keeping quiet like a good boy. A part of me wants to get up and leave. I'm done here! But another part of me still yearns to feel that dick buried deep inside me.

I'm not lazy at all. I work for my bread. I get up and ride. It feels like forever since I last had my dose of him. I can hear his heavy breathing and I like. My hands press down on his chest as I go on him like a cowgirl. If I never forgive him I need him to remember this night. I lean forwards and bring my twins to his face. I know they are his weakness. My mistake. The moment he takes a nipple in his mouth, I lose all control. All my strength just deserted me. I don't even know why I'm still on top because I'm doing nothing, just taking it like a good girl. He's holding me by the thighs and fucking me stupid. I feel like he'll split me in half if he goes any further.

He sits up, still buried inside me and I feel him pulsing so deep I swear he's touching my soul! My legs are around his waist and my hands around his neck and my boobs on his chest. We sit there a moment hearing each other breathe. That scent that's just him has me feeling hypnotised and wanting to drink in more and more of him.

"I love you", he whispers.

I don't just hear the words. I feel them. I hear his heartbeat as he says them and I know he speaks the truth. He lowers me backwards till my back is on the bed and my legs are kicking in the air and he's driving home. He grabs two pillows and puts them under me. He isn't fucking me anymore, he's making love. Slow, gentle and passionate. As I close my eyes I feel like he has many hands and many mouths because I feel his touch everywhere. He goes in and out of me slowly I never want it to stop.

He gets off and takes me by hand. When he took over control, I don't know. He leads me to the open window. A cold breeze hits my face as I look out. There's noise from partying people at not so near clubs and lights and the sound of the ocean not so far away. It's a full moon and we unleashing the werewolves inside us. As he stands there behind me,

breathing down my neck, I feel peace and serenity. I feel love. I hold on to the window seal and pop backwards as he finds his way back into me. He picks up my legs and holds me like a wheelbarrow. I'm hanging in the air and balancing myself by the outside of the window. My ass bounces on him rhythmically as he thrusts and I know he's watching it. I know him all too well. My screams are echoed by the distant noise from outside and are lost into the night. The coldness I feel in my face and the heat I feel in my body have me feeling like ecstasy and bliss all wrapped in one. I count the stars and look at the moon and thank the skies for the gift of Elikplim. The feeling is intense and he is going in too hard and too deep. I scream out his name as I come and he lets my legs step back on the floor. I'm trembling and my knees are shaking but he holds me, leaning back on him with his one hand cupping a boob and the other resting on my stomach. He's not talking but his breath on my neck tells me he's not done with me yet.

"Goddamn!" is all he says under his heavy breath.

I feel so weak but I want some more. Just a little more. I've been called a nympho before. It wasn't a lie. He turns me around and sits me on the window seal then goes down on his knees and eats me up a bit as I spread eagle for him. I'm quite sensitive and I keep twitching but he knows all that and he treads with caution. When I'm ready for my round three, he picks me up and lays me on the bed. He enters me as I wrap my legs around him and stays there, our bodies wrapped together like a gift. I pull him deeper into me with my legs. I can see his face now cause of the moonlight flooding in through the window.

I look up at him and although he feels so good inside me, my brain reminds me of the hurt. His eyes, his glorious eyes, I can feel them. They remind me of those nights he would hold me like this under the stars as he made me come back to back. Tears stream down the side of my face. He keeps holding me, still hard and deep inside me, still unmoving. A tear drops from his eye onto my face and I pull him down for a warm embrace.

"We are ok", I whisper. He raises his head and keeps looking at me. I don't know if he can see the hurt in my eyes or not.

This wasn't part of my plan at all. All was going perfect but my brain just had to remember! He brings his lips to mine and kisses me. Wet and sloppy and eager. I give back what he's giving and I cling on to him. He asks if he should stop, I say a soft no. I don't want him to stop. Slowly at first, picking up the pace. The pain in my heart and the pleasure intertwine

and I can't wait for him any longer. I let go and enjoy the explosion. I'm melting and exploding at the same time, so good it almost hurts and my thighs quiver and my mind becomes blank. I know he will come any moment now. I barely hold on as he pounds my trembling self. Must be the contractions around him, squeezing and gripping, that have him reaching his seventh heaven. I feel him contract and pulsate and throb within my walls followed by a warm sensation somewhere inside me.

We lie there, panting. I'm so weak I'm a noodle. As he pulls out, I can feel his cum flowing out of me and down my thigh. He keeps telling me he loves me and I keep keeping quiet and trying to catch my breath and regain my strength.

"You are my life", he says. *'You are my death!'* I think. I told him not to talk, didn't I? He shouldn't have talked and his eyes should have never looked into mine. Now his words have triggered a pain I was willing to let go a few heartbeats ago. We are toxic. I face two demons and I don't know which one to attempt to tame. A life with Elik and that is all the broken pieces of himself mixed with the broken pieces of myself. Maybe they can make a mosaic with my pieces on my grave to tell a story of how love killed me. Or the unknown future, without Elik, filled with longing, and yet hope for healing, growth and who knows, mediocre love maybe? But in this moment only one demon can be tamed and it's in my arms. I get up.

"What's wrong baby?" he holds my arm.

"Don't", I shrug him off.

I get the lights, put on my gown and slippers and walk out.

"Fierce wait!" I hear, as I open the door of my car and jump in. He comes running, only wearing sweatpants. He opens the passenger side and lets himself in.

"What just happened?" he asks.

I continue pressing 'next' on my playlist.

"What happened where?"

What happened is he walked into my car uninvited. I'm so chillaxed you wouldn't believe it was me screaming his name out of the window for the whole city to hear, not so long ago.

"Wait. I'm confused. I thought we were... I thought you said we are ok... I thought you meant... I'm so confused. Balance me here".

He's looking like he's studying me or something but no, my emotions are sleeping right now. I reach over into the glove compartment and get a

gum. I don't acknowledge his presence.

"Fierce! I'm talking to you! Can you stop that and listen!" he snaps.

I stop and look at him, chewing my gum with attitude. He thinks he can just waltz into my car and start barking orders around? I'm dressed now, he has zero power over me.

"No Prof. You don't get to tell me what to do. You are in my car so either you take a chill pill or you get out. Pick one". I go back to song searching.

He bangs the dashboard with his fist and still I ignore him. Throwing tantrums so late at night! Are you kidding me! He composes himself all on his own. I ain't got time for that!

"But baby, I mean we just reconnected but now you acting all cold like nothing happened. I don't understand". He looks confused I'll say and the part of me that loves him is feeling bad. But he has to learn.

"It was just sex! What's the big deal?" I'm calm and my face says 'I don't care'. Deep in my heart I'm sad but he won't see that girl today. Today I'm going to teach him. He's always been my student in these love things anyway so I'll teach him some more. He looks defeated.

"What do you mean it was just sex?" I don't know what he means by that. It was just sex. Self-explanatory!

"Baby, it was real. It was intense. You can't tell me you didn't feel that! Come on, you can't deny what just happened. We reconnected baby. You said we are ok".

"I didn't say it wasn't real. I said it was just sex. We did it and now it's done so can I go home and sleep now?"

Carefree. He laughs a little.

"I don't believe this!"

I look up at him innocently. "You don't believe what?"

"Since when is sex just sex to you?"

"Well, sex is always just sex to you! I learnt from the best", I look away.

"Not with you baby, you know that. Come on now".

"Oh well. I'm just saying it like it is".

"So are you trying to say you used me?" he laughs. Not laugh laugh but laugh in disbelief.

"It's not like you didn't want! I was horny, you are always horny, we had sex, we came and now we are happy. Win win".

"Fierce!" he pulls my hand. I shrug him off. There's a particular song

I'm looking for and he's disturbing me.

"But come on Fierce, you can't tell me that meant nothing to you. Look at me and tell me it meant nothing". Oh dear!

"What does it matter what it meant? I got what I wanted from you and now I want to go home and sleep. Go and sleep Elik and forget this happened".

I love the disbelief in his face and I'm trying hard not to laugh.

"You know what, you are a coward for running away from your feelings! Deny it all you want but, damn right you know that fuck was good!"

He he he! What did he just call me? A cow what? And he's really gonna brag about his sexual expertise right now?

"I'm a coward? I'm a coward Elikplim? How dare you call me that when a good fuck is the only consistency you have ever given me in our relationship?"

He didn't expect that, did he? His facial reaction says he didn't.

"But you know what, a good fuck doesn't heal the pain and it doesn't bring me heaven or move mountains. So Prof, instead of bragging about how good you lay the pipe, maybe you could choose to be a better man!"

He pissed me off!

"Ok now you just want to insult me".

"No, stating facts. No insults here. Grow up Elik! Grow the fuck up! The hell? Talking about how good the fuck was. It was just sex! Wake up!"
I laugh at him.

"You don't talk to me like that baby girl", he says, dropping his voice.

I know and maybe I'll be sorry later. I go back to looking for that song.

"Ok, ok, calm down baby. I'm sorry ok. Let's talk about this", he says.

"There's nothing to talk about", I say not even looking at him.

"Please ma".

This me leaving him soon after the bed rocking really didn't sit well with him ne? Uzobastrong! I go back to my playlist and oh yeah there's the right song. *'Against the grain - Akon'*. I lock the doors, put on my seat belt and I drive.

"Where are we going?"

Why is he asking me that? Isn't he invited himself into my car so he should just go wherever I take him! I turn the aircon on his side to 18 degrees and close my ventilation holes, leaving his open. I'm still cold but

it's good, I'm a girl meaning to inflict pain on her lover.

"It's freezing up in here", he reaches for the knob.

"Don't touch anything! This isn't your car!" I snap.

Technically it's his until it's registered in my name. But he gave it to me so it's mine. He lets it go and hugs himself as I increase the speed of air circulation. Let him freeze! I freeze too but he's topless, let him turn into ice!

"Baby. I'm sorry. What can I do to prove to you how sorry I am?"

Shame he sounds so cold.

"Think you could shut up for a start?" I blow my gum into a bubble.

He sighs and sits back still hugging himself. It's almost 3 am and we driving.

"You missed the off ramp", he says.

I didn't miss the off ramp. I didn't want to take it! I ignore him and keep driving and singing along to my song.

The song ends and I replay it. I keep singing aloud some parts just to get at him, '*They always said don't love a whore ...*' I look at him and he's looking at me with his arms wrapped around himself. He looks so honest.

"Fuck it!" he says. He presses the off button so hard I jump up. My song stops! He turns up the temperature to max. This car is new! He should handle with care! I'm glad the song got to him. Music always did help us express ourselves. Thank you Akon, you always was my lifesaver.

He's back to saying he doesn't understand what happened and keeps apologising. I'm still on the N2 and have left Somerset West behind. It's farm lands here and there's no sign of buildings or anything, so I pull over on the hard shoulder, careful not to completely get off the road.

"Baby", I say so sweetly.

"Yea", he says. He sounds drained shame, poor thing. He's been talking alone the whole time.

"Please come and drive, I'll jump over to the passenger seat from here", I undo my seat belt.

"Cool", he jumps out.

I lock the doors and roll down my window and put back my seat belt. He gets to the driver's side and pulls the door. Locked.

"Open up. It's freezing out here. Jump over", he says.

"Ok, this is what's going to happen. You will walk back to town from here. It's what? 40 - 50 km back? That should give you more than enough

time to think clearly and decide what you want to do with your life and our relationship!”

“What? You’re crazy!” he says.

“It’s not a bad thing hunn. You’ll get to soul search and think of aboMbali and all those other hoochies of yours. Surely by the time you make it to town you’ll have reached meaningful decisions!”

“You can’t leave me here! The fuck?”

Watch me.

“Fierce...!” is all I hear as my window rolls up.

I pull off, drive some 200 metres, make a U-turn and head back to Newlands. Let him stay there in darkness with his thoughts. Nothing will happen to him. Nothing will see him in the dark! He just blends in perfectly with darkness. Maybe, just maybe, he can learn and make better decisions in the future! As I get home and put on pyjamas and slide into the covers and put my hand around Peter, I have a smile on my face. Let his toplessness suffer the cold and the darkness. I’m too kind if you ask me. I should have driven further and pushed him into a ditch full of spiders somewhere in the bundus.

I wake up late. Lizzy came and took the kids to ready them for school. I didn’t even hear them. I must have been tired. I had quite the eventful night last night. I wonder if Elik is still alive! My first instinct is to reach for my phone to call him. No missed calls from him. I don’t think he had a phone when I left him there. Butho and Zibulo are leaving today. I would have loved them to stay longer but Butho loves acting like he’s the only person in the world with a job and he’s taking Zibulo with him. That leaves my dad, aunt and Inflation. I’m just glad my aunt is staying. Everyone else can go I don’t mind. She got her car from Elik and she’s been showing me pictures since she got here and she keeps saying she hopes she’ll find it with wheels and not sitting on bricks. At least she did better than a Honda Fit, she got a Hyundai i20. Elik might as well just become a car dealer, the way he just buys cars!

People are having breakfast when I wake up. I say my hellos and I feel sad that they are leaving. I love this sitting around the table to eat thing. Growing up in the village we never had ‘family time’. When I was younger I couldn’t eat around adults, it was taboo. When I was a teenager, I was always the last to eat because when everyone would be eating, I would still

be busy keeping the meat hot on the fire in case my father wanted a second serving. I would only eat after everyone was done. Some days I wouldn't eat. Not because we were poor (which we were) but because I wouldn't cook enough for everyone so when it came to dishing up, I would not get a plate. Reminiscences of my past life. And all those type of thoughts always lead to my mother. I'm still shocked that mother let Ignition and my father and Zibulo come to my graduation! Except if they lied to her and she doesn't know they are here. Thoughts of mother again! Control + Alt + Delete. Terminate thoughts.

Elik, Lumka and Kofi come through as I take my seat at the table. I almost choke on my own saliva, seeing Elik. Fuck! I'm so dead! What if he evicts me from this house? In front of my family? That would be embarrassing! My aunt keeps looking at me then at him with a talking eye. I ignore her. I told her we broke up, she didn't believe me. What I did yesterday seemed like a good idea then but I feel bad now. What if something had happened to him? Like he had been kidnapped and raped by a group of women! Why do I think he might have enjoyed that! Gosh I'm so sick in the head, don't even waste your prayers on me. I'm beyond redemption.

Lumka and Kofi greet me but Elik just gives me the eye, greets everyone else and sits. So we really are a family! My father surprises me you know! After everything that went down that time at home he will sit here and breakfast with us? I want to forgive him really, but he has to get in line. I'm still working on forgiving Elik then we can talk about him after that. Elik says he's not hungry and only drinks a glass of water. I just lost my appetite as well so I just sit there playing with my food. I keep looking up at him thinking I'll meet his eye but dololo.

We take my brothers to the airport, leaving father and aunt dearest to get ready for the city tour 'we' will give them. In my father's eyes, I need to be so in love with Elik that he regrets not backing us up that fateful day! But how exactly I'll pull that off today after the stunt I pulled last night, I don't know. I have a teary farewell Butho. He's so lost in himself it makes me sad. He reminds me of Elik. All closed up to the world and carrying himself like everything is ok when deep down his soul is crying.

"Thanks for coming Butho. I love you, I will always love you. I've looked up to you for so long and up to today, you still my role model", I say.

That's not what I wrote in the 'Dedication' of my thesis. I dedicated my PhD to Elik and wrote a whole page of saying how awesome he was and how he was my source of inspiration.

"I love you too sisi. And I'm proud of you", he hugs me and I wipe my tears. I think I cry about 2 L of tears a day!

"I don't quite like this Elik of yours. He's too pompous and hot headed and has a bad attitude. But he loves you so ya, take care of him, I guess".

I want to defend Elik but ey naye he can be so arrogant it's hard to defend him! I wave until they disappear through the security checkpoint. That rural girl who used to wave at the bus until it disappears around the bend is still in here somewhere. Elik is still not talking to me! He's not even looking at me! He's been acting like I don't exist the whole time. As we walk out of the airport towards the car, Kofi puts his arm over my shoulder. I hate it when he does this. He just drops all his weight on me!

"Dude! You dumped Elik in the middle of nowhere at 3 am!"

I look down. I want to laugh. But I can't laugh because Elik is all up in his feelings already and I don't want to make things worse.

"You girl, you're badass. Remind me never to mess with you", he keeps laughing. No comment from yours truly just a sly smile.

"Lumka, did Elik tell you what Fierce did to him?" Kofi says and proceeds to give Lumka the details. Elik is giving him the eye but sweet Kofi just keeps talking.

"Well, all I know is I need to write to the management of Cape Grace and ask them to soundproof the walls!" Lumka says.

"Why?" Kofi asks, looking confused.

"Your brother and Fierce. Some of us couldn't sleep!"

"What do you mean? She left him far from town! You mean before that they were... I thought... Wait, what?... I thought they were broken up", Kofi says. He sounds so confused shame, poor boy.

"She was in his room. There's no break up here. They're both just being childish", Lumka says.

"That's enough!" Elik says.

Phew! Thank you. That was getting uncomfortable.

"So how did your brother make it back if I supposedly left him in the middle of nowhere?" I ask Kofi. I'm curious.

"Let's ask him. Elik, tell her", Kofi says.

Elik shoots him an eye and Kofi laughs and playfully hits him on the

shoulder.

“He walked over 10 km until he got to a garage. Then he asked for a phone and called me”.

“I was shocked to get there and find someone topless and freezing”, Kofi narrates. He’s laughing so hard I can’t help giggling.

Elik looks at us and still doesn’t laugh. How can he not find this funny? 10 km? I must give him a 10 km fun walk medal.

“You are vicious bro!” Kofi says.

I high five him. I’m a little proud of myself. We sit at the back of the car and continue laughing at Elik.

“Will the two of you just shut up!” Elik snaps and we giggle like children. He’s driving like he wants to kill us! He just overtakes and turns like he’s in Formula 1 or something.

“Slow down man”, Lumka says.

“You wanna drive?” Elik snaps and pulls over and gets out of the car. My tantrum king. Lumka sighs, gets out and drives us normally back home.

The sightseeing crew will be Elik, me, my father, Inflation and my aunt. Lumka has work and Kofi has people to ‘catch up’ with. It’s going to be a long day! Elik is just ignoring me and paying attention to everyone else! And because I’m petty, I only speak in Ndebele today. No English. His ears are not worthy of hearing my words! We start at Table Mountain and it takes a lot of convincing to get my father inside the cable car. Some old guy we meet up there says Table Mountain is called that because the original people found a table on top of the mountain! How original! I’m like whaaaaat. I just say “Oh really? Nice!” because I don’t want to ask who the original people are and I’m in no mood for small talk with strangers.

We then go to Camps Bay but my father sits on the benches near the road and looks from a distance. Elik sits with him while the rest of us go closer and into the ocean. My father says he has a calling to be a traditional healer that he has been running away from, so if he goes near a large body of water, our ancestors will take him and force him to ‘thwasa’ (train/graduate as a traditional diviner) underwater. I couldn’t stop laughing at that! Camps Bay water is so cold but Inflation doesn’t seem to mind. He is all up in there getting soaked. We leave the ocean with 2 litres of water, for my aunt to take home. She really believes in the healing powers of sea water!

The day flies by and before we know it, we are back in Newlands and my people are packing because tomorrow morning it's back to Zimbabwe for them. I'm jealous watching my aunt just adore Elik and talk to him and completely ignore me. Everyone always drools over him. What about me! No one cares? Even the twins are more taken by Inflation than me and even say they are sleeping in their room with him tonight!

I'm sad. Elik didn't speak to me all day. I miss him.

Eighteen

I'm seriously considering checking myself into a mental hospital. I'm a mess. A hot mess, but a mess nonetheless. Well, some days I'm just a lukewarm clutter but today I'm a boiling mess. Because no one was paying me much attention, I sulked, went to bed and hugged a pillow. I thought (hoped) maybe Elik will follow me but nope. See, with Elik I don't want him but I want him, you know. Like when he's around me I'm like 'begone demon!' but when he ignores me I'm like 'come closer angel'. I did point out that I was a mess.

I'm busy sleeping and dreaming of graduation and all the drama that went down when my phone vibrating under the pillow wakes me. It's past 11 pm! I could have ignored him but again I want to talk to him so I can tell him how much I don't want to talk to him! Mess.

'Hey', a message from Elik pops up.

'What!' I respond in record time.

'Come outside'.

'What for?'

'I wanna talk to you',

'I'm sleeping'.

'Please. Or should I come in there?'

'No! Go away'.

'Please, 5 minutes is all I need'.

'Good night. I'm sleeping'.

'Can we talk, please? We need to resolve this'. I ignore that.

'I get that you are mad! But you're getting out of control now. That shit you pulled yesterday wasn't funny!'

'Laughing emojis x10',

'You think that's funny?'

If he thinks I'll apologise for that I'm sorry to disappoint him. I won't. I'm sorry but I'm not sorry.

5 minutes later.

'Fierce! Get your pretty ass out here', Elik texts.

I go into my gallery and find a semi-nude of mine he took, showing my ass in a small lacy thing. I send that to him with the caption, *'My ass is sleeping!'*

'Damn mami! Can I touch that?'

'No! Never! I don't ever want to talk to you again!'

'Did I say something wrong?'

*'Yes! You said everything wrong! You did everything wrong!
Everything is wrong! You are WRONG!'*

3 minutes later.

'Baby'

'You there?'

I ignore him. Then he starts calling. I switch off my phone and sleep. Half of me is hoping he comes in and apologises some more in person. He looks cute when he's begging. Sleep won't come. I toss and turn until I think I finally fall asleep. I wake up from a nightmare and when I switch on my phone, I get 28 missed calls and a message.

'I get the message Lastborn', it reads.

Short and vague. Ah! What does he mean he gets the message? Is he giving up on begging me to come back? I can't have that. I like how he's begging and I'm enjoying torturing him. He can't quit now! But the part that really gets me is Lastborn. Him using that name can't be good. He's leaving me! He can't leave me! I'm not yet done with him yet! I think he is fed up now though. He called me Lastborn!

It's 2:30 am and I get into Fierce mode. I start thinking, ok fine if Elik couldn't see me earlier that means he left, right? But why didn't he come in? He has keys and all. Maybe he doesn't love me anymore? He most certainly doesn't want me anymore because who's Lastborn? I'm baby, baby girl, ma, nana, cupcake, Fierce and all those but not Lastborn! Not to him. Maybe he's still outside? I put on a gown and go and check. His car is not there. Awesome! Let me think. What would Elik do after being made to walk 10 km at night then being ignored on the phone. He would want to either have a drink or fuck! Or usually BOTH! Maybe he's with another girl right now! I haven't been too kind to him. I almost get a panic attack just thinking of it. Just because I don't want him anymore doesn't mean he's back on the market!

I don't deserve fuel shame. I drive all the way to Cape Grace. The guy at the reception is nice and lets me in and I knock at Elik's door. I don't have a plan at all. I don't know what I'll do if he opens the door and there's a girl inside. He can always say we are no longer together so I can go climb a wall! What if he doesn't open the door and I stand here knocking all

night? What if the girl is hotter than me? Do I have the right to fight a hotter girl over my man or do I just swallow my pride and understand where my man is coming from? What if they are in action and he has her in some Topsy-Turvy position? My eyes and mostly my heart would never heal from that. It took a lot to heal the last time and they were just lying in bed! Ok chances are that won't happen because he can't open the door when in action! Or can he?

The day I die 'STRESS' will be written on my stone! But me, me I'm a soldier shame. I never abort a mission! I knock for 30 minutes straight! I left my phone at home so I can't call. I have to knock and knock and hope he opens. Maybe he's not in? If that's the case then it's all good. I'll sit right here facing the door till he comes back from wherever he is! I sit on the floor and I'm wondering what I'll do all night here without a phone to play with. I could meditate maybe?

I keep playing with my fingers on the door just how we used to play church drums in high school. The door eventually flies open and a pissed Elik steps out. He really hates being woken up. But who has the time past 3 am to be cradling his feelings? I should be pissed! I'm the one who's been knocking my knuckles off for the past half an hour!

"You gotta be kidding me!" he says.

I'm not here to talk so I get up and push past him.

"Fierce?"

He says my name a lot these days! At least he didn't say Lastborn! I don't say anything, I just switch on the lights and proceed to the bed. I look under the covers to make sure there's no one sleeping there. I look under the pillows as well just in case she's tiny. I look under the bed, well there's no clearance anyway for a person to hide under, but I'll check anyway. I check the closet then the bathroom after that, just in case. I check the bin for wet wipes or condoms or anything suspicious like that. All clear! Now I feel stupid. I can go home and sleep.

But no, baby boy has other ideas. He says I'm going nowhere till I talk! He's been standing by the door watching me do a police-type raid of his room. I personally think he looks hot AF! I think he's a display-type specimen of what the heavens can create. He's the epitome of male beauty. But that's just me. And right now his sexiness is none of my business. He grabs me hard as I reach for the door handle and turns me around and pins me against the door.

“Ouch! That hurt”, I protest.

“What games are you playing?”

Well, I wouldn't call it a game. Games are fun and this is not. I think he looks angry but might just be the annoyance from being woken up from his precious sleep.

“You thought I was with someone here?”

I look down. I'm a little bit embarrassed. But can he blame me for thinking that?

“Let me go”.

I'm done doing my search, now can I go home in peace! He keeps pinning me on the door. He does this sometimes when he wants to force me to talk to him. I ask him to move but he just stands there, his body too close to mine. I don't have time for this, I want to go and sleep, but I need to get past him first!

“What you did yesterday was nasty! It was childish, vindictive and unlike you! When did you become this bitchy?”

Oh by the way there was yesterday! And him walking 10 km! People usually pay to do these 10 km walks, I gave him one for free so he should be thanking me!

“When did you become this vindictive?” he shouts.

“I donno ok. The day you put Mbali above me, maybe? The day you made a child with her and kept it from me? Take a guess”.

His hold on me relaxes a little.

“Fine. I get you upset but come on now. That was unnecessary! I'm sorry. I don't know what else to do to show you how sorry I am!”

I'm quiet now. I'm waiting for him to get tired of talking so he can make way for me and I go.

“Where did we go wrong Fierce?”

That voice still sends shivers up my spine! He can't be serious! He can't tell me he doesn't know where we went wrong? He's not serious. He forgot so soon? Does he want me to tear my chest open and show him the lashes across my heart? He lifts my chin so I can look at him and I can feel my breathing getting deeper.

He says “I love you” and other things. I can see his lips are moving but I can't hear anything anymore. I'm wondering if I can like get some D again and just pull a yesterday. I haven't gotten some in a very long time (about 24 hours!) and now my hormones are getting excited for nothing.

I'm debating with myself. To get some or not to get some.

"What do you want? Tell me. Let's resolve this right now. Tell me what it is you want and I'll do it. I need us to get back to us".

I look down. My mind is not here right now.

"What do you want baby girl?" He holds my chin up so I look up at him.

"I want you to make love to me". The words just flew out of my mouth.

He laughs a bit. "No man. I don't mean that! I mean about us. How do we go forward?"

"Oh!" is all I have to say before looking down at my toes.

"Hey, don't feel so bad. There's nothing wrong with begging to be done!"

Oh dear!

"I guess we can start there and we talk things out tomorrow?"

I want to say no but I know exactly what he's capable of delivering to me and who can say no to that? He stays there looking at me. Probably expecting me to say something. No, I'm not opening my mouth. I've already said a mouthful.

"Is there anything under this gown?"

There is but it's none of his business!

"You love me baby?" Question or statement, I don't know.

"You don't love me?" He says something in his language. Then goes all out on me seducing me in a language I can't really understand. He keeps talking and the way he's sounding has me giggling now. For all I know he could be insulting me but I just love the sound of it. I bet that's his cue to proceed. I don't even know why I let him take off my gown and the pyjamas underneath. My body decided all on its own, I had no say in it. Now I know what people mean when asked why they slept with someone and they say, "It just happened".

After the show down, I wait for him to fall asleep then I sneak out. I do my little walk of shame past reception, to my car and back home. I had to come back. Elik and I are over and he has no business splitting me in half anymore! Besides, my people's flight is at 8 am so I must be at the airport by 6:30 am somewhere there.

The next guy I date has to be better than Elik! Good luck to him, the bar has been set too high.

Because I know Elik will look for me first thing when he wakes up, I become the bigger person and leave him a message.

'What happened was a mistake. We are done and from now on I'll stay out of your way and please do the same. In fact, don't come to my house. If you can go back to Joburg, that would be very nice. Thanks for everything. Have a nice life'.

I don't stop there. I block him after that. I'm done and dusted now. That was my final final break up sex and boy was it good! From now on I'll be celibate!

After dropping my family off at the airport and having to listen to my aunt advising me to keep Elik happy and to keep feeding him my red velvet cake, I go home. I couldn't bring myself to tell her that I re-broke up with him again last night via a text message! She's too invested in our relationship, I feel like she deserves to be given at least a month's notice before the relationship ends.

I get home just before 9. I might as well start calling this house a local club. AboLumka and Kofis and Elik's come and go as they please! They are sitting on the couch watching football highlights. I say hi and sit at the corner of the couch and play Farm Heroes on my phone. I'm struggling to level up. Elik comes and sits next to me and tries to talk! So we talking now? I broke up with him if I remember well!

He talks and talks and then says, "So you mean to tell me even last night meant nothing? All your screaming meant nothing?"

Hay shame. This business of me leaving him after sex doesn't sit well with him. He wants me to acknowledge that the sex meant something? This conversation would be fine if it was just us two but now, Kofi and Lumka are here! And Elik is not even trying to lower his voice! Thankfully they don't say anything. The way he's so comfortable talking about our sex life in front of Lumka is the reason Lumka almost got a taste too! But oh well, everyone in this room has heard me scream in ecstasy and two of the three have seen me naked, so I guess we have no boundaries!

"But baby. I'm sorry. I've said it over and over".

I look away. He gets off the couch and kneels in front of me. I must have given it up good last night! He's bending the knee! This must be weird for Kofi and Lumka.

"I'm sorry Fierce. Please", Elik keeps begging.

I'm quiet. I sigh. Fine let's talk! It's not like Kofi and Lumka don't

know everything. Especially Lumka! Sometimes I feel like Elik tells him too much!

“You are a good man Elik. I know that. But I’m watching the right now and if this is how my future looks like then I’m terrified. I’m scared for myself”.

“I’m scared too baby. Half the time I want to leave you alone so you never hurt again but the other half I’m crazy out of my mind wanting you. Can we be scared together?”

Who knows, maybe our fears can cancel each other out.

“Let’s be friends baby. Like, just start there and see where that takes us”.

I’m still babying him! No wonder he’s still here.

“Friends? After the way we fucked last night you think I want to be just friends? Friends Fierce?”

Oh dear! The eye Lumka gives me makes me so embarrassed. Couldn’t Elik find a better word? Besides, who said friends don’t bonk? They do! Where does he think the term friends with benefits came from?

“I love you!” he says.

“For the sex?” I ask looking at my phone still.

“Of course not! Not that I don’t love it. I mean I love that as well but that’s not why I love you!” he stumbles on his own words.

“So why do you love me then?” I wanna know.

“I love you because you give me everything you are and you love me with everything you have. I love you because you are everything I’m not. You are more than I ever hoped for in a woman. Don’t ever think I don’t know how lucky I am to have found you. I know and I never want to lose that”.

That’s so sweet but then again so was he the last time and the last. My life is in autumn now. The wind is blowing and the leaves are falling and a girl knows she needs to go. It’s probably time I laced up my trainers and jogged away. Maybe it’s time I found myself a grown man; it could save me a lot of *growing* pains. Maybe it’s time I left this beautiful bastard alone. I’m looking at him, but I’m not seeing him. His words left me confused and now I’m lost in my thoughts wondering if I should fast forward my heart from this autumn to spring so our love can bloom again and grow new leaves. I’m miserable without him but I need to remember that I’m strong. Why I’m strong and what exactly I’m strong for, I don’t know. All I know

is I'm strong. I'm a rock.

"Let's just be friends Elik".

He looks up at me. "Are you serious right now? Friends? Goddammit Fierce! Friends?"

He gets up and paces up and down. The silence in the room right now is too loud. I look down, I still have three moves left on my level of Farm Heroes. Next thing I don't have a phone in my hands and I hear a SMASH.

"No Elik!" is all Lumka says. He threw my phone at the TV! I just hope my Farm Heroes game didn't close. I know I can win with those three moves and I can finally level up. Why is he so upset at us being friends? Just because I don't have any friends doesn't mean I'm a bad friend! Besides, I'm giving him a good deal here. I could have said I never want to see him ever again! He should be thanking me and not breaking things! He grabs me, lifts me up by my top and shakes me.

"Fierce!" he screams. Is he going to beat me up in front of Lumka and Kofi? He's never beat me up before and this would be a bad way to start.

I'm still shocked and I'm sure it shows in my eyes. I expect a monster to look back at me but I see a tear run out of his eye. He sniffs and lets me go. It can't be easy for a man to cry. Worse in front of his little brother and friend. That tear reminds me of the tear that dropped on me the other night before I dumped him at the start of his 10 km walk. I'm breaking him, ain't I? Kofi must have thought his brother is going to go all John Cena on me because he grabs him by the arm. Elik lets me go and shrugs Kofi's hand off.

"Come El, let's go outside", Kofi says.

"No. Stay out of it Kofi! I need her to see reason! She's telling me she wants to be friends? No, fuck it man".

Kofi tries to pull him by his hand so he can get away from me but Elik pulls his hand back.

"I can walk just fine! No need to push me around!"

They walk out and I take a deep breath and collapse back on the couch.

I'm further breaking him apart and kicking him while he's down, ain't I? Then I'm going to take him back and he'll heal the best way he knows how, by sleeping around, then I'll be hurt again. Such a vicious circle.

"What the hell Fierce!" Lumka shouts from where he's sitting.

Why is he shouting at me? I'm the victim here. My phone got thrown

at the TV and I was almost slam dunked!

“Sisi, please make up your mind. Stop playing silly games. If you want him, go get him. If you don’t, do us all a favour and stop messing with his mind!” Lumka says.

“I’m not playing games!” I say, defence walls rising up.

“You are! The whole using sex because you know he’s obsessed with you and leaving him in Somerset at night. That was childish! I know you and Kofi think it’s cute but it’s not! What the hell were you thinking leaving him out there? Did you consider that something could happen to him?”

Is Lumka shouting at me right now? Does he have the right? He thinks because he’s held my boobs and ran a finger into me, he can talk to me however he wants? I fold my arms and I hope he can speak body language so he can understand what I’m communicating right now .

“No man, this has to stop. You have Elik running around after you and doing all sorts for you. To what end? He got that chick pregnant, deal with it! Either you stay or you go. If you don’t want him anymore just tell him”.

He got that chick pregnant, deal with it. Those words settle at the bottom of my heart. I shelf them.

“Me and him are through! I told him, many times already!” I defend myself. I’m trying to convince myself.

“Really? Weren’t you giving it up in his room last night? And the night before? We all know you’re just enjoying watching him suffer! Stop sending him mixed signals. And we all know you’re not going anywhere so please stop torturing each other. Spare us y’all drama and work things out like adults!”

He’s so upset. Wow!

“Elik needs to get back to work mode! You think this house and all these cars he’s buying you fall from the sky? Stop stressing him so he can go make money for you!”

Lumka needs help from a higher power! One day he’ll say Elik doesn’t deserve me and is a jerk and the next he’ll say I should stop mistreating Elik and I should take him back? What witchcraft is that? I keep quiet for a while. I need to think. I need Lumka in my corner always so I won’t respond in disrespect.

“What should I do? I don’t know what to do”. I really don’t.

“I don’t know. That’s up to you. But one thing for sure is that Elik loves you. He will do anything for you. What I don’t get is why you are

hurting him. Since when are you so vengeful? Respect to a man goes a long way sisi”.

I look at him blankly. Elik described me as vindictive as well. Am I?

“Free advice from someone who likes you: Put your body aside and the sexiest thing about you is how you manage to respect and love Elik when he’s messed up big and he’s at his lowest. That’s the one quality that makes him bully me into almost missing your graduation so I can make sure the car he bought you is delivered on time! Don’t lose that sisi. Don’t be like all the other girls because what then will set you apart?”

Dr Lumkani mani! The philosopher.

“Do yourself a favour and go get your man before you lose him forever”.

I pick myself up from the couch and walk outside. I stop in my tracks when I get out of the door. I can’t disrupt this moment. Kofi is holding Elik in a hug. Watching them there hugging is pulling at my heart. When they let the hug go, each of them looks away and rubs their eyes. Ok I get why Elik might be crying, but why is Kofi crying? Now two of my boys are hurting. Is it because of me? I can’t have that. Anyone can cry I don’t care. Hell! Even doves can cry for all I care but not Elik. I never want to ever see Elik cry. I can cry, I do that all the time anyways, it’s fine but not him. I never want to see him shed a tear and it’s my job to protect his soul so it doesn’t hurt further .

Everytime I see him cry, it makes me want to get on an airplane and fly to Accra and kung fu Kofi’s mother. She did this to him! She broke him into the million fragments that I’ve been trying to put back together over the years. I just stand there and watch them, my never far tears filling my own eyes. When they spot me, only then do I walk towards them. Kofi grabs me by the arm. He lets go when he realises his grip is a bit too hard.

“I’m sorry”, he says. I nod and rub my arm. I bruise easily.

“Fierce, please. Forgive him. I know he hurt you and all but please man. He loves you. Don’t let some girl take that away from you”.

I have no response. She’s not *some girl* ! She’s baby mama coming soon! She’s the she-devil!

“This is killing him man. Look at him”, Kofi says.

Oh sweet Kofi! He sounds like he’s begging. He sounds so desperate, I wonder what Elik said to him.

“Please give us a minute”, I say to Kofi. He looks at me then at Elik.

Elik nods and he leaves and goes back to the house.

I take my man in my arms and hold him there. It's me who's crying now and in no time it's him who's taken me in his arms and telling me we'll be alright. My name should be edited to Crying-Fierce. We just stand there as I try to calm down.

"Look baby..." , he starts to say.

"No, wait. Wait here. I'm going to take the keys. We're going for a drive".

Taking my new baby for another spin and boy can this baby spin! Damn Elik for spoiling it for me. We are in a bad space so I haven't fully enjoyed my new car. We drive in silence all the way, through town, past Gardens onto Kloof Nek Road all the way up to Signal Hill. I get out of the car and open his door for him. He looks so drained. We jump over the small wall and we find our tree and sit on the low branch there. We got engaged here! It's our place. I have so much to say but I don't know where to start. Oh bother! Let me just say it as it is.

"I know you are sorry baby. I have no doubt about that. And I know that you love me".

Not such a bad start judging by the way his grip on my hands tightened slightly.

"I love you too, maybe more than I love myself even. I can't even begin to imagine myself without you. Since that day, I've cried, I've hurt, I've wanted to skip the country even. But one thing I couldn't do was stop loving you".

I turn my body slightly so I can face him. I make a decision right now that I'm going to extract DNA from his eyes and clone them and give them to hospitals to install into every new born baby. Because this right here is exactly how eyes should look like!

"You look so good" .

He smiles and looks down. Blushing? I derailed fast there let me get back on track.

"Elik. What I'm trying to say here is yes, I'll take you back. I forgive you".

He sighs in relief and let's my hand go.

"Not so fast handsome! I have conditions", I cross my arms across my chest to show how serious I am.

"Anything. I'll do anything".

That's a dangerous statement you know. What if I ask him to kill Mbali? I wonder if he would do it if I asked. I don't want to be stepmother once again! I take a deep breath and take out my phone. It didn't break and I picked it up when I went for the keys. In the past few days I've been doing a lot of research and making notes. Now I have a list of demands. I knew that if I was going to take Elik back then I had to come prepared.

"What are the conditions?" he asks.

"Ok. Just listen!"

He nods. Phew. Deep breath! I'm about to tell a grown man things to do and stubborn as he is, it might not go too well.

"One. We'll go for counselling. To kick start the process we are going to Mozambique for a couple's retreat end of this week. It's about time we talked to a professional. What say ye?" I ask, looking him in the eye. He's not allowed to lie!

"Cool. I accept", he says.

Now that's a huge relief! Most of our black brothers don't want to hear about counselling and paying a stranger to listen to their problems.

"Two. I've decided I'm going to lecture till end of semester. Prof asked that I stand in for a lecturer going on sabbatical and I said yes. The twins and I will move up to Joburg next semester. I think I already found the right school for them but I'll need you to 'persuade' the principal to get them in".

These schools that tell you they have a 10 year waiting period! So 5 years before my child is born I have to apply for a Grade 1 spot? I need the twins in that school! Making a handsome donation to the school usually magically opens up a spot for your children so we have to do what we have to do. Money is everything! Don't let them lie to you.

"Ok I can do that ya. But I was hoping you'll move up to Joburg sooner".

"I don't want to sit at home and do nothing. It's just a month and a half and I'll fly down every weekend".

"I accept. Send me the details of the school and what needs to be done. I'll do it".

Good. I know that's just leaving him room to cheat. But I'm not worried about him cheating. Actually, he should cheat and rehearse with them girls out there and then come home to me and show me what he's learnt! He can think of them as training grounds where he just works out

and practices and think of me as an Olympic stadium where he comes to perform and aim for gold! No kidding. Ok let me rephrase. I don't like him cheating but I don't hate him when he does. I don't mind as long as he uses protection! I don't even call it cheating! Judge me.

"Three. I wanna open a lab that will do nutritional analysis of food. You know most food companies don't have internal labs, right?"

He nods. I tell him the whole plan. Why isn't he saying anything? Is my business idea that stupid? He's looking at me smiling.

"Gee! I love this! I really love this. Tell me more", he says.

Phew! Relief! I think that's pride in his eyes!

"That's awesome baby! I'm behind you 101%. Just tell me how much you need and what you need. I'll get you someone to help you draw up the business plan, my whole team will be behind you. And I know someone to help you with accreditation. I'll do whatever it takes to get your lab off the ground", he says.

Why is he sounding more excited than me? And I swear this man knows a 'guy' everywhere!

"Thanks baby. I'll appreciate that".

He looks so proud, I'm blushing.

"I even have a name for it already".

"What's the name?"

I don't think he trusts my naming skills. I almost named one of our ex-babies Nebuchadnezzar.

"I'll call it Elikplim Analytical Laboratory". Elikplim - *God is with me*

I've never heard a more beautiful name! I don't know if he gasps or what because I'm not looking at him. I'm looking down at my hands. He turns my face to look at him.

"You serious? You would do that? Name it after me?" he sounds so shocked. Shame, no one ever named anything after him?

"Yes. It's perfect. This lab will be my heart and you, Elikplim, are my heart. I couldn't think of a better name".

His lips move but he doesn't say anything.

"Four, you will get Mbali here first thing tomorrow morning!"

Just saying *Mbali* leaves a sour taste in my mouth!

"What?" he says. He looks like he just saw a dead person. He can relax, I'm not going to lock them in a house then burn the house down! Not

that it never crossed my mind.

“Baby. I broke up with her, I swear. We can call her up right now”.

Can he shut up and let me finish! I don't want to stay long on this point. I hate Mbali with a deep passion. Of all my man's whores, she! My hatred for her runs deep in my veins so he should know for me to want her ass here means it's serious.

“You'll get your bitch here tomorrow morning Elik. I'm taking the both of you for DNA testing. I need to know if you are the father of her foetus or not!” He looks at me and looks down.

“Isn't prenatal DNA testing dangerous? Won't the baby be born without fingers and stuff? Or induce a miscarriage?”

Alright, I said I hate Mbali, I didn't say I want to harm her baby!

“You talking about amniocentesis or CVS! That's not what I'm talking about. I don't hate your unborn child Elik!”

“The one they'll do is non-invasive. All they'll do is take a blood sample from her and a mouth swab from you. The appointment is at 11:30 so make sure she's here!”

I'm going to fast and pray all night today that that baby turns out not to be Elik's! Mbali doesn't deserve Elik's baby!

“How much will that cost?”

“About R23000”.

“Cool. I'll make a plan to get her here”.

I need to know those results before we go to Mozambique. Just in case I need to add this to my list of things I need to heal from. We stay silent. He needs to digest all this I guess.

“What if the baby is not mine? I mean, I kind of have already done a lot for her and the baby”. I know! He even had a trust fund set up for it! He thought I wouldn't find out really? Doesn't he know research is my thing?

“Well if the baby is not yours, we fall on our knees and sing praises to the heavens, then we get up and throw a big party!”

Why is he looking at me like I'm the devil's sister? It will be a good thing if that baby is not his! Don't tell me he doesn't see that?

“Whether the baby is yours or not, I'll be right here for you”.

He takes my hand and lock our fingers.

“So? We doing this tomorrow?”

“Consider it done. She'll be here”.

Isn't he such a good person today? Obedience looks so good on him

he should wear it everyday. And I hope that baby isn't Elik's!

"Five. I'll publish my books", I leave it at that.

"No ways. What do you want people to say about me?"

"Nothing untrue", I tug at his arm a little.

"I don't know. Can I have my own unbiased person read them first?"

I cringe. I was betting on the fact that he doesn't read novels and books like that. If this person now reads and tells him everything I wrote then I'm dead mos.

"You know I still have to decide this publishing thing. I haven't thought about it in detail. Let's put it on hold for now".

Ey! He just had to jeopardise my plan!

"Cool. I know how passionate you are about writing baby and that makes it easy to support you. But I can't have you splashing my life all over papers. I kind of work with high up people so imagine now if their wives read your books and tell them! All everyone will see is a monster. And frankly I'm tired of being that".

He has a point. All I wanted was to pen down my feelings and thoughts so I don't go crazy.

"You are not a monster. You may not be perfect but you are perfect for me". I wrap my arm around his and perch my head on his shoulder.

"Lastly, our wedding is still on".

I might just be making the worst mistake of my life here but I might also be making the best decision ever. Only time will tell. He jerks up and I almost fall off the branch.

"Hey!" I try to keep my balance. His eyes are popped open.

"For real? You'll still marry me? After everything you'll still be my wife?" he gets off the branch.

"Yes, I'll be your wife".

I mean it. For every mess and fight and horror and pain, there's happiness and joy and laughter and an undeniable connection of energies. There's love and I'll always choose love. I'll always choose Elik every time. The pleasure cancels out the hurt and the love cancels out the hate. I'm a scientist after all, I'm all about balancing the equation.

"Will you let me double barrel? Please please my love, please. I'm begging you".

Let me ask him when he's still this happy. I want to be Dr. Nkomo-Nkrumah not just Dr. Nkrumah.

“I will, and in exchange I’ll ask for something as well”.

“Name it”.

“We try for a baby one more time. I want to see your face on little me”.

I look down. He’s always wanted a baby with me. But the thought of losing another baby is terrifying.

“It’s fine you don’t have to answer that and if you can’t it’s also fine. I’ll still love you”.

“Ok, after the wedding”.

This time if it means having a doctor on standby 24 hours every day then that’s what I’ll do. My next child will live. He picks me up and twirls me around and kisses me and squashes me with his extra tight hugs.

“Thank you. I’ll spend the rest of my life showing you how grateful I am for you”.

I’m worth my weight in gold and Elik knows that. The love I have for him is more than just a feeling or words. No matter how hurt or angry at him I am, one thing stays intact - my love for him. He puts me back down and he stands in between my open legs and I hug him back. We just stay there in silence. I don’t know what he’s thinking but I’m thinking *‘I’m one lucky bitch!’*

“Baby”, is all he says looking at me so amazed.

“I need you to know that I was deeply hurt by your thing loMwali. But I forgive you and even if the child is yours I’ll stand by you. When I said yes, right here when you asked me to marry you, I said yes to you and everything you came with. We’ll get through this together like we’ve faced many of our storms in the past”.

He holds me, my head lying on his chest.

“I love you Fierce”.

“I love you too Elikplim”.

“Oh and the sex we had was bomb! It meant everything”, I giggle.

He pushes me gently and then pulls me into him.

“Thank you nana, Dr Nkomo-Nkrumah. I’ll make this chance count. I’m going to spoil you rotten and love every bit of you in every imaginable way and with everything I have. I love you, with all my heart”.

He’s going to spoil me more than he already has?

My heart may still be a bit sore but it’s in a happy place now.

“I’m sorry for my behaviour”.

“Don’t be. I deserved everything you dished”.

He did, didn’t he?

“So about that meeting we had”, he says playing with a strand of my weave. Oh yes that! I need to hear this.

“Your mother wants to make peace”.

“What?” I sit up and look at him.

“Ya. So apparently a whole ritual ceremony needs to be done to break the curse. I told them that no one would pressure you to do it. If you decide to do it, it should be of your own mind. And whatever you decide, I’m on your side”.

I think my heart just stopped. I don’t think I’m breathing. I don’t know if I want to reunite with my mother ever again. Once upon a time, I lived for her but now, I’m not sure. The scars she inflicted ran too deep and never fully healed.

“You don’t have to decide right now or ever even. If you don’t want, no one is going to force you. I’ll make sure of it. No one will ever hurt you again baby, I promise. Me included. I’ll protect your heart”, he pecks me on the neck.

I’m still dead I think. Mama’s face comes into my mind and I feel weak. I refuse to think about this right now. Let me focus on me and Elik and our journey towards marriage. We will be the most messed up couple in history but we will be ok. As long as we have each other we will be alright. I hope we find some sort of healing in Mozambique!

Nineteen

Today the paternity results come out. I'm more terrified than the parents themselves. Elik wakes me up at 7:30 am. He's the most alive person in the mornings, as long as he wakes himself up. He says he just got back from dropping the kids off at school. That makes me hate him a bit less for disturbing my sleep. He's putting effort with the kids. Those kids shame, I foresee serious abandonment issues in their future. That's why I'm staying here with them when I lecture and I'll move up to Joburg with them. I can't abandon them. They might just turn out like Elik and there's two of them, so many girls would be hurt. I'm doing the community a huge favour here, I deserve a Nobel prize.

"Please join me in the shower", Elik says when I eventually stop pretending like I can't hear him. I yawn and stretch myself and rub my eyes and cuss at him for disturbing my dream. I'm exhausted and it felt so good to have him back in my bed. We lay in bed last night and just talked. I realised just how much I had missed him and how I can't be without him. I thought I was done with him, for good this time, but my heart has other ideas, clearly.

He's still walking on eggshells around me. Choosing words extra carefully, holding holding me too gentle and generally being overly nice. I don't think he believes I really took him back and let him wrap his arms around me as we slept last night. Even then I had to take his hands and wiggle myself into his body for a cuddle and force-wrap his arms around me. If I got paid R100 for every time he said sorry last night, I'll be rich by now. I don't think he believes my "It's fine baby. We'll get through this".

In his words, he said, "I'm sorry Fierce, but I can't believe a woman would still want to marry a man like me. And I really can't believe you would forgive everything I've done to you".

It's too early for thoughts. I drag myself out of bed and join him in the shower. It's like we haven't showered together in a while because we have been broken apart till yesterday. We spoke last night but it wasn't fun talk, it was intense.

He briefs me on how his business is going, his upcoming meeting with the minister tomorrow for a potential business venture and all, his excitement for our upcoming trip to Mozambique, his future plans for us

and all that. He says very soon we'll be rolling in money. He's talking, I'm bathing. I tell him I'm proud of him for always taking care of us. By that I guess I mean '*Thank you for making money, it makes life so much easier for some of us*' .

I just stand there, watching water runs down his body. I admit, I'm in love and I don't wanna be saved. When I look at this man, he looks almost celestial! His perfect melanin pops and it always calls me to bring my body next to his so I can look at that contrast of our skin tones. I realise I actually truly love Elik so much I don't even know why. Maybe they are right it's the money, or it's his dick game, or I'm bewitched! I don't know. All I know is that verily verily I love him with every fibre of my being. Even if he woke up broke, I would stay under a bridge with him and love him. You don't choose a soulmate, the stars give him to you. I so happened to be given a broken diamond. Broken yes, but a diamond nonetheless.

"Baby", he moves my chin up so I can look at him and stop looking at 'him'.

"You want some?" he bites his lower lip in the way he always does when I'm about to be in trouble.

"No baby, not now".

I wasn't even thinking of that! I was just admiring what's mine and thinking of what he means to me. He smiles at me and I blush. Elik! Those eyes, those!

"You have the most beautiful eyes. I pray our child will have your eyes", I say. That was random. Now it's his turn to blush away.

"So you will still have a child with me?"

"Of course!".

So he really didn't believe anything I said yesterday? I need that child maybe more than him and after the wedding I'm getting rid of this implant in my arm. And because of this implant my period is still nowhere to be found so that means I'm accessible to Elik 24/7/365.

"Nana. You doing it again", he says.

I snap out of my thoughts and back to the now.

"Doing what now?"

"Zoning out".

"I'm sorry. I just, I have a lot on my mind".

"It's cool. Do you want me to take your mind off things?" he's looking at me like a pervert! Gosh I love him I can't even help it.

“Will you come with me to collect the paternity results?” he says.

That’s a 180 degree change of subject! If I was getting any wet from the way he was looking at me, I just dried out completely. I turn around so he can wash my back but I stay silent. I’m back to thinking.

“She (Mbali) won’t be there. It will be just us two”, he brings his hands around me and rests his chin on my shoulder.

“I love you baby and you don’t have to come if you don’t want to. I got us in this mess, let me deal with it”, he says.

He gently rubs my stomach. I can’t make him stop this moment. It’s just us and the only sound is the water from the shower splashing on our bare bodies and the radical streams splattering on the tiles. Now I have to go with him. How can I not when he’s holding me like this? Just great, now I might have to find out on paper that my future hubby is fathering a child with some ugly bimbo. Ok fine, Mbali is far from ugly and she has dangerous curves, but still! She’s ugly because her heart is ugly and because I hate her.

He pulls me closer to him. He’s getting all my hair wet and I wasn’t planning on blow drying but alright. After that chop chop I did on my hair, I look terrible without a wig on. Why I even chopped it off I don’t know because here I am, back at one. I just wasted a good afro. I walked out without a wig once and Kofi laughed at me so hard, I almost cried. So the wig stays firmly on all the time now. Thanks to glue and double tape.

“Don’t you want her there, baby?”

I’m learning the word compromise and I’m learning to put Elik first. When all is said and done, it’s their child and hurt me as that may, my taking Elik back is accepting that.

“No I don’t”.

“Why not?”

“Because if by any chance that baby is not mine, I’ll kill her”.

Alright. Fair enough. I have a vacation/retreat coming up so I have no time to deal with corpses. I think he somehow loves that girl because why then did he put her up in a fancy hotel in Camps Bay? I know it’s just for the baby but I’m scared. What if he will love the baby so much he’ll love the mother as well? Or worse what if Mbali dumps that baby on Elik and I have to take care of it. I don’t know if I’ll be able to handle that.

“Do you love her baby?”

He keeps quiet and I immediately regret asking such a stupid question.

If he says yes, then what? You'd swear I enjoy pain, I dig for truths that only end up with me crying into a pillow.

"Cybertron", I say. My voice drowns in my throat and a thin whisper is all that comes out. I want the truth but I'm not sure what exactly I'll do with it.

"I, I don't love her. Maybe I might have felt something for her some time ago but I don't anymore. I care about her because, you know, the child".

My turn to stay silent but aim sure he felt that deep breath I took since his hand is on my stomach.

"She's not going to replace you. No one can ever replace you. I love you and I promised I won't hurt you again. I meant it. You are safe with me and that girl is not a threat at all".

I keep looking down. I'm not reassured. He turns me around to face him. I must look so insecure shame but I stopped wearing a mask around Elik. He sees the real me.

"I swear, it's only you in my heart", he says.

"I'm scared", I confess.

"What you scared of?" he says.

I look down. He brings my chin back up and the water is flowing down my back.

"What are you scared of? Talk to me".

"I'm scared of losing you Elikplim", I bite my lower lip.

No tears Fierce. He must know I'm about to cry because he pulls me in for a hug our wet bodies coming together.

"I love every little bit of you baby girl and I'm the one who should be scared of losing you. I know I've messed up and I'm the reason for your insecurities. I'm sorry. You are gorgeous baby and I love you. I could never leave you for anyone".

I hear what he's saying and it makes sense if I choose to forget how he always leaves and looks for whores on the side. Ok now we're just wasting water. We can't shower for an hour! I get it together and finish up washing myself.

"I'll come with you... for the results".

I actually think it's a good thing that I go. I don't trust Elik right now. The baby could be his and he'll bribe whoever is there to tweak the results to say it's not his so I can be ok and then go ahead and play baby daddy

behind my back. Then five years down the line when I find out, he'll be like "I did it to protect you". I'll go and be there for my man. Isn't that what marriage is about? Through thick and thin? For better or worse? And all that stuff they make you repeat after the pastor? I'll be married soon so I'm practicing.

"Thank you, baby", he says turning off the water.

We make it back to the room and I'm looking for something to wear. He's looking at me like he's going to eat me but no thank you, he just watched me finish bathing! Now he thinks he's going to get all up in me and then I either have to shower again or walk around smelling like him! Not happening! Not that I mind the way he smells. That scent that's just him. I love it actually. I think I'm looking at him too in the same way. I didn't notice.

"Dress up baby and stop raping me with your eyes! We need to go".

I can't help but laugh. This man of mine is too much. We dress up and head down to Panorama. I'm glad Mbali isn't here. Why should she be? Just because she's incubating my fiancé's sperm doesn't mean she has any right to anything. We just wanted her blood and we got it so she can chill in that hotel and enjoy room service! I don't know why I hate her so much! I'm lying. I know why. She's a huge threat to my kingdom and I'm protecting the crown princes, Peter and Paul from having her as a stepmother. They can't even pronounce her name! Even Elik can't really pronounce her name right! So how exactly do you love someone but you can't say their name?

The lovely lab person in a too white lab coat sits us down, offers us tea or coffee, which we refuse. Elik gently tells him to skip the formalities and get to the point. I'm so nervous, my hands are shaking. But because I love being wonder woman I take Elik's hand and tell him, "Whatever the result, nothing changes between us. We'll be just fine".

In response, he kisses my hand. I can only hope the baby won't take him away from me! I'll hate that baby and I think it's wrong to hate babies. But they are people though and hating people is not wrong so technically hating a baby can't be that bad. Right? The lab guy hands me the envelope with results. My hands are shaking as I open it and I peak as if I'm hiding answers from classmates in an exam. It's a whole three-page document detailing even the methodology used! One line would have been enough you know just say '*Yes he's the father*' or '*No he's not the father*'. Finish

and klaar. Straight to the point. But no, now I have to read through sections and subsections before I can get a yes or no. There are four major sections I have to suffer through.

1. Genetic System Table (Locus/Allele Sizes chart).
2. Combined Paternity Index.
3. Probability of Relationship.
4. Test Conclusions.

I'm not in a rush to get to the conclusions so I'll read the whole document, it's all good.

The lab guy's eyes keep running from me to Elik and back and forth. I think he thinks I'm the mother. How he can't see from this bodysuit leaving some of my stomach out that I'm not pregnant, I don't know.

"What does it say?" Elik asks.

I keep looking at the results, reading fast. Elik has his hand over my shoulder waiting impatiently for me to share the results. I'm frozen. I can't feel my face, literally. These results have my heart racing and my palms sweating. I scan past the jargon and quickly scan through the table showing the genetic markers and get to the point.

The interpretation:

Combined paternity index (PI) = 0.

Probability of paternity = 0%.

Conclusion: *The alleged father is excluded as biological father of the tested child. This conclusion is based on the non-matching alleles observed at the loci listed above with a PI equal to 0. The alleged father lacks the genetic markers that must be contributed to the child by the biological father. The probability of paternity is 0%.*

"So?" Elik says.

I stay frozen so he sighs and grabs the paper from me. He's the one now frozen staring at the paper while I'm over here singing joyful praises unto the heavens.

"You're not the father baby. The child is not yours!" I hug him from the back as he stays seated. I'm so relieved I think I'm going to cry. Elik slams the report on the desk and storms out, pushing me out of the way and the chair dropping behind him and the door banging as he exits. The lab guy looks at me and I look at him. Why did I just get pushed? What did I do?

"Thanks for the results. We'll be on our way now", I say to the guy. I

take the report and put it back in the envelope.

“Please sign here and here and here before you leave ma’am”.

“Sure”.

“So that’s your husband?” the lab guy asks.

“Soon to be. For now he’s my fiancé”.

“Ohh kay! So you are happy your child is not your fiancé’s?” he’s looking all colours of confused. Even men love things!

“No silly! It’s not like that. He got our side chick pregnant or so we thought. But now he’s not the father so that means Mbali cheated on him!”

I can’t believe I just said ‘our side chick’ and I’m saying Mbali like he knows whom I’m talking about. He looks confused and curious.

“Wait. So your fiancé got another girl pregnant and you are here with him for the paternity results?”

I’m not sure where this is going but I nod.

“We are getting married soon so I needed to know this”.

Why exactly am I explaining myself to a stranger?

“So you will marry a guy who cheated on you?”

“Why not? All these men out here are cheating one way or another, so are you saying we should just cancel the sacrament of matrimony altogether? Come on now”.

“Not true”, he says.

“What’s not?”

“That all men cheat! I’m married and I don’t cheat”.

Oh brother. A holier than thou!

“Good for you! Your wife is probably doing the cheating on your behalf, so there. Ok fine not all men cheat, but most do. Either sexually or emotionally. At least mine cheats sexually! Ok fine so he got a bit emotional with Mbali but who cares now right? That’s water under the bridge. The baby isn’t his!”

He looks at me.

Why am I wasting my energy on this conversation again? Who’s this guy? I don’t need stress from nobody. Not today honey. I’m a happy soul right now. Not even Elik can kill my vibe. What’s up with him anyways. Shouldn’t he be as happy as me right now? I mean we just got rid of a huge cockroach in our house. Now that calls for a celebration! In fact, I’m going to buy champagne and make a big lunch today. I find Elik in the car and he’s not ok at all. The way he keeps banging that steering wheel, I’m scared

the airbags will deploy! I still don't get why he's so upset though. I offer to drive, he says no. I say if he drives I'll take a taxi because no way am I getting into the car and let him drive when he's this angry. He already drives like a maniac when he's happy. Now imagine when he's upset. The road rage!

I could choose to rub this whole thing in his face but I won't be insensitive, I'll take him home it's fine. I chose this york, let my shoulders bear it. Today my love is being tested beyond its limits. I feel like the devil is standing behind me waiting for me to fail. I won't lie. Being there for your man when he's going through a heartbreak caused by another woman has to be the worst thing in the world! Half the time you feel sorry for him and hold him and make him his favourite pap and meat and veg so he can be fine. You make sure the glass of Hennessy in his hand doesn't run empty and you keep reminding him how much you love him. The other half you are like 'ya! Burn you SOB! You deserve it!'. It's tough.

Elik, my man, my fiancé, my future husband, he whose rib I was made from, is hurting because his side chick played him. Hay shame, life is hard for some of us. The whole betrayal by Mbali isn't sitting well with him. He's not ok at all but he can't do anything because he's still making it up to me and the last thing he needs is stress from me as well. I guess now he's wishing he'd kept Komla and hadn't upgraded his side chicks to more permanent posts. It's afternoon and he's been sulking on the couch all day and being short with Kofi for no apparent reason. I quickly pull Kofi on the side and reassure him it's not him.

"Dude you need to give it to my brother more, see how frustrated he is. What's his deal?" Kofi says.

"It's Mbali. The kid is not his!"

I hope my happiness isn't too obvious.

"Yhoo! No wonder! Elik's gonna lose his mind bro! He even had a trust fund set up for that kid already! Yhoo! He did the most for that chick".

I blink fast. He what now? What else don't I know mara? It's like everyone around me knows things about Elik but I'm in the dark.

"You must be happy!"

"You have no idea how much! I'm so relieved".

Kofi stops and looks at me. I look back at him confused.

"What?"

"I'm wondering. I want a girl who'll love me the way you love Elik.

How will I know when I find her?”

“Well, ask Elik how he knew when he found me”.

“I’m serious Fierce. I need a Fierce in my life”.

Oh dear. Another Lumka?

“Well, it will help to slow down on the sleeping around! No girl wants a travelling man! Travelling from one bed to another! So not attractive!”

“But Elik is the greatest traveller of them all yet you still here!”

This boy! I’m his sister-in-law. Fine, my man is a traveller of note, but is it necessary to point it out?

“Sorry. That came out wrong”.

It’s cool. We move the conversation along but my brain is still hung up on that trust fund. Damn it Elik!

I’m upset at him now but I just took him back and he’s already sad as is. I would be heartless to pick a fight with him right now! I walk over and sit on top of him and wrap my legs around his waist and my hands around his neck. I keep reminding him how glad I am the child is not his. You know just to rub it in his face! He just says “you are my all” and gives me a big hold.

“You ok baby?”

“I’m ok”, he says.

But one look into his eyes and it’s obvious that he’s far from ok. Whatever! Let him burn! How dare he opened a trust fund behind my back! We are engaged for crying out loud! I ignore the issue till I decide, *‘You know what, I won’t have my vacation spoiled by some useless beesh! We’re leaving tomorrow evening. Elik will be in a mood the whole time and my time will be spoiled!’*

So being the grown person I am, I decide fine I’ll stay at home and cook and pack. I give Elik a once-off guilt free pass to go and talk to Mbali. He needs to talk to her and get whatever answers he needs. I’m not worried about him doing anything with her. If there’s one thing I know it’s that Elik doesn’t forgive such type of betrayal. He values loyalty above everything.

“It’s ok baby. Go and talk to her. Don’t do anything stupid though. Don’t hurt her in any way. You are better than that”.

I ask Kofi to go with his brother just so Elik doesn’t kill someone and he ends up in jail. Orange really isn’t his colour so I don’t want him in jail. The kids will be home soon and I’ve told Lizzy not to bother with anything. I got this. I’m in a good mood and cooking and singing and even dancing

alone to *'Feeling the Nikka - Akon & D'Banj'*. Mbali's child isn't Elik's! Oh happy day! What a huge relief. Now at least Mbali has fallen but that means the post of head side chick is vacant again. Sigh.

Food cooked, lot of time passed, played with the kids, whole afternoon gone, bags packed, had dinner without the Ghana brothers, BORED. I'm beginning to wonder what's taken them so long but I won't call! I put the kids to bed, take a long shower and Kofi and Elik are still not back. But again, I won't call. I'll let him deal with this alone. I resort to chatting to Lumka. He flew out to Zambia for business and he knows how to cheer me up and shower me with compliments.

I'm getting tired of waiting for Elik. I need to sleep because we travelling tomorrow. I gave him a pass to go and talk to her, I didn't say he must move in with her! I thought he'd be gone an hour or two, but now the whole day is gone! I rest in the thought that Kofi is there with him. It's not a thought even, it's just me grasping at straws here, just hoping. I find one of his T-shirts, put that on and be on my phone. Farm Heroes needs me to level up. Just before 10, the bedroom door opens and Elik comes in. He sits at the foot of the bed. He looks somewhere between angry and sad, I can't tell because he just glanced my way and looked away.

"You still up?" he says.

"Yup", I sit up.

"I'm sorry. That took longer than expected. We went for drinks afterwards, just Kofi and I. I had a lot to tell him".

"How are you feeling?"

He looks down and plays with his fingers. Sigh! It sucks being me you know. Now I have to help Elik get over Mbali's betrayal.

"Switch off the lights and come sit".

I need him to tell me exactly how he feels and what's going on in his mind so we can deal with it. But I know he's ashamed and won't talk with me looking at him, so that's why I'm telling him to switch off the lights. That way he can talk to me without my eyes accusing him.

"I'm fine baby. Let's get some sleep".

He gets up and throws off his jacket. His T-shirt follows to the floor and the shoes, the belt and the jeans.

"Get the lights Elik and come let's talk", I repeat, more firmly this time. I'm not asking! He looks at me for a second but gets the lights and comes and sits at the edge of the bed near my feet.

“So? How did the talk go? You didn’t do anything stupid, did you?” I start.

“No, I didn’t. We just talked”.

“About?”

“Everything”.

“Come on baby. Tell me. I won’t judge you, you know that”.

A sigh from him.

“I wanted to know who the father of her child is. It took a while to get it out of her. Fuck, that bitch is such a liar!”

Like someone I know, I think in my head.

“So, who is it?”

I’m just asking, it’s not like I’d know him. He keeps quiet and I wait. I have all night, no rush.

“She had what she calls ‘a serious boyfriend’ the whole time. I was just a... ummm”.

“Side nigga”, I autocomplete for him.

“Yup, something like that”.

If he didn’t sound so hurt, I’d laugh at him serious. He gets to walk a mile in our shoes for once. I’m sure he’s still shocked that he can be a side too. Did he honestly think he’ll be a main to all of us? It’s all messed up. Elik is my main and had Mbali as a side. Mbali has a main and had Elik as a side. I have Elik as my main and I have no side. I think I’m the only good person in this mix up!

“How does that make you feel?” I’ve seen therapists on TV ask like this and since I’m not sure how to deal with such, I’ll follow that cliché line of questioning.

“It pisses the hell out of me! Fuck that slut! If it wasn’t for Kofi, I swear I’d have decapitated her. Can you believe I’ve just been an ATM to her?”

Well, I’m glad Kofi was there then!

“She didn’t love me Fierce! She just used me and was sleeping with her punk the entire time and would lie to me and act all innocent and make me feel guilty for not being serious about her! She had someone the whole time! And you know, I don’t share!”

First, I can believe the ATM part. Secondly, I don’t get why he’s upset. He uses girls all the time! And thirdly, did he honestly think a girl like Mbali was faithful and would keep her legs closed while waiting on his phone call for months? They used each other, how can he not see that? And

that ‘she didn’t love me’ is honey to my lips. It’s ambrosia to me, nectar of the gods! Next time he’ll think twice before trying to be in multiple relationships!

“I’m sorry baby”.

I know I’m stupid. I mean I’m seriously comforting my fiancé because of what his side dish did to him.

“So the baby thing? How are you dealing with that?”

He keeps quiet. It’s all good I have all night so I ask again.

“I’m so infuriated. I could kill that bitch! I gave her my time and my money! Then she turns around and does this bullshit! I almost lost you because of her and all this time it wasn’t even my child! How fucked up is that!”

Very fucked up, I say in my head. All three of us are fucked up. He’s hurt though shame. His voice is lined with so much pain I genuinely feel sorry for him. My poor baby. And because as a human being I want to be angry at someone, I direct my anger towards Mbali and bash her out of her name. That just has him going on a rant about how he was this close to picking her up and throwing her against a wall. I would love to do the same. You know kill Mbali then kill Elik then bury them in the same shallow grave on top of each other, so their ghosts can sex forever! Birds of a feather!

“Today did you, ummm, get with anyone?”

“No”, he says.

I sigh deeply. I believe him. My being is composed of three parts.

The first is saying ‘serves you right for cheating! Burn motherfudger!’

The second is feeling betrayed and hurt and doesn’t understand why I’m even entertaining this right now.

The third wants to forget everything and hold him and reassure him. It wants to give him that unconditional type of love. I listen to his rant patiently, occasionally adding remarks like ‘no she didn’t!’, ‘she said what now?’, ‘You don’t say!’, ‘What the..!’. I truly can’t believe I’m here listening to my soon to be husband go on about how dirty the girl he cheated on me with for years did him! But again, we established a long time ago that I’m not normal. He stops his rant and just paces in his dark. I hate him because he hurt me but I loved him enough to forgive him. I don’t do halves so I love him fully and I need to be there for him and help him through this. I’ve always thrived to make sure he’s ok.

I get out of bed and walk towards him. I stop his pacing and stand on my tippy toes and put my hands around his neck.

“It’s ok baby. You’ll be fine. I’m here”.

His hands go around my waist. It’s dark but not that dark, like I can see his silhouette.

“I’m sorry Fierce. You are my girl and I know I don’t deserve you”.

I just stay there.

“Why are you like this? Why are so good to me? How can you love me after everything?”

That last one is an easy question.

“Because you are mine”.

He pulls me closer to his body.

“I’m sorry I’m this broken. You don’t deserve anything I put you through”.

That’s true, I don’t, but it is what it is. We made promises to each other and love forgives and love soothes and all that 1 Corinthians 13.

“We’re fine. I love you and I’ll never give up on you. I know you hurting baby and I know you’re angry. And I know you need to blow off some steam”.

He keeps quiet but his hold around my waist stays. I’m half glad, half relieved that he’s home right now. We all know what he does when he’s in such a state. I hate to see him like this though. I want him to be alright and I want myself to be alright. I’m tired of all our fighting and we should be happy right now because Mbali is out of the way! One day I’ll do an active scan of my brain and record a video, maybe I’ll be able to see how exactly it works. I’m convinced there are portions that don’t function.

“I want you to be ok”. I mean it.

“Thanks baby girl. I’ll be ok. I have you, so of course I’ll be ok”, he kisses me on the top of my head.

“Let’s get you better then”.

“How?”

“Fuck me”. I think I caught him off guard because his hands twitched.

“What? No Fierce I can’t. I don’t ever wanna hurt you again. I can’t”.

“I want you to. I’m your girl. Take me and fuck me. Blow off the steam, on me”.

I can’t believe I’m asking a man to hurt me. I need urgent psychiatric evaluation. And maybe I don’t deserve the title ‘woman’, I’ll stick to just

identifying as a homo sapien so feminists don't come for my head with knives and machetes.

"No baby, I can't. I can't do that to you".

He holds me close and brings my face to rest on his chest.

"I love you too much. You are my everything and I'm done breaking you. I love you".

"I love you too that's why I want you to do this. I want us to do this".

"No baby, I can't. I really can't".

"I'm a big girl, I can take it!"

"No baby. I'll feel worse afterwards".

Oh man! Why does he have to be so stubborn! I just make a realisation. I don't want him to 'hurt' me so he feels better, I want so I feel better. I want this for me.

"I need this Elik. I need to get over this too! So, ok do it for me if not for yourself".

I don't know since when but I'm also starting to use hard sex to forget problems. Like I can get to take out all the anger I have inside on him. I'm sure we spend a good 5 minutes of me begging and of him saying how he can't hurt me.

"Damn it Fierce!"

When he reaches for the T-shirt I'm wearing and takes it off me, I know, I'm on the right track. When he starts kissing me and his hands start roaming all over, I know I've won. He picks me up and throws me on the bed his body crushes down on mine. I want this more than him I think. I need this.

I asked for this I know but when he grabs me hard and just spears all the way into me, I want to say 'I was joking'. But again, I need this. I claw his back so hard I'm sure he'll have scratch marks in the morning if I keep at it. I must be hurting him. It's the pain we need though, right? It takes pain to draw out pain. Ok, I just made that up and I'm not sure it even makes sense! He strangles, I claw, he grabs too hard, I bite, I gasp for air, he slams the living daylights out of me. I think he's gonna split me in half. We are just like chimpanzees in the jungle violently mating. I forget all about Kofi in the other room and the kids sleeping in their room and I scream down the walls. The pain and the pleasure have me going crazy. My brain really works in mysterious ways shame. As he goes in and out of me and I'm feeling it and I'm wanting him to stop but not stop, I start thinking *'Did he*

give it to her this good as well?'

I get upset in the middle of it and lash out at him, "I hate you".

"I know. I love you too", he says.

I'm hitting him hard so he takes both my hands and pins them over my head. He stops moving and if I thought we were weird before I don't know what to describe us now. We have a full on conversation about Mbali with him buried deep inside me! With our breaths irregular and our chests heaving, we try and get the words out. I need answers right now and no it can't wait till afterwards.

"Do you love her?" I go first.

"No. I swear", he says.

"Are you gonna get back with her?"

"Never".

"Do you love me?"

"With everything. I love you Fierce".

I believe him. All clear then, we may proceed. I need him right now. I need his animalistic self to reveal itself.

"I love you too", I promise.

End of discussion, time to resume our sexercise. This is not kissing, it's too rough and too wet to be classified as kissing. We back to fighting each other in no time. I'm convinced I'm going to be paralysed after this. I'm resisting him but I'm doing a bad job at it and he's not stopping. It hurts so good. The pain and the pleasure are at par and that just leaves me in a state of nirvana and I feel like my spirit is levitating right out of my body. I'm in a whole new dimension.

"You good?" he asks.

If I wasn't good that voice just made me good. I nod and hope he can see me.

"Should I stop?"

"No. Please". He can't stop now!

"I love you", he says.

I know that's just to tell me I'm about to get the fuck of my life. He's just reminding me that he loves me so that when he starts smashing me like he hates me, I'll know he doesn't. I wanted to mouth an 'I love you too' but he doesn't give me the chance. He just ploughs. I gave up the fight the moment my legs reached my neck and now I'm just taking it like a bitch and choking on my screams.

“I love you. You are all mine. All of you, mine”.

“I’m all yours”, I agree.

A good D will have you selling your soul I promise you. He gets me up, walks me to backwards until my back is against the cold wall. He holds me in place and then just screws me stupid. I understand the saying, caught between a rock and a hard place! Either I’m abnormal or I’m just a helpless freak but when he checks on me again to see if I’m still alive, I ask him to keep going. It’s like I have a death wish or something. He’s going to murder me. We’re back on the bed, he flips me over, grabs my waist and drives home. I fall forwards onto my stomach. I keep crawling away until I’m almost falling over the edge of the bed and my upper body is dangling on the side. I’m holding onto the floor with my hands so I don’t drop on my head. I can’t afford anymore head damage than I already display. I was never ready for the intensity that follows.

He pulls me back and flips me back again. I’m not resisting him at all. I stopped fighting losing battles a long time ago. He kisses me so gently I fall in love with him and his hands touch me all over, I want to marry him right now.

“Cum with me baby”.

How can I not when he asked so nicely! I surrender myself entirely to him and let him just own me. He owns me alright and he’s showing no mercy while doing it. We arrive alive together and we are both sweaty and breathing hard and my mouth tastes blood. As he gets off me and holds me tight in his arms, none of us says anything. We just breathe and cuddle close together.

“Thank you, baby”, he says trying to catch his breath.

Oh goodness! He’s back to thanking me for sex?

“You are my life and for you I’ll do anything”, he says.

I kiss his hand and I’m getting drowsy.

“I loved every second of it”, I whisper.

I need him to know so he doesn’t feel guilty for hurting me. I hurt him too. I’ll wake up sore and bruised and he’ll wake up with bite marks and a clawed back. Fair trade.

Tonight we sleep, tomorrow we try to explain to the twins how we were playing video games that made too much noise and try and avoid Kofi by all means. There’s no way he didn’t hear that.

Twenty

I woke up exhausted and a bit sore. Not as sore as I expected though, surprisingly. Elik wasn't in bed so I jumped into the shower quickly. No way I would go down for breakfast with bloodstains on the side of my mouth and dry white patches on my thighs! How would I explain that to Kofi? After my 2 minute shower, I jump into shorts and Elik's T-shirt. It looks like I'm just wearing a T-shirt only but who cares! I hate clothes. Elik is cooking and singing to *Forever - Akon*. He sounds so happy, it makes me smile. I just stand there watching him humming along and probably burning the bacon. He's topless and I can see the scratches on his back and I smile naughtily to myself. Last night got quite interesting. As I listen to the song he's humming along to, I can't believe how accurate a song can be. It's like it's talking to me personally. I'm just standing here smiling like an idiot watching him work work. The song is right. I love to do it over and over again. I'll make sure to listen to it on the flight to Mozambique for now I write the lyrics in my head. Just as I'm lost in my moment of Elik admiration, Kofi happens!

"I can't even get sleep on the couch! You guys are already making noise so early in the morning!" he complains.

What did I do? I was just standing here watching my man and not saying anything!

"Morning to you too Kofi".

He just grunts and goes straight to the fridge and drinks milk straight from the carton! I hate that the twins are doing that now too. Picking up bad habits from their uncle! Elik now knows he has company! He turns around and I melt looking at him. He's my weakness, I can't lie.

"Why are you out of bed though babe? I meant to bring you breakfast in bed and romance you".

"I didn't know that! I can go back to bed and pretend I didn't wake up".

"No, it's all good, there'll be many more mornings, I'll wake up earlier next time. It's just after last night....", he bites his lower lip.

I look at him and we laugh. Last night ne! We proved why humans are scientifically classified in the Kingdom Animalia!

"You guys are annoying!" Kofi says, leaving the fridge open and the milk carton open on the counter. He leaves to who knows where.

“What’s his deal?” I ask, closing the fridge. Elik shrugs his shoulders.

“He needs to get laid, he’ll be fine”.

“Ya, getting laid good makes you fine. Look at me”, he says and I giggle.

“Let me set the table so long”.

I find cups and plates to take to the dining room.

“No don’t worry! I got this. Let me quickly make your lemon water and you just relax. Let me take care of you”.

Such a sweetheart! He was almost done cooking and toasting and in 10 minutes I’m sitting with a greasy breakfast in front of me. But I know it was made with love so I thank him and get ready to dig in. We keep looking at each other and laughing. We don’t need to say anything, we were both there yesterday so we know what exactly went down.

Then Kofi happens again! He’s in quite the mood this morning, I can’t deal with him. He complains that no one thought of him and no one dished up for him. He disappears to the kitchen and comes back with a bowl of cereal and says it’s fine he will eat cereal since no one here remembered he too is alive. Elik and I look at each other and shrug our shoulders. We don’t know what’s up with him. We eat in silence and Kofi is done before us. He puts his bowl away and sits back on the chair and starts interrogating us! This boy!

“I slept on the couch!” he says.

“Why?”

I think it’s polite to just ask.

“I couldn’t sleep! What freaky shit were you guys up to last night?”

I look down and giggle.

“It’s not funny! I couldn’t sleep! I’m traumatised!”

Now he’s being dramatic! We ignore him but he’s never one to shut up.

“Elik, I saw the claw marks on your back, earlier! What the hell were you guys up to?”

Does he really need an answer or? I look down and giggle.

“You guys are sick, you know that?” he laughs.

I knew he wouldn’t maintain that serious face for long. There’s the Kofi we love. Maybe he was just hungry and now the cereal has saved him.

“Dude! It’s like a dog bit you here (he reaches for Elik’s arm). You might need a rabies shot!”

“A dog really? Rabies, really? So I have canine teeth now?”

“Wait what? You bit him? What exactly were you guys up to last night? Biting each other? Tattooing his back with what? Your nails?” he looks at me with a shocked face.

Do I answer that? I’m not sure. I look down and keep eating my food.

“Do you know how traumatising it is to listen to your brother and his girl going at it? And whatever you were doing didn’t sound normal! I almost came in there to see if you were not killing each other!”

I’m glad he didn’t come! I refuse to imagine that horror.

“I had to sleep on the couch! You wouldn’t stop”.

He knows he could have put on earphones, right? Why is Elik laughing instead of telling Kofi to shut up?

“We are sorry Kofi. It was nothing, we were just umm, playing video games”, I laugh.

“Yeah right, let’s call it that, shall we? What video game? Angry birds?... Fierce why did you bite him? This looks deep bro. Like you literally ate him! WTF dude!”

He should quit acting all innocent here. I’m sure he has his own freakiness somewhere. Just because my idea of sex doesn’t align to his doesn’t mean it’s bad. Has he never heard the saying, ‘*Different strokes for different folks?*’

I’m done eating and if they want to continue with this conversation they have to do it without me. I have a vacation to go to. I get up and hug Kofi from the back and kiss him on the cheek.

“You know I love you boo. I’ll always love you. Sorry about last night”.

I then step to Elik and whisper in his ear, “Think you can show me what else you can do before we head to the airport?”

He looks up at me with that ‘damn right, you know it’ eye.

“I’m not wearing underwear so don’t make me wait too long”.

He laughs a little when I’m done whispering and his eyes tell me he’ll be right there.

The flight to Maputo goes by without me noticing it. I don’t even mind the slight turbulence! All I want is to talk to Elik. It’s true that good sex will have you all happy and glowing. I’m just happy. The private charter to Inhaca is more fun and the views from the top are amazing. We check into our resort and then meet our overly smiley therapist, if I can call her that. She says her name is Melissa and we should feel free to call her Mel. She

says she will be our spiritual guide and will lead us into holistic wholeness. I can't wait to see her try. We may look normal but trust me we are far from it. I hope she loves a challenge because when she's done with us I doubt she'll still be ok upstairs.

She seems nice and I like her. She looks proper. She's oldish, wears specs, hair tied up in a bun and you can just tell she is a yogi from her straight back posture. I choose to like her. I'm all about positivity here. As she explains how tomorrow will go, I almost laugh. Elik will hate all of it. I'm sure he's already thinking up excuses for us to leave tomorrow. Mel says the retreat will bring Elik and I together and align us to our truest selves, whatever that means. She says we will start the morning at 7 am so we can salute the sunrise with Ashtanga yoga. I love yoga so I'm good but Elik makes a face.

She says we will then have breakfast in the garden and she will teach us about the human mind. I hope she won't go all scientific on us because we kinda both have PhDs here and know a lot about the human mind so she might just end up with us disputing everything she says. She says after that we will learn to breathe! (What?) and we will look deep in our centres for ourselves (What?) and we will be able to communicate better with our souls (What?). She then tells us that after that we will just talk and she will guide us. Then we can do whatever we want and we will meet her at dinner for a mouth-watering, vegetarian dish to heal and balance our bodies. All I heard was no meat and my positivity just died. She says for the duration of the retreat we will not eat any meat or dairy or eggs. I personally think she's being unreasonable!

"Can we at least have seafood?" I ask.

She smiles sweetly and says, "No honey. We will only eat vegetables and fruits. Our bodies were never designed to digest meat".

I could lay down scientific facts to show her just how wrong she is but again, positivity Fierce.

Just great! What have I gotten us into! No meat? Elik will go mad! She then gives us the day to day itinerary to go through. It's so absurd, we already know we'll do everything here wrong. We will break every rule today. We decide to ignore the rule book. We are like, '*Tonight we are young*' so we go out and set the world on fire.

We DRINK! We are depressed mos. Remember our side chick Mbali broke our heart! How dare she cheats on my man! Who does she think she

is! Like who cheats on Elik though. He's amazing in every way and Mbali was wrong to cheat on him and then try to pin the baby on him. But naye uElik, for a professor he can be stupid shame! Ey, I'm one to talk! Sometimes I think our PhDs stand for Permanent Head Damage!

The major rules in the 'rule book' are:

1. Adhere to a strictly vegan diet for the duration of the retreat.

We are meatitarian! Besides, Mozambique is quite popular for its lobster and no way am I missing out on it!

2. Do partner activities like board games for an hour before bedtime.

Our idea of partner activities is sitting at the back of a bar with Elik drinking and me dancing for him.

3. Refrain from alcohol .

How can we be on vacation and refrain from things that make us happy? In our defence though, the alcohol is written in Portuguese so we didn't know it was alcohol. We are victims of language here.

4. Go to bed by 23h00.

How old are we? 8? By 11 pm, we were having sex on the beach, and not the cocktail.

5. Abstain from love making.

We abstained alright, we got to our room and just fucked dirty and raw. They said love making!

Needless to say, the first night is a disaster, we'll try better tomorrow! I don't even know how we made it back to the room last night. So when we woke up this morning we were stupid and our heads were heavy. But we have a sunrise date with our 'Healer'. We drag ourselves out of bed. I don't know what they put in the alcohol in Mozambique but it knocks you flat out. Maybe that's why it's so expensive? We arrive at our mats for yoga on the beach and our therapist shakes her head. If only she knew what we were doing on this beach last night. We did our moon salutations alright! We're wearing shades to hide our hangover eyes and we just look sick.

We sit on our mats and Mel tells us to sit in the lotus pose and close our eyes. She says we must OM and inhale the freshness of the ocean and exhale all negativity while waiting for the sun to rise. We do and I think I doze off by the 4th OM. When the sun comes up, Elik suddenly has a headache! Mel says he can get into Savasana while she practices with me. I know he's just going to fall asleep! I struggle through poses. Normally my

balance and flexibility are on point, but today I can't hold any pose for longer than 10 seconds. The rising sun must be so disappointed at my salutations because I'm stiff and I feel like I'll puke any moment. It's the longest yoga session I've ever practiced! But I'm a yogi and I never quit.

Namaste.

Breakfast just makes us sad. Green smoothie, green tea, green fruits, green salad? Where's the food? All I see is green here like we are in a meadow! We are here for healing not for weight loss! I just have a cup of green tea and an apple, Elik has water and an apple. Mel happily tells us that our minds don't have to control us. I don't know how that's possible because every decision, voluntary and involuntary, comes from the brain. We excuse ourselves to quickly go to our room after breakfast. We have real snacks and energy bars there to eat. Then it's therapy time, in a room that has minimal furniture and is sound proof so no external disturbances.

As we get to talking, I feel like laughing at Mel! I've never seen anyone blink as fast as she does when we speak! The session has me going through a roller coaster of emotions. I cry, I laugh, I joke, I hurt, I hold Elik's hand. Mel has us telling each other how we feel and she bombards us with question after question. It's mostly about cheating and sex and the hurt we inflict on each other. I've always said the day we go for therapy, the therapist will be left needing major therapy. You should see Mel's face as she hears us talk about Elik's disturbing morals like it's nothing. It's like she will drop down and faint. She tries to stay composed though and says we need to talk about this.

We go right ahead and traumatise the hell out of her with our problems. We laugh and joke through major issues and she just sits there blinking unnaturally fast. I jump right on to Mbali and bash her and keep referring to her as 'his (Elik's) bitch!' I can't exactly laugh at how he had started taking care of a child that wasn't his. It's too soon. Maybe one day we'll sit around a fireplace and laugh our lungs out but not yet. The wound is still raw. Elik and I are sitting next to each other. All I want now is to sleep and I know the feeling is mutual with my baby. I try to be positive though. I keep telling him we will be just fine and will sleep after this. We need to listen to what Miss Therapist says and do everything she says we must do. I remind him of the private boat cruise we'll take late afternoon where we can sail the Portuguese seas and leave all our problems on land. When that doesn't work, I tell him I'll do that thing he likes when we're on the boat. Even that

doesn't work because he just wants to sleep!

"You keep mentioning this woman Fierce. I can tell she's made you very angry. Tell me about her".

"He (I poke him a little playfully) cheated on me with her for years and got her pregnant. I don't know if it's cheating cheating though because initially he was cheating on his wife with me and he was cheating on me with her (Mbali) or cheating on her with me, I don't know and cheating on us with other girls!" I try to explain the situation.

I don't think our Mel dearest understands so she turns to Elik for clarity. She just keeps blinking fast shame.

He clears his throat and does his best to save me, "No, she's referring to back when I was married to my ex-wife and engaged to her and dating Mbali and seeing a couple of other girls on the side. Not seeing them seeing them but you know just hit every now and then, you know how the game goes".

He says it like it's the most natural thing on earth. I laugh because it's funny but Mel looks shocked. She blinks and blinks and looks at me. She needs to stop this blinking, it's too funny! We are trying to be serious here! She takes a moment to digest what we said.

"So he's been cheating on you all this time?"

"I don't know if we can call it that but let me just say yes".

"And how does his cheating make you feel?" she asks looking at me over her specs.

"It's annoying. It's like that mosquito that keeps buzzing in your ear when you're trying to sleep, you know. Just going bzzzz then it bites you and runs away then bzzzz again so you just keep slapping the air. So annoying!"

She looks at me and I think maybe I didn't answer the question.

"I don't mind the cheating. I know why he does it. All I ever ask is that he uses protection and he doesn't catch feelings. That's all".

"So you would never leave him for cheating?" she asks me with an accusatory tone.

I guess as a woman she's disappointed in me. I'm not a woman though, I'm just a Homo sapien, thank you very much!

"No. I would never. It's just sex come on, it doesn't mean anything to him. He has issues this one. You haven't heard half of it!" I tug at his arm. I'm sure Mel doesn't understand how I'm so ok with this. Hopefully she'll

understand soon.

“Anyway, with the way he’s always horny, him sleeping with other people means I catch a break”, I joke.

She blinks so fast I laugh. I’m just joking! I’m an addict myself, I don’t need a break!

“I admire your strength Fierce!”

I don’t know if she means it or she’s mocking me!

“Oh why, thank you”.

Man, I’m so childish. I need growing up lessons!

“But you were angry when he got with that girl. The pregnant one. So clearly his cheating affects you!”

Elik is looking at me and I’m pretending like I don’t see him. I’m here to get our money’s worth so I’ll say what I mean and mean what I say!

“What got to me with that bitch of his was the baby part. Thankfully the paternity test showed 0% chances of Elik being the father!”

“It’s not nice to keep calling her that B word Fierce. She might have hurt you but don’t insult her. Don’t give her that power over you”.

“But she is a bitch! That’s a kinder word even!” Elik says.

See, he backs me up! He’s got me! Mel has no come back to that.

“Alright then let’s talk about that. How did that make you feel? Are you angry?” she asks after swallowing like a duck and blinking.

“Angry? At who? Elik? No, I was but not anymore. He’s an idiot but he’s a good idiot”, I take his hand in mine.

My beautiful idiot! Elik laughs.

“Alright. You say the main problem in your relationship is that Elik cheats. How often exactly does he betray you?”

This woman! Why is she using big words like cheats and betrayal!

“Well, let me see how to put this. You see, he has needs and he sometimes sort of gets with a different number of women on the regular, often, sometimes but not always. A lot though, more than the average man, waaaay more than the average man”.

I’m trying not to insult my man here but she looks at me confused. What? Wasn’t I clear?

“What she’s saying is I have fucked a lot of females. A lot”, Elik says.

I need to help him with his language soon. He will embarrass me one day!

“How many is a lot?” the lady asks. I start laughing because I know

she's not ready for the response.

"I don't know. A lot", he says.

"Take a guess. 10? 20? 30?"

"I don't know. Maybe 500, maybe more. It's not like I count really".

Mel's eyes pop open and her jaw drops. I knew she wasn't ready.

She says we must take a break and she gives us notebooks and asks us to write down the names of people we have slept with in the past. She says acknowledging the people we have shared our energies with is a great start to the healing process. She gives us an hour to complete the task and says we can't talk to each other in that hour. She asks if there's a song maybe she can play for us to help us relax. It kind of came out in one of the questions that we are Akon people and use his songs to deal. We both say, '*Each his own*'. I'm impressed by how synchronised we are! She plays the song from my phone to the Bluetooth speaker on the wall and leaves the room. I'm done with my assignment in 10 seconds.

1) Elik

2) Bunke

3) Athi.

Then I just listen to the music wondering what I'll do with myself for the remaining 59 minutes, 50 seconds! I get off my chair and lie down on the floor with my hands behind my head and my knees up. I might as well sleep. 30 minutes later, Elik's still writing! He keeps doing that thing of biting the pen and thinking. Occasionally he counts with his fingers and I wonder what exactly he's counting! He keeps flipping the pages and writing on a fresh page! But they said not to speak and we are trying to be obedient over here. By 45 minutes he's still writing! What the hell! I creep up on him and I peak over and the man is on number 447. What the! How does he even remember all that? Yes yes he has a high IQ and a good memory but still. I thought he said that '*maybe over 500*' as an exaggeration! If he's on 447 and still writing what exactly does that mean? That he wasn't joking? Yoh! He has cloaked serious bedroom mileage! I suddenly feel like I haven't started living. I only had three men and yena his list is approaching half a millenium! WTF!

I guess he wasn't lying when he said he doesn't remember most of the girls' names. He has names there like 'Durban 3, Singapore 18,19,20, Paris brunette, Cyprus air hostess, Blonde hair black girl, Sandton stalker, Stole my money girl, the best friends with the piercings'. He sees me peeking and

he closes his notebook and gives me the eye. I get it and go sink back on my chair. Ya ne! I'm shook. But that explains all the experience though. I always knew he was international and extremely generous with his body. Looking at the positive, at least I'll never lack a mind blowing orgasm!

When Mel returns and asks if we're done, I say yes, he says no.

"I've forgotten a lot of them though", Elik says.

Lawd! On top of that almost 500 there will be more? Is that even possible? Where and when did he get time to sleep with all these people?

"It's alright if you've forgotten, just write the estimated number of the ones you didn't write. Take a wild guess".

I watch his hand movement and I think he just wrote 100! I'm unable to can. I'm not mad at him at all or even hurt, I want to laugh at him after this. He needs to tell me about the best friends with the piercings! This casanova of mines! Then we take a break and use it to take a stroll down the beach.

"I know you saw the number of girls I wrote there", he says.

"It's in the past honey, it doesn't bother me".

It really doesn't and I don't know why people never believe me when I tell them. It doesn't bother me at all, maybe it used to once upon a time but now, nah, it's funny actually. And most definitely it wouldn't be the reason I leave Elik, should I ever leave him. We get to talking about us and our things and complain about how this retreat and it's green food is draining! We agree that at least the talking is good.

After the break, we drag ourselves back to the room of answers. We promised each other we will be more serious this time. Strangers think I'm mental! I don't think this therapy thing is for me. I'm more than capable of dealing with myself on my own. From my teenage years I always took care of myself and my issues. I grew up very fast and took on major responsibilities. I know myself and I'm safe within myself. Why everyone keeps standing around me with a hammer ready to break down my so-called walls, I have no clue. If I'm delusional and I stay delusional for the rest of my life, how is that a problem? Maybe delusion is my normal state.

"So, you guys decide, do you want to do this session together or individually?" Mel asks.

"Together", we both say.

"Are you sure? Decide now, because once you choose to sit in together, under no circumstances can you leave no matter how uncomfortable it gets".

We nod. We got this! Me and Elik, we terrible but we terrible together.

“Good. I prefer you sit in together anyway so you get to hear each other’s thoughts”.

“Alright then. I’ll start with you Fierce. Just focus on me and forget Elik is here. Can you do that?”

“We had our fair share of laughter earlier, can we be a little serious now?”

I nod. I was serious earlier, I don’t know about her. That was my serious state! But it’s fine if she wants to do things in an uptight manner, who am I to say no. Her job, her rules!

“Let’s wrap up the last session before we move on. Tell me, are you ok with Elik’s behaviour?”

“Of course not! He needs to slow down after marriage otherwise we’ll have a problem!”

“Slow down and not stop?” she looks over her glasses.

“Ya well umm, that”. *What was the question again?*

“Focus Fierce!” she snaps at me and I get myself together.

“How did you feel when you found out Elik didn’t father that woman’s baby?”

We back at this again?

“I felt relieved that the baby wasn’t his. I’m already raising his ex-wife’s kids and I didn’t want a new baby. I kinda lost three of my own you know so I’m quite touchy feely about newborns”.

“What do you mean you lost three of yours?”

“They died. Not died died because they were never born in the first place, but died”.

Elik puts his hand over my shoulder and pulls me closer to him.

“You had three miscarriages? Tell me about them. What happened?”

Isn’t she just nosey! Ok I get it it’s her job!

“No, I had two. First, I had twins. I was pregnant with Elik’s twins and I didn’t even know. Then I was raped by ex and Elik didn’t want me then and I felt so alone. I then drank too much and took too many pain pills and I overdosed and killed my babies in the process”, I swallow the lump building in my throat.

“The second one just died. He had been dead in my stomach for a week and I didn’t know. Then he just came out one day, dead”.

Where are these tears coming from now!

She makes me talk about it and keeps probing and digging and Elik keeps encouraging me to talk. We even delve into the car accident and the girls that showed up at my house party. I wasn't mad at those girls. They had positive reviews about Elik. If your man cheats he has to do it right and represent out there, so that the girls can respect you! Otherwise if he cheats with his weak, one minute sex game and you've been with him for years, what will people say about you? I realise just how much I hate therapy. Why force me to dig up graves? There's a reason why whatever is in those graves was buried so deep under!

"You realise everything about you returns to Elik? He's your anchor and without him you will fall flat on your face?" Mel says after listening to me go on and on.

"That's not true!" I object.

"Take a minute and think about it. Close your eyes and think. Think about the three things you love the most and see if they won't return to Elik".

I know it's not true so I fold my arms with attitude and think. I realise '*shit, she's almost right!*' Let's see. The twins are my boys, but that's because they are Elik and everything Elik I cling on to! Kofi and Lumka are my only friends and again they are Elik! Well, I love my PhD, it's all mine! There, let her eat that! I'm determined to prove her wrong. So I give her a whole list. The people in my circle, fine that's Elik. The houses, the cars, the shoes that's not Elik it's from Elik! Big deal.

"Don't you think you too dependent on him?"

"No I don't! I'm dependent on him enough. We are in a relationship! We are dependent on each other. Isn't that what relationships are about?"

I know she's also on that '*if he was broke you'd have left him*' tip. Bullshit! Isn't women always say they want a man that can provide! But when you get a man that can provide they call you dependent and all sorts. Why is Mel wanting me to feel bad for having a provider?

Women! The biggest hypocrites of all! If a woman's man buys her a phone or lunch or flowers we all say, '*Wow. He really loves you friend!*' but when Elik buys me a car or a house or a company, it's '*He owns you. Leave him!*' How? Us women are all miners. Some of us just happen to be digging for gold while others dig for coal. At the end of the day both are minerals and we are both mining! Somehow, we back at the miscarriages and she probes and probes! She listens to me as I talk.

“When I lost Junior, I was terrified I would lose Elik. I couldn’t give him a child and I knew he wanted a child with me. When I failed, I couldn’t bear it. So yes, the pain was mostly because I thought I was going to lose Elik”.

This woman is a witch! She has me saying things. It’s like she’s controlling my brain and I don’t like it at all. She makes me talk about that miscarriage and the days that followed and Elik putting me out. She wants to know exactly how I felt.

I’m a wreck when she’s done with her line of questioning. She leaves us alone for a bit and says she’s going to get me a towel to dry my face. Am I crying that much I need a whole towel? Tissue won’t work? Elik just makes me stand and holds me in his arms.

“Cry baby... Let it all out... You are the strongest woman I know Fierce and I love you for it... We will be fine my baby, we will make it, you’ll be my wife and you will make me a fine wife... I love you... I’ll do better I promise... I’ll try harder to treat you like the princess you are... I love you... I’m sorry about our babies. You have no idea how the losses tore at me...I love you”.

When Mel returns, I’m better. I’m mad at myself for opening up. I’ve been happy and this woman is taking that away from me! My mantra is *‘Conceal, Don’t Feel!’* See what happens when you feel? You hurt and hurt means pain. I don’t like pain! I’m just quiet now and I’m in no talking mood. She says it’s fine, she’ll talk to Elik.

Now she goes all out of Elik and digs and digs into his childhood. I don’t know why she doesn’t point out that he’s too dependent on me since all his answers lead back to me! He doesn’t have a mother and he points out I was there with him and for him. The truth about his real mother, he got it from me and I got it from Kofi’s mother. His arrest, he points out how I laughed at him about it and never once made him feel like a criminal. He’s dependent on me! Or is it only pointed out when the woman is the one who’s the dependent? We need equal rights! I’m curious to know what Mel keeps writing in her notebook! Elik keeps talking about his past, his family or lack of, his rough life running the streets of Accra, his time in juvenile, how he started whoring, how it became an addiction and so on and so on. They spend some time there. Mel basically says he has extreme childhood trauma, abandonment issues, attention issues, detachment issues and chronic sexual addiction. Not in those words but that’s what she means.

Elik just looks at her and I'm glad he doesn't say anything. I know everything, if I didn't I would have left him right here, right now. Issa lot and shit is heavy and deep!

They move on to talking about the ex-wife and their marriage. He tells Mel about Komla and how he knows it was wrong to divorce her via WhatsApp. He acknowledges that he might have been a little unfair to her but he says.

"I take care of mines. I take care of Fierce, Kofi, my boys and Lumka. That's my family. Komla didn't make the cut so yah it is what it is".

He then lights up when he talks about how he met me and as he always tells everyone, he talks about how I was a virgin and how for once he found a girl loyal to the core and wasn't after his money. Isn't it funny how the owner of the money always points out that I'm not after his money while everyone else says I am? I always find it ironic. He keeps saying he loves me and can never make it through life without me. He says I've made him a better man and I'm his strength. He even acknowledges that he's not a great father to the kids and is always absent. He loves them though and he has to work, to be fair. He looks at me when he tells her how he just dumped those kids on me. I'll never forget that day! Sitting on a plane with two kids and I had no effing clue what I would do with them!

It's interesting to listen to him talk. It's liberating and reassuring.

"Why do you love Fierce?" Mel asks.

"I love her because she knows the real me, the me no one can ever possibly love, but she loves me anyway. I love her because she's loyal, she's always there for me, she makes me happy in every way, she's gorgeous, she has a big heart. I love her because she's open with me and she gets me. I tell you this girl has loved me when she shouldn't have. When no one else did. I love her because when she forgives, she forgives and I love the way her eyes sparkle when she smiles. I love her because of the man I have become since I've been with her. I could go on all day".

Ncooooooow!

"I love her not just for the way she dances with my angels but for the way the sound of her voice saying my name can silence my demons".

When did he become so good with words?

"If you love her so much, why do you keep hurting her? Is she not enough for you?" Mel asks. He looks at me for like four seconds then back at Mel.

“You mean why do I keep fucking bitches on the side?”

Mel nods. I guess she has fast made peace with our raw language.

“You need to understand something. Whatever happens on the side has absolutely nothing to do with Fierce. She’s amazing and I’m more than satisfied with her. The rest are just my inner demons”.

She writes something down then looks at him.

“The only fulfilling sex I get is with my girl. I get to love my baby girl and kiss her and make her come all over me and hear her scream my name and just hold her body close to mine. I get to get really intimate with her and do things to her I would never do to a bitch out there”.

TMI Elik TMI!

“I see. So if the love making with her is that fulfilling what is it like with other girls?”

I’m not sure I want to hear this!

“With other girls, I don’t know how to explain it. I want to say it just happens but I suppose that’s not good enough. I get to a dark space, one I’ve been trying to get out of for a very long time and I just drink too much and find myself doing it. It’s never to hurt my baby, trust me. I’m working on it and she’s helped me through it whether she knows it or not. She’s given me a purpose and I’m slowing down. Soon I’ll come to a standstill and I’ll be the man she deserves”.

“How do you feel every time you get with a different woman? How would you explain your umm addiction?” Mel asks.

He makes a face at the *‘addiction’* but doesn’t comment on it.

“I would say it’s like being on cocaine and living with a drug dealer. You want to quit but the dealer is right there. You can see the pain you are causing the ones you love but again, the dealer is right there and your cravings are right there. I guess what I’m saying is, women are everywhere and it’s not hard to get with one so the *‘addiction’* just goes on and on”.

“Go on. How do you feel with a new girl?” Mel says.

“How can I put it? I get a high from getting with a new someone, but as soon as it’s done, I hit a low. I feel guilty and angry and I just feel like a failure. But I do it again next time anyway. It’s like I can’t help it”.

“Go on”, Mel says.

“See, the goal is the high. It’s always about the high. Orgasms and all that shit are never the goal, it’s always about: How many more times can I make her cum and hear her tell me I’m the best she ever had”.

“So it gives you validation!” Mel says and writes in her book.

I’m holding my hands together wondering if I should sit in this session. But Mel keeps urging him on and making him talk some more and face his demon. Besides, we were told we can’t leave no matter how uncomfortable it got.

I take his hand in mine and tell him, “It’s ok”.

We are in a safe space and we came here to talk. So let’s.

“You know Elik, none of this is your fault. You are lucky you have a woman that loves you and is willing to stand by you. Most women would have left on day one. None of this is your fault so don’t be too hard on yourself. From your childhood, that lack of love had you subconsciously seeking love and recognition. Your body lies to you sometimes and tells you that you can’t feel happiness unless you get a physical sensation”.

Doesn’t it always return to childhood issues with therapists?

“You use sex to thrive. In the space between arousal and orgasm, you find peace and you yearn to prolong it so you can stay in that happy place, so you can escape your mind. At that moment, you want to be outside yourself, instead you become your own prison”.

She then turns to me.

“And Fierce, he isn’t lying when he says he loves you despite all that. He isn’t lying when he says he only makes love with you and meaninglessly beds other women. It’s very possible”.

“I know”.

I tighten my hand around Elik’s.

“Let him go so he can focus only on me”, Mel says.

Awa! Cool! I’ll let my man’s hand go, it’s fine!

“The very first time you slept with someone else, after you were committed to Fierce, how did you feel?”

“Ummm. Shit. Let’s see... She was home and we’d had a small fight over something silly and I remember I used that to justify myself. I used that as fuel to get with someone else. But afterwards, I don’t think I’ve ever felt despair like that in my entire life. I remember driving home screaming, because I knew that I had just destroyed my relationship with the one girl I’d ever loved. I thought to myself, *‘no way in hell will she stick around with a guy who’s done this!’* So there in that car that night, I told myself, ‘I have to bury this so deep and so far away that no one ever finds it’, he says.

“Did you manage to bury it that night?”

“No”, he looks down.

“What happened?” she probes.

“I got home and Fierce was waiting up. She said I had lipstick on my shirt and she just broke down. She was crying and asking me to tell her the truth. So watching the girl I loved like that hurt me and so I told her the truth”.

I remember that night and gods I cried so hard I woke up without a voice. I would prefer to forget it though. I knew he was a wanderer but I’d thought after we got exclusive, we would be just that, exclusive. But boy was I delusional. Again, I hate therapy!

“What did she do after you told her?”

“She kept crying and locked herself in the bedroom. I could hear her crying as I sat outside the door. I felt bad and wished I could undo everything. It took sometime but she forgave me. She didn’t leave me”.

Clearly! I’m right here, ain’t I? They talk forever about this sex thing and I’m just sitting here seeing a side of Elik I didn’t know. We’ve spoken about this before but not to this depth. I’m glad I never left him. He really needed me and never meant to hurt me. He hurt himself more each time he hurt me. I get a deeper understanding and I’m hopeful that there’s hope after all. Just hoping against hope. Today, he’s wearing his heart on his sleeve and I like.

“What is Fierce to you?” Mel asks.

Elik looks at me and quickly away. His eyes are glassy and he won’t cry in front of a stranger. He’ll only cry with me.

“She’s my strength. She brings me humanity when I feel like a piece of trash. She’s everything to me”.

“If she slept with another man what would you do?” Mel asks.

“I’d kill the guy”.

“Why?”

“Because she’s all mine and I don’t share”.

“If she left you, what would you do?”

“I don’t know what I would do. I just know I wouldn’t make it”.

“Why?” Mel asks.

“Because I need her and I love her more than life itself. Yes, I’ve hurt her but I’ve never stopped loving her. If anything, hurting her and the way she forgives me leaves me in awe and just makes me fall in love with her all over again. It makes me just wanna give her everything she wants to show

how thankful I am that she's mine".

"You are addicted to her!"

"Yes I am and I won't apologise for that!" Elik says. Mel makes a note.

"Do you ever think Fierce is with you for your money?"

"Do you think she's with me for my money?" he laughs a little.

"Maybe. She was generous enough to share all the things you've blessed her with".

"Let me tell you something Melissa. I've heard this so many times! What do you people want? You want me to be broke and then when she stays with me, only then will her love for me be worthy? I don't get you people! Balance me here, should my girl take two trains, barefoot and hungry to get to a Mall, when I get afford to buy her whatever car she wants? Should she stay on the streets so y'all can be happy, when I can buy her a house? What must she do? Throw away my bank cards so she can be broke? Must I stop working? What should she do?"

"I was just asking", Mel says.

"Ya that's it. The asking that pisses me off! Don't we all live within our means? Everyone has their money and it's their choice how they spend it! I'll spend mine on my girl whichever way I want. Anyone with a problem with it can go suck a dick!"

I hold his hand to calm him down. My heart is smiling.

"I need to breathe. Can I leave?" he says.

"Sure. We can call it a day. Thank you. You guys did very well today".

She won't ask silly questions next time I'm sure.

"Baby, can I have some time alone. Please?" he says.

"Ok baby. I'll be in the room. Love you".

He squeezes my hand and leaves. Three hours later we have our boat cruise and eat seafood and meat and drink. Elik is pretty quiet today and I let him be. That session he had was too intense. Mel really got him talking! We're back to breaking all the rules but whatever. We are on vacation here! Ain't nobody got time to eat leaves and grass!

Twenty-One

The next day is back to traumatising poor Mel. Elik said he wasn't coming for yoga this morning so I said that's alright, I'll do enough for the both of us. Mel and I do 90 minutes of Bikram by the beach. Today I practise well. I maintain every pose, I even get into the toe stand effortlessly! Then it's back to that depressing breakfast and then back to talking. Mel makes us talk about our mothers. She thinks I should forgive my mother and make peace. She says I must do it for myself because as long as I harbour the emotions, I'll always have negative energy around me. Then somehow we're back at cheating! And we're back at talking about Mbali! Like why should we always talk about this girl though! She's so annoying! To avoid facing reality my mind does what it knows best. It laughs at the situation.

"But Mbali though boo? You need to up your standards".

I still think he can do better than Mbali! He should stop selling himself short! Doesn't he have a mirror? He laughs and to show how sick we are exactly, we go through some girls he's had bedroom relations with in the past and I rate them out of 10 based on appearance. He just keeps saying, "I was drunk".

I can't stop laughing when he gives some girl called Minky a 2! I kid you not, he says he would give her a 2, 1 for being alive and 1 for making it to the hotel. He says the rest was zero. Even a corpse surely can do better than a 2! I'm laughing so hard, I'm almost falling off my chair. I can't believe I'm out here laughing at stories my future husband is telling me about girls he slept with while I was home waiting for him. It's so funny though. It's in the past so we can laugh about it now. A 2! Elik is too savage! Mel is looking at us wide eyed, not understanding how I can be laughing at my fiancé's sexcapades. She brings us back to attention and we apologise for derailing. She says this session is all about me. I don't like the sound of that but ok let's do it. She asks me silly questions and I answer honestly. Then we're back to cheating oh lawd! It's like that's all we can talk about. If we've run out of problems to discuss maybe we can discuss more serious things like the cash flow problem in Zimbabwe or the wars in the middle east or the increase in VAT!

"The first time Elik cheated on you, did it hurt?" Mel asks.

“Yes”, I try to be serious.

“How much?”

“A lot”.

“And the second and third?”

“It hurt”.

“By the 10th time how did you feel?”

“I had accepted it and so it didn’t hurt much. I made peace with it”.

“You see the trend there! Your pain became less and less until you became numb. You did what you had to. You protected your heart. You knew it wouldn’t stop and you knew you wouldn’t stop loving him, so you stopped feeling instead”.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing!” Defences on 65% and going up.

“It’s not a bad thing entirely. But you keep storing your pain away in a suitcase somewhere. What will happen when the suitcase gets too full and can’t close anymore?”

“I don’t know. Buy another suitcase?” I respond carelessly.

She smiles sweetly at me.

“So tell me the truth Fierce. Look into my eyes and tell me the honest truth. Would you ever leave Elik for cheating?”

“No, I would never”, I look her in the eye. What? I would never! And why are we talking about Elik like he’s not here? I wonder how he’s feeling.

“You know I love you Fierce. You have this energy I’ve never experienced before. I love how you love Elik. It’s so pure! You don’t hold back, you’re quick to defend him at the slightest hint of attack and you just glow when you talk about him. It’s beautiful”. I look down and blush.

“I have no doubt you love him. Even when you talk about how he’s hurt you, you don’t speak from a place of anger or hate. You speak from a place of love. You protect him and that’s priceless. That kind of love is priceless. But if it’s to stay that way, we need to patch you up missy”.

“Patch me up? There’s nothing wrong with me. I’ve told you all there is to tell”.

She looks at me with eyes pitying me and I don’t think I like it.

“Oh Fierce! You’re so lost deep within yourself no one can reach you, not even yourself. I can see what happened to you. Elik is your everything. He is your entire life and without him you can’t function. You won’t function. You fell in love with him completely so when he started hurting you, you started protecting yourself. The first time he hurt you, you said

you cried for days on end. But you had given him the most intimate part of you, your soul. So you took him back and laid the foundation around your heart. As he continued to hurt you, you became a builder. With each pain, you put up a brick until the whole portion of your heart that's capable of hurting was caged away. Then all you knew was happiness. So yes, I believe you when you say it doesn't bother you. Nothing can bother you because the section of your brain capable of perceiving negative emotions is closed off".

A tear rolls out of my eye and down my cheeks. I let it. Could that be true?

"It's alright. It's not your fault. Everyone around you hurt you. Your mother destroyed you, your father didn't stand up for you, your brothers abandoned you, your sister passed on and left you, your pregnancies failed, your ex raped you. Everyone hurt you. You never made friends because you were scared they would hurt you too. So all you had was Elik. As much as he hurt you at least he merged his body with yours and gave you that solace. He showed you love and protected you and was there for you and kept you together each time you were falling apart. He loved you and love is all you ever needed. He became the voice that guides you and every time something threatens to take that voice away from you, you fight. You can't lose that voice because without it you fear you'll have no direction. So when Elik hurts you, you open a small hole in that wall you built and you stash away the pain and forgive him. Because what else can you do? You can't lose that love. It's all you have".

Wow! I wish I could see into Elik's mind right now.

"I'm happy! Why are you salty people trying to bring me down to your level? Why can't I be allowed happiness?" I snap.

Like why is everyone on my case! I'm happy and that makes me happy! I'm fine! If they are sad and that makes them happy! Then their cup of coffee not mine! I choose happiness.

"I know you think you're fine and you're happy. But you're just on an all time high. The day you will come crashing down, you will hurt Elik and yourself in unimaginable ways. So as much as you are safe in your happy space, I want to draw you out of that cocoon. I want to draw out the pain before it seeps out one day and you self-destruct. You say you are strong, so be strong! Be fierce Fierce! Let those walls fall down and come to the battlefield to face your demons head on".

“Trust me Mel, I’ve fought that battle before and I lost the war dismally. See, my demons are not like everyone else’s. They don’t play. Mine fight from within and they fight with fire and Sulphur! I’m not armoured enough to exorcise them back to hell! So please I’m begging you, let them sleep”.

She writes something in her notebook. I speak in riddles when I don't want to face my issues.

“Melissa. I know I have underlying issues. I know that. At first I used to fight them then I went to dealing with them then one day I realised silencing them was best!”

“You can’t ignore anguish Fierce. It will eat at you from the inside!”

“There’s no guarantee that that will happen! I’m happy. What’s wrong with that?”

“Because you are in denial! You are a ticking time bomb and the day you explode you’ll leave dead bodies in your trail”, she sounds desperate.

“Fine! What will you have me do? I’ve told you everything! What else do you want me to do?” I snap.

What does this woman want from me though! Can she stop trying to save me! She keeps talking about bringing down my walls. Can she just stop being Joshua and blowing her trumpet around me! Can she leave my walls of Jericho to stand! Please.

“We need to tap into your subconscious because your conscious self is a fort. It’s too well protected and no one can get through”.

All I’m hearing is I’m a lost cause! St. Jude, pray for me.

“Are you open to hypnosis?”

Hypnosis? As in hypnotherapy? I’m not sure I’m ready to grant someone that much power over me. I look at Elik. My eyes are filling with tears. I feel like I have no idea who I am. I’m happy and how can that be wrong? Many people spend their entire lives chasing happiness and never even find it. I have it.

“Elik will be by your side the whole time so you’ll be safe. I know you feel safe around him”.

“I’m scared baby”, I say to Elik.

“Do it baby. Do this for yourself”, he says.

I take a deep breath, wipe my tears, then nod. Whatever, let’s do it!

Mel says she will guide me into a subconscious, hypnotic trance state using her voice, incense and a relaxant. It sounds like some voodoo type ritual! I don’t think it will work anyways. She leads us to another room that

looks like a spa room. She helps me get comfortable on the bed and she says I must take off my bra under the top and undo the buttons of my shorts so nothing constricts my blood flow. Weird, but I do as told. I think Elik is unsure about this but he isn't saying anything. She says she'll help me be relaxed in my body yet still alert in my mind as I enter that state of mind of increased suggestibility and reception. Alright. I'm curious how this will work really. I'll probably fall sleep midway.

"You see Fierce, the mind is a very powerful tool and I can tell you trust yours a lot. Maybe that's why you've managed to manipulate it as much as you have. You've taught your brain to filter certain experiences out of your normal memory. So it's out of mind, out of existence for you. We need to reach those repressed memories and thoughts of yours".

"Why? Why not let sleeping dogs lie?"

Why save a normal person? I don't get it. Why is she wasting her breath trying to save me. Save me from what exactly?

"Those memories you keep repressing sit deep inside your mind and like it or not, they will affect your everyday life. And then one day, you'll reach your breaking point and all hell will break loose".

Ain't we just cursing me today!

"I need to reach behind that door you shut all your pain in. We need to open it. You need to keep your mind open and do as I tell you".

I nod.

"You practice yoga so use that skill now. Take control of your mind and quieten any voices except mine. Listen to your breathing and to my voice".
Namaste. The light in me truly recognises the light in her.

"Your conscious mind will be suppressed but your subconscious mind will be revealed. You will be safe the whole time so don't worry".

"Will it hurt?" I look at her.

"Yes. You've suppressed too many emotions so when the floodgates open, you will get hurt, not physically though".

"Will I heal?"

"If you cooperate, we will get you there. The first step is revealing the pain. Then we can deal with it".

"Ok".

"Drink this", she gives me a vial.

The drink is bitterish. I just drink and I don't even know what it is. I hope it's not truth serum! Is that thing even legal? No need for that now.

I need to shut up my consciousness so my subconsciousness can come out and play. I lie back and close my eyes. I feel drowsy. I can't feel myself. Like that feeling when you get an anaesthetic at the dentist and you can't really feel the side of your mouth but you know it's there. That's me. I can't really feel myself but I'm aware that I'm here.

"Hold her hand so she knows she's safe", Mel says to Elik.

He sits by my bedside and holds my hand and brushes back a strand of hair from my face.

"I'll be right here the whole time baby girl".

As she soothes me, I feel my breathing grow slower and deeper, a little dryness forms in my mouth and throat, and my closed eyelids keep fluttering. I don't even think I have a pulse now. It's like I'm asleep but wide awake, you know. She starts talking to me and I feel like I'm dreaming. She guides me deeper and deeper into the land of pain and anguish. I feel like I'm walking on burning coals in the pits of hell. I relive everything. The pain is flowing out. I try to shut it down but I already exposed myself too much. I'm not in control. I can feel the repetitive stabs at my heart. It hurts so bad, it's physical.

"Breathe Fierce... that's it... now breathe out... yes... breathe... now relax", Mel's voice says.

The pain is better now. I can feel it but not really. It's like a pain from a long time ago. A scar that never really healed. The cheating actually hurt. My mother. Replace's death. My accident. Komla. Mbali. My miscarriages. The rape. Athi. The abuse. Butho. My failed lobola. The gates are wide open and I keep talking. I don't leave anything out. Elik. The deepest stab into my heart comes when his face flashes through my mind. The day he married Komla. The first time he cheated. The second. The third. The fourth. I remember exactly how I felt. All the feelings I neatly shelved away over the years come flying at me and I feel them all. I want it to stop now. It's enough. I'm screaming. I think I'm going mad. I want it to stop. I don't want to feel this pain. I want it to stop. But Mel's gentle voice just won't shut up. She presses on and makes me say everything. I'm aware of what I'm saying but the words are just flying out of my mouth. I can't control them.

"Think about Elik. Think out loud", her guiding voice says.

If I was conscious I would laugh at this. I'm speaking my thoughts. I'm just talking and the sentence construction doesn't really exist. I'm speaking

thoughts as they are. All interwoven and disorganised. I'm sure Elik is looking at my lips waiting eagerly to hear what exactly I think of him. Elik. I love him. I adore him. He's perfect. Black. Tall. And that D! Damn. But he hurt me. Mbali. He hurt me because he was hurt. Excuses for him? No. Facts. I understand why. I understand him. We are one and the same. Why am I being punished for understanding? Broken people break people. I love him. I'm more broken than him. We are broken together. Everytime he hurt me, he took away something from me and by the 50th time, I had nothing left to give. I was just an empty shell. He's my world. My galaxy. His dick game though. Why am I thinking about sex all the time? Because he loves it and I love him and we love it. I've become more like him. I turn to sex because it works for the one person I look up to so why wouldn't it work for me? No that's not true. I love sex because I love sex. But I love him so I only reserve the sex for him. Why can't he do the same?

Why is Mel making me do this to myself though? I sound crazy. I'm talking to myself here. And Elik is right here as I go on confessing how strong his D-game is. She says I must imagine I'm looking at myself in the mirror and keep my thoughts coming. I wish I could break off a piece of that mirror and cut my wrists and bleed to death. I forgot how to feel pain and now that it's here I don't know how to contain it.

"Breathe Fierce", she says when my breathing gets too heavy. I want to stop thinking. I want to die. She calms me down and guides my mind back from that mirror. Then she makes me breathe and breathe and breathe.

"Now imagine you are standing in front of Elik. No walls. No filter. Just a safe place where no judgement can be passed. What do you say to him?... No no keep your eyes closed".

I take a deep breath and relax. I let my mind wander off. I'm stepping into my Newlands home and there's Elik standing leaning against the counter.

"What do you see?"

"Elik".

"What does he look like?"

"He's dressed in a black Tee and black jeans. He looks good. Very good", I smile to myself.

"Good. Now take his hands, look him in the eye and talk to him".

I do that. This is crazy.

"Elikplim. Please be ok. That's all I ever want. For you to be ok. I want

us to be ok. I love you, you know that. Please open up to me completely baby. Please love only me, please. I know I always say your cheating doesn't hurt, but the truth is it hurts so hard I don't even feel the pain. It's like my heart's nerve endings have died. I don't feel the pain even when it's excruciating. Please stop my love. You're killing me. I want to live. To live with you but you keep killing me. Please stop".

I feel tears runs down the side of my face.

"I can't watch this anymore". Elik's voice disturbs my concentration and I lose him. He crumbles to dust in my imagination, like a dying god. My mind is back in the room.

"You can't leave her. Without your hand in hers she will panic and shut down all over again. She needs you. She feels safe with you", Mel says.

"Is she in pain?"

"Yes. She hasn't felt pain in a while and this is good. She needs this. She needs to get out of that happy shell and be alive again. We can't stop now and risk her doors shutting all over again. We're getting through to her".

"If anything happens to her I swear", Elik's voice says.

"Shhh!" Mel shushes him.

I can hear them but it's like I'm stuck in my own body and can't do anything unless Mel gives me the instruction to. It's like I'm floating on a cloud somewhere in the skies. Drifting away.

"I need to protect my kingdom. I need to protect Elik. I need to keep the crown on his head. His family is waiting for him to fail and I won't let them have that satisfaction", I whisper.

I just remembered I can't lose Elik.

"Interesting", Mel's voice returns to me.

"In this kingdom, who's on the throne?" her voice asks.

"Elik. He's king".

"And what are you? A queen or a servant? A concubine or a peasant?"

"I'm the queen. There are concubines but I'm queen".

"Is that why you need a child with Elik? You need an heir to secure your place in the royal kingdom?"

"Yes".

I also didn't know that's why I wanted a child. I didn't even know I still wanted a child. I was willing to just do it for Elik. I get lost in my thoughts again and wander off. I scream out as Replace's face flashes through my eyes, then my mother's, then Athi. Can they make this stop please! I've had

enough.

“Fierce. Take a walk into your future. Five years from now, what do you see?”

I let my mind time travel.

“I see Elik coming home with two sets of twins. Peter and Paul and another pair that looks like me. I think they are my children. I got home early from the lab and I cooked. We have dinner and everything is perfect”.

“Good”.

“Now imagine it wasn’t all rosy. Picture the worst. What do you see?”.

I stay quiet searching my mind and focusing on my breathing.

“I’m standing outside our bedroom door and I’m hearing sex sounds”.

“Open the door”.

“No I can’t”.

“Do it!”

“She’s in pain, please stop”, Elik’s voice says.

“Please shut up”, Mel says to him.

“Open that door Fierce. Now!” she says.

I open the door and walk in and I scream. I told her I can’t.

“What do you see?” she asks.

“Elik in bed with someone else”.

“React”, she commands me.

“It hurts”. I can’t watch!

“What are you going to do?”

“Run away. I’m running away”.

“Where are you running to? Besides Elik, where is your other safe space? Go there!”

“Lumka... I need to get to Lumka”.

“What will you do when you get there?” she guides me on.

I wriggle in the bed. I’m aware and I can’t answer that. My mind knows Elik is here. I can’t speak up and say I’ll run to his best friend and throw myself at him and hope he actually sleeps with me this time.

“Speak Fierce. What do you do when you get to Lumka’s house?” she insists.

I want to snap back to consciousness and tell her it’s Lumka not Loom-car!

“I, I, we...Elik help me”.

It’s taking all the strength in my soul not to tell the truth. A second

longer and everything will come crumbling down. My secret with Lumka will be out.

“Ok that’s it! We’re done here! Bring her up”, Elik says.

“But...”, Mel says.

“I said it’s enough! Bring her up NOW!”

Mel sighs and takes my hands and guides me back from my subconsciousness to reality with her soothing voice. I sit up. I’m exhausted and terrified. It feels like I’ve been running a hundred miles. I thought hypnosis was about being calm! What the hell did this woman do to me? It feels good to have my brain back, except now it knows. I get off the bed and throw myself into Elik’s arms and cry.

“You hurt me”, I keep saying.

“I’m sorry”, he keeps saying.

“Fierce, tell Elik about yourself in third person. Pretend you’re talking about someone else”, Mel says.

So this woman won’t even let me finish crying at least? And the session is still going on? Is she being serious right now. But that truth serum she gave me hasn’t left my system so I obey. With a broken voice, a runny nose and a wet face I look up at my dark prince and he looks down at me. I smile at him a little and I want to say something funny but I promised Mel I’ll be serious. Besides, the pain won’t let me smile all the way.

“Elik, I know you think Fierce is strong but she’s not as strong as she will have you believe. And love you as she may, if you look deeper into her eyes, you can see tears dancing in the background, screaming to be let out. If you listen carefully, you will hear her soul whispering, begging you to stop woman hopping, asking for mercy. And if you held her a little bit closer, you will hear the arrhythmic beating of her heart, torn and broken, crumbling under the weight of a pain and betrayal only she knows. But when she walks, she smiles sweetly like the world is hers. It’s the only way she can keep the tears back, soothe her soul and encourage her heart to continue beating. It’s the only way she can continue loving you because that’s one thing she never wants to stop doing”.

Oh man, I hate this new me. Can I have old me back? What did Mel do to me? Why am I suddenly so deep and so serious! I have no problem with being shallow.

“That went great. Well done Fierce!” Mel claps hands for me. For her! It went great for her!

“Come give me a hug. We made a major breakthrough”.

I give her the hug and I think I actually like her.

Session over.

Elik and I walk down to the beach hand in hand. We're not talking. I feel much better as we sit with my head resting on his shoulder and his arms protectively wrapped around me. Our healing might just be right here in Mozambique. I think we will make it after all. In Elik my soul found its mate and my heart found its playmate. He's my home and I'm safe with him and I'm never leaving my home.

“It's only you in my heart Fierce. I know I'm not perfect but you make me a better man. I love you more than life itself”.

How can I not love him though? “You're my life Elik. You're the best decision I've ever made. I most certainly couldn't have done better”, I snuggle closer to him.

“I love you”, he says.

“I love you more”.

“I love you most”, he says.

I giggle a little. What comes after most? Because I love him that.

I don't wanna see doves cry but more than that, I never wanna see Elik cry. So I do what I always do, protect him. But he's so stubborn, he rejects my protection! I told him he doesn't need to sit in my hypnosis sessions anymore. This is my pain and he doesn't have to share it. But he's so strong headed and he wasn't joking when he said, “I'll sit right there with you, in all of them. End of discussion”.

I just want to protect his heart. Why won't he let me? The hypnotherapy is a ball of anguish. It unleashes emotions I can't contain. And yes, it's working in its own way. It's helping me grow into myself. It's like I'm moving back into a clean home after selling all the old furniture and throwing out the clutter. The hypnosis is doing all but make me hate Elik. That's impossible I think. After reliving everything he put me through, I put him through, we went through, I don't hate him. If anything, I love him more. I'm unbalanced I suppose, maybe that's why I still have him lying by my side right now with his hand on my stomach, where it lies every night after a steamy session.

He's strong. He has to be. On the outside at least. Inside, sometimes I think I'm the only one who knows what goes on. And Mel now of course. He gave her a glimpse and on the first day it was like she had seen the face

of satan. I wonder if she will ever be the same again! They do say you are never the same again once you see the true face of Lucifer! I'm willing to pay for her therapy sessions! I've seen the true face of Jucipher but I'm a special breed and my demons have no problem dining with the devil. In that other side, such is an honour. But Elik is strong. What option does he have when he decided to be in love with a girl that cries at the slightest hint of pain? But deep down I can feel his pain, the pain he feels for bringing me pain and the pain he feels because of the pain I caused him when I reacted to the pain he brought me. I feel all of it, coursing through my veins like it belongs! We're both hurting. We're both going to be hurting for a very long time. And we, probably more than anyone else out in the world, will be searching for a new happiness every day. Therapy is just our beginning. But I know that whatever happens we will be just fine.

I hate thoughts at night. They are deep and dark and intense and they just won't let you sleep! Thoughts of the last session have me staying awake. I feel like something is still broken inside me and it's begging to be fixed. That's the only reason I agreed to another session. To fix whatever is broken. I'm getting healing alright but at what cost? The price I'm paying is too high of a cost. Me and pain just don't go. We are oil and water, me being oil, just floating over the pain like it's marshmallow clouds beneath my feet. But that broken thing inside me is asking to be fixed and since I'm such a great person, I'll endure the torture and fix it. As Mel made me confront my fears, I wanted to die. As the fragments of my imagination pieced together to remind me of multiple realities I'd buried six feet under, I just wanted to die. Yes, between pain and death, I'd choose death any day. Maybe mainly because I now believe in reincarnation and so death will just be a short break from life before I return as a pretty white dog with medical aid in Sandton.

Yesterday was the worst! Misery broke inside me. What Mel didn't tell me was that the pain would be released and it would linger! That it would burst open and erupt like a volcano and leave me bleeding internally. That it wouldn't end when she clapped her hands and said "Now wake up Fierce". Had she told me, I'd have never agreed to it in the first place. Pain and me are sworn enemies. I'm all for happiness and smiles. I'm all for rainbows and unicorns, waterfalls and morning rain. I always loved sparkly things and in my ideal state, I feel sunshine sparkle pink and blue on my skin all day long.

All the bodies buried in my heart keep flashing in my mind and I keep wincing to shut down the horror. I buried Replace and her unborn child at the base of my heart. I dug three more tiny graves on top of theirs and buried my three unborn mini mes. Pieces of me are buried in each grave, because everytime I lost someone a part of me cleaved off and died too. Then the freshest grave of all lies at the top of my heart. My mother's. The only grave I still have the power to excavate and exhume the body inside. They keep saying I need to forgive her but do I really have to? What exactly am I forgiving her for? She decided I was dead to her so why must I resurrect myself at the snap of her finger? I have many other open graves waiting for dead bodies to move in. One being my father's. I often wonder if I should push him in the open pit and bury him too!

Why am I doing all this to myself? All this is bringing me pain and sadness. I want none of it. I want to be happy! Is that too much to ask? I see what they (Mel and her like minded people) are doing! They think I'm not normal and I need saving and I'm weird and my theories about life don't make sense! That's not the problem, the problem is why the heck am I letting them? If I'm fine and feel fine, why am I letting them make me unfine just so I can conform? I've been embarrassing myself since about birth and I always laughed at myself. Why should that change now? Like that time I was caught naked grinding on Elik in the VIP lounge in a club. That was embarrassing but how did I handle it? I said "shit" but I got up, found my dress, turned it right side out and put it on with those four guys standing there! Bloody perverts! Thankfully, club lights are very dim. And yes it was wrong but I learnt a lot from that mistake. For one, I learnt no matter how good it gets don't take off the whole dress! But as always, we solve our problems. On that day we paid the bouncer and we left the club. Then 10 minutes later we were sitting in the car laughing our lungs out at the embarrassment! Weird, awkward, crazy, gross... to everyone else. To me... normal. I choose to be myself.

Now I know my thoughts will forgive me and let me get some sleep. I have a smile on my face and it's like that huge block of concrete that was crashing down on my heart has been lifted. I've decided to stay true to myself. So I'm not the ordinary girl and I'm probably going to be used as an example to little girls on what not to grow up to be. But I'll own it. I dare to differ and to walk with my difference with my head held up high. It's the least I can do for myself. That means stay laughing, stay weird, talk too

much, say all the wrong things if that's what my brain wants, have no-limits. Because that's why Elik loves me and that's why I love myself. I need to write this down rather than try to explain to someone with words, they wouldn't believe the absurdity of it all! They would be calling 'fire' to fall down from heaven to cleanse me and baptising me in holy water! Maybe Akon was talking about me when he said, '*You can't save a life that don't wanna be saved?*'. Maybe.

Elik starts snoring so I kick him in the leg. He jerks and repositions himself but doesn't wake up. Good, that grrr grrr has stopped! I'm not sleeping with a bear here! This man here lying behind me is weird maybe even more than me. I feel like the luckiest girl in the world. I found someone whose weirdness is compatible with mine and we fell into our mutually satisfying weirdness. Now that's true love. Bonnie and Clyde would be proud of us. Sleep finally finds me and it feels like I had just closed my eyes when Elik wakes me up. I hadn't even started dreaming yet! He was sleeping when I slept and now he's awake and actually dressed!

"You sleeping?" he asks.

"Not anymore! And why ain't you sleeping?"

I'm annoyed to the T. Why is he waking me up!

"I had a nightmare so I woke up and went outside to breathe".

Then he came back no longer sleepy and decided I too didn't deserve sleep? Such selfishness has to be punished!

"I want us to talk", he says. "

Now? What time is it?"

I pull the covers over my head. He pulls them back.

"It's 1:23 am. Sit up baby let's talk".

I get a pillow and cover my head, he pulls that too and throws it on the floor.

"Really now! Who does this? Who wakes someone up in the middle of the night to talk? You're crazy!"

I pull the covers over my head. He pulls them back and away from me.

"You did the same na baby in Sun City!" he laughs.

My goodness. I'm in love with a mental person! Really? I wake up and sit up. The sooner I wake up, the sooner we finish the talk and the sooner I go back to sleep. I hug myself. Since I slept unclothed and he has taken the covers from me, I'm feeling a bit chilly and my nipples are getting hard in response and if that keeps on we won't end up talking! He takes off his T-

shirt and throws it at me to put on. I'm still grumpy but I put it on.

"Fine let's talk ke", I snap.

Don't let my sacrifice of sleep be in vain. This better be good.

"What were you dreaming about?" he asks.

"Surely, you didn't wake me up to ask me that!" I give him the '*quit playing with me nigga!*' eye.

"Easy there tiger. Put the claws away! Geez!"

"Elikplim! Will you talk already? I have yoga in the morning! Have you ever held a pose when you're half asleep? It's hell!" I snap.

"No, I've never. I've held other poses half asleep though and I held them alright", he smirks.

I take the pillow next to me and hit him with it.

"Ok fine. Let's talk. No need for violence!"

Mxm.

"I just want to umm thank you for bringing us to this place. I feel like I understand myself and you better now", he says, suddenly serious. His mood just changed like Cape Town weather!

"You remember when we first started. How was I?" he asks.

"I'm not sure what you asking. How were you where?" I look up at him looking down.

"I mean character wise".

"You were alright I guess. A bit uptight and a lot arrogant but that's what made you you".

"Fine I'll tell you", he says.

That's better. I'm too sleepy to be answering questions.

"I used to run from situations. I would walk away from all our arguments, remember? Or I'll ask you to keep talking and tell me when you are done and then ignore you, remember? I hated confrontations. I still do that with everyone else but with you baby I'm really trying. I know I'm not there yet but I'm trying".

Awwww. I refuse to think of our arguments back then! He would tell me to sleep it off and continue like nothing ever happened! Or he would use sex to distract me! Or he would listen and when I'm done he'll be like "Are you done? Can I go now?" He was something else and funny thing is he still does that sometimes. But he's right, he's trying.

"There are times you just go on and on and girl you know you can talk! You'll go on and on and give me a headache but I just sit there and take it

because let's be honest, if I leave we would have to wash all the pillows because you'll drench them with your tears".

He's actually serious! What was that last part about? So he stays so I don't cry not to listen? I want to laugh, seriously! He needs hypnosis!

"You were annoying, that's what you were. You're still annoying".

He smiles and looks down and I feel a tingle sensation run through me.

"Do you want to know how I finally decided I wanted to settle down with you?" he glances my way.

"From the first time you saw me? I was like your dream come true and you wanted to put a ring on it? Oh and you said my legs looked like they belonged around your waist and my ass had you on your knees and you knew you just had to hit that".

He actually said that to me! I guess a normal girl would have been offended but I was flattered.

"I'm being serious here Fierce", he says. Fine! "Tell me".

He sighs and intertwines his fingers.

"It was in the middle of sex with Komla one day. I didn't even finish! I got up and thought, '*Screw this. I'm gonna marry Fierce!*' I just knew".

Eh ah umm! WTF! That's a little bit of a hell lot of weird. Like is Elik ok in the head? WTF! Did he go outside to smoke a spliff? How do I even respond to that! Whaaaaat? Wow, he didn't even tone it down. Good grief! He decided he wanted to marry me during sex with his ex-wife! What a wow!

"What? You were doing her and I crossed your mind?" I'm utterly shocked.

"Ya. You cross my mind a lot you know! You have no idea how many girls I've called by your name! Why do you think Komla and Mbali hated you so much? I guess they got tired of me calling them Fierce during sex".

"It's never intentional though", he quickly adds.

You know I'm just sitting here with my legs crossed, looking at him looking all kinds of innocent. I'm convinced he doesn't hear himself when he speaks. No one is like this! I'm not even going to give myself a migraine trying to figure him out right now.

"Oh! So you decided to marry me for the pum pum? Is that what you're saying?"

"Among other things", he says. I'm looking at him and he's actually serious.

“Back up a bit. That Komla bit, why are you telling me that again?”

“Well, just. I mean she was there but I kept thinking about you and seeing your smile in my head. I realised I couldn’t keep up anymore. I couldn’t keep society and morality police happy by keeping Komla at the expense of my happiness. That’s when I decided I’d propose”.

Ooh kay! Strange time to make that type of decision but oh kay! No one should ask him at our wedding day when he knew I was the one to wife. Please.

“But it can’t be the way I used to give it up baby. Remember when we first started. I had no clue what I was doing. I’d just lie there and hold on to you and get done and just get done”, I blush thinking about it.

“And that’s exactly what made you attractive. You were all mine to love, to teach and to learn new things with. You’re all mine Fierce, you don’t understand”.

I understand alright. I’m all his and he’s all ours. What’s there not to understand there?

“Remember when I took you to Ghana and we flew economy and had to suffer through that horrible airport in Addis?”

“It wasn’t that bad nje baby! We had a good flight and we got some us time at that terrible airport”.

“That attitude. That! That’s exactly why I wanted you to be my wife”.

“Oh so it was a test?” I’m shocked.

“Sort of. It was Lumka’s idea not mine. He said if you were in it for the money you would throw a fit and just bitch and moan the whole trip”.

That’s the best they could come up with? For real? Two grown engineers with PhDs?

“And Peter and Paul. I dumped them on you and you took them. Despite everything their mother did to you, you still loved them. That just made me want to wife you”.

I’m a bit confused. Why exactly did he decide to marry me? He’s giving different reasons and for each one he says that’s the one that made him make up his mind! So which one exactly is it?

“I miss them hey”.

“Me too”, he says.

I really miss those twins. I think my heart is in a bad space and is too vulnerable after being laid bare at the hypnosis session. I’m feeling too much.

“Kofi and Lumka adore you. Do you know that? They almost killed me when we broke up. They ganged up on me and Lumka stopped talking to me for days! They say I don’t deserve you so for me to turn around and keep messing up, it doesn’t sit well with them”.

“So their opinion matters that much to you?”

“Yes. They are my brothers. And Lumka knows me. He’s seen me fuck up more times than I can count. He told me many times to come clean about the Mbali thing and I didn’t listen. So when shit hit the fan and I ran to him he said ‘You on your own bro’. He wouldn’t help me! The bastard!”

I know. Lumka was busy helping me!

“This time when you took me back, he told me never to hurt you again because I’ll have him to deal with if I do”.

He’ll probably deal with him by taking me for himself I suppose.

“But isn’t that funny? Kofi and Lumka knew about Mbali but chose to keep it away from me. So their love is quite flawed, don’t you think?”

“They kept telling me to tell you and Lumka wanted to tell you himself but I told him to try and see. And let’s face it baby. What I say goes. You don’t mess with me”.

His arrogance is so sexy!

“Lumka loves you, you know that right?”

My heart skips a beat and I almost start confessing things I wasn’t asked.

“He thinks I should let you go. He gave me that whole if you love her then let her go bullshit”.

“And? Your thoughts on that?”

I swear if he woke me up at 1 in the morning to dump me, in Mozambique! I’ll kill him!

“How am I supposed to love you if I leave you? How exactly does that work?”

I never get it either. Like I love you so much I’m going to dump your ass and let you go and be miserable for a long time and then hope you come back afterwards to prove that ‘if it was meant to be it will return’. What level of crazy is that? It doesn’t make sense. If you love me you stay with me and we suffer together until we make things right! You don’t throw me away.

“Then don’t leave. I’m the one in your bed and not Lumka so I’ll be the one to tell you when to leave not him!”

He looks at me then down and plays with his hands.

“Anyway, that’s not why I woke you up”.

“Talk away, I’m already wide awake”.

“Don’t worry, you know I’ll put you back to sleep after this”, he says.

I blush. Gosh he still has the power to make me blush! I guess I can use that as an indicator of our love. The day the butterflies stop flapping and the blushing goes away is the day I’ll two step. For now I’m still stuck on stupid.

“Stop distracting me Fierce. I have to get this off my chest before I get cold feet”.

Alright. Silence.

“You know, I don’t know whether to thank you or to apologise for the way you handled the Mbali situation. Even though I’d hurt you that deeply, you still held me in your arms and told me we would be ok. You were there for me! I don’t understand it”.

It’s spelled L.O.V.E. It’s also spelled S.T.U.P.I.D.

“Half the time I look at you and I wonder what I ever did so good in my past life that I was given you”.

“I promised I’d stand by you no matter what, that’s what I did”.

He looks at me with those eyes and I’m back to blushing.

“After the whole Mbali pregnancy I thought I’d do the right thing. Lumka tried to talk sense into me but I was adamant that I would do the right thing. I grew up without a father and I thought I was doing the right thing. I was going to handle the both of you like a man should. I was going to protect you from the truth until the baby was born and then I was going to take her as a second wife, maybe. But as always, I had no solid plan”.

He can’t even look at me shame. He knows he did me wrong there.

“In my quest to do right I went overboard. I had a trust fund set up for the child... But it’s been dissolved”, he quickly adds. I want to tell him I know, but I just swallow the lump in my throat.

“That’s not all. I paid damages for her”.

I know! I don’t know why they call it damages? Isn’t that a bit offensive? Like the woman is damaged goods now?

“So what you going to do?” I ask.

“What can I do? I’m a fool and the wise feast on the riches of fools”.

True . I won’t voice it but he was a fool there.

“I want her to pay! Like, I want her to burn”.

Oh boy! I'm not doing this with him again. I know that voice and just a word of encouragement from me and Mbali is as good as finished. I hate Mbali but no, we're not going there this time! When I told him me and him are partners in crime and are Bonnie and Clyde, I was just saying because that's what everyone says. I didn't mean we really should pull a Bonnie and Clyde on people and be criminals! After Athi and Komla, I decided I don't want a part of this destroying people anymore.

I get out of bed and go sit on top of him, facing him.

"Look at me Elik".

He looks at me. His eyes, how can I describe them, it's like they have a life of their own, like they have a fire dancing behind them and a deadly type of coldness in the middle and a seductive, glassy brown finish on the surface. They have a power that draws me in and leaves me tongue tied every time, as if they harbour an infinity stone. They are surreal!

"*W'aniwa mma ye fe papa* (You have beautiful eyes)", I find myself speaking his language now! I self-taught through YouTube videos and know enough phrases to get me what I want. It works. He's blushing and looking at me like he's about to write me a cheque!

"*Me do wo papaapa* (I love you very much)", he holds me closer.

"*Me do wo* (I love you too)", I say.

Gods! How do you say "Your voice makes me crazy" in Twi? So I can tell him. End of my Twi for the day, back to the queen's language.

"Elik. I love you and we're past this Mbali issue. We can't be taking steps backwards now. You won't hurt her in anyway because as much as she did you wrong, you found yourself in that situation because you went into it. No one forced you my love, you knew it was wrong but you did it anyway. You brought her into our lives, you let her into your heart, you almost made a baby with her, all on your own. You allowed her to use you and manipulate you. You chose to love her, all on your own. You can't punish her for that!"

He looks hurt but that's the honest truth.

"So please let it go now. If we hurt her or do anything to her, it's going to hang over us for a long time and I don't need any more curses around me. Please my love, let it go".

He can't let his stupid decisions keep affecting us!

"So promise me that you won't do anything stupid".

"I promise", he says after a while. Good boy. Now can we sleep?

“You always save me from myself. You saved me from making a huge mistake. I wouldn’t have done the DNA test if you hadn’t made me do it”.

“I know. I’m your saving grace. You’ll be a lost soul without me”, I kiss him on the forehead.

“You really are”, he squeezes my bum. He shouldn’t start things if he still wants my attention!

“I love you Elikplim”.

“I love you too Fierce”.

“We’ll be ok, right?” he asks like he’s unsure.

“We are ok!” I assure him.

“We are?” he says looking at me not understanding.

“Yes we are. We are screwed up and a whole lot of fuckery, but we are ok”.

He agrees with me. He’s too emotional now. I need to change the subject.

“You know you owe me a story!” I get a sudden jerk of memory.

“What story?”

“The besties with the piercings! What happened? Tell me. Curiosity is killing me”.

Weird, right? No! I want to know exactly how the threesome encounter between my man and some two girls I don’t know happened. The juice of a story is in the details.

“It was a long time ago. I don’t remember”, he looks down and has a subtle smile that says ‘*Ya ne! That night!*’

“I know you remember! They were memorable enough for you to write down!”

He shrugs his shoulders.

“If you don’t tell me, I’ll force you to do yoga in the morning!” I fold my arms.

“Fine! Stop bullying me! I’ll tell you”.

I sit properly and wait to hear this. I’m so messed up upstairs nothing can shock me. Nothing is too bizarre for me. He’s given me some details in the past that would have a normal girl packing but to me they made me wonder if I should try it with him. I used it as a lesson and I was deeply (excuse the pun) rewarded.

“I didn’t do much to be frank, the fun was in sitting there watching them do each other. Those girls were freaks!”

I ask for details and he gives but he's toning it down and not giving away everything. I think this therapy is changing us, for the worst. I can't live like this. I want to know! I've no idea how my mind works. When he cheats it hurts but once I get over it and we're in a good space I want details. I once tried to give him details on my sessions with Bunke and that went south very fast. I didn't even get past the second sentence before he had lifted me up and thrown me against the wall and held me by the throat and told me to "Never ever even think of mentioning such bullshit to him ever again". I apologised profusely and he left and disappeared all night!

If we're not careful and we continue this we'll be 'fixed'. We'll become generic and get into the box with normal people. We'll start living and doing things, following a manual written by society. We'll become like genetically-modified rats growing in a cage in a lab just behaving as told. I'm not sure we'll like each other much then. We we'll become normal and let's be honest, normal is boring.

Before I know it, we're back to talking serious things. We talk about the twins. I wish they knew how much their father and I love them. From the therapy sessions, we became aware that we are neglecting them. We behave like we don't have kids! I point out to Elik how Peter is more like him in his stubbornness and passing commands and bullying all of us! He laughs and says Peter is a man and that's how Nkrumah men are! Yeah right! I take off the T-shirt I'm wearing. I guess if we ever broke up, I'd miss his T-shirts the most. They smell like him and that's what draws me to them. I don't know about him but I'm done talking and I really could use a slow session of passionate grinding and sensual kisses and lots of love.

"Fierce".

"What? Don't you want?"

He smiles at me. "Of course I want! But we're still talking".

He pulls a sheet and covers me up from the head! Now I look like a ghost in Halloween movies!

"I mean it baby. Thank you for loving me. I'm sorry I'm this messed up and thank you for being messed up with me".

"I think I'm more messed up than you, you know. And I strongly suggest we stay together so we don't go out there, meet new people and mess them up. Let's do this for the greater good!"

I try to remove the sheet from my head and he's keeping it there. Now we're playing with the sheet. Me trying to get it off me and him keeping it

there. How old are we?

“Baby, fine I’ll stop fighting this sheet. Maybe you have a ghost fetish or some necromancy fetish, who knows!” I give up the struggle.

“So you’re that weak? Can’t even get out of a bedsheet!” he says. Mxm!

“Anyhoo. I’ve been meaning to ask. Let me ask before I forget. What is leg over baby? You always listening to that song ‘*Leg over*’ and I know you only listen to it because you sound like that guy who sings it”.

“Firstly, I don’t sound like that Mr. Eazi guy, he sounds like me! And I know you just boxing us because we’re both from Africa as your aunt says!”

“Nothing wrong with boxing people! You both pronounce some words in a funny way... Get this thing off me Elik!” Can he get this sheet off me!

“You wouldn’t know a good accent if it hit you in the face!”

“Leg over baby! What does it mean? I’ve been captioning my pictures ‘*leg over*’ and someone wrote TMI. So I’m curious”.

I hope he doesn’t say ‘Google it’, I’ll smack him. If only I could escape this sheet!

“You sure you wanna know what it means?”

He just made his accent very Ghanaian and I’m melting and giggling over here. I nod. Duh! I wouldn’t have asked if I didn’t want to know!

“It means... *Words in his home language*”.

“What? Say that in English!”

“I thought you knew Twi! You said you’re Ashanti now!” he laughs. He’s not funny, honestly. Although I gotta admit, I love it when he speaks foreign to me. I try one last time to get the sheet off me and I push too hard I fall off his lap and land on the floor with a thud.

“Aaaggghhh!”, I scream in annoyance. I flap the stupid sheet off me and he’s squatting next to me with a smug look on his face. I hate him!

“Come here, let me show you what leg over is!” he picks me up and lays me down on the bed.

He wasn’t lying about putting me back to sleep. And I won’t caption my pictures ‘*Leg over*’ anymore!

Twenty-Two

I woke up before sunrise so I could do sun salutations with Mel. I'm really warming up to her. She's so warm and so kind and she keeps reassuring me that I'm a lucky girl. Firstly, because my man actually agreed to go to therapy. Secondly, because he's actually opening up. Thirdly, because he really loves me, she says.

"Morning sunshine", Mel smiles brightly at me as I drag myself to the mat she has laid so neatly for me.

"So you and Elik, you disregarded all our rules and just did your own thing?"

"Sort of. It wasn't intentional though I promise".

"Why did you do it then?" Ever so calm.

"It's complicated Mel. We are meat people and we love having fun and we love our sex and Elik loves his alcohol and I love my Elik and I love supporting his cause. It's too complicated".

She would never understand.

"I'm not judging you. Since I've met you guys, I'll never judge anyone ever again".

"So you not mad?"

"No. You two are... how do I say, special. Yes, special".

This woman! I know what she means.

"Why are you loyal to Elik? Tell me, woman to woman". Miss nose!

"He's my everything and I don't see myself spending my life with anyone else".

She gets out of her pose and puts her hands on her hips.

"No honey. He's not your everything. You are your everything! He may be your man, he may be the guy you want to spend forever with but he's not your everything! You've made him your everything and that's why you'll lose your mind each time something threatens your security. You'll even allow him to do whatever he wants as long as he comes home to you. Because the idea that you might lose him is akin to losing your very life".

What happened to her saying she will never judge anyone ever again?

"No Mel, you're wrong. He's my everything because I made him my everything and that's a choice I made with a sound mind. And yes, losing him is akin to losing my very life because he's my very life!"

All too calm and still in the high lunge pose.

“Fierce, I’m telling you that…” she starts.

“No Mel, let me tell you. Elik is my life and that’s it. Don’t make me apologise for it. Don’t fight me on that because trust me, you’ll lose”, I give her the smile I once gave Mbali when I found her in that hotel room with Elik.

She shouldn’t try me. Not today! I didn’t get enough sleep.

“I apologise”.

“Accepted”, I get into the downward facing dog.

“I’m wrong to tell you who to love or how to love them. I apologise for that”.

She joins me for the plank pose and we finish our salutations in peace. When I get back to the room and I’m ready to take that nap, Elik is already done! So while some of us were busy contorting our bodies, he was busy getting ready?

“Wake me up in 30 minutes”, I throw myself on the bed.

“Shouldn’t you shower first?”

“If you’d let me sleep last night maybe. But for now shhh! Let me sleep tu”.

“Ain’t we just feisty this morning!”

“Whatever!” I close my eyes.

“I need a favour baby”.

“What now?” I complain but sit up anyway.

He comes and sits next to me and takes my hands. This man was born to irritate me!

“Look, please feel free to say no”.

“Ok”.

“Can I speak to Melissa alone?”

“Why?”

“I need to speak to her about… Mbali”, he looks down.

I keep quiet. I’m still thinking what to think of this request. What does he want to discuss that I shouldn’t hear? I could ask him and force the truth out of him but that defeats the purpose of him wanting this private session Sigh.

“She really hurt you, didn’t she?”

“She did”. *Sigh* .

“Fine. It’s fine”.

“Are you sure?” he asks.

“Yes. Now go walk on the beach or whatever while you wait for her. Spend the whole morning with her please so I can sleep”.

Yay! More sleep time loading .

“Give me a hug first”, I open my arms and he leans in for the hug.

“I love you. I want you to be ok because when you’re ok, we’re ok”.

He doesn’t say anything.

I only see Mel in the afternoon. It’s our last session and we’re not taking it serious at all. I think we’ve grown fond of her and we’re having detachment problems. I think I’ll cry after this. I hate goodbyes.

“I have to say I’m very proud of you guys. You work so well together and you’ve inspired me to look at life differently. You are, how can I phrase it...special”.

She’s too sweet. That’s the second time she’s called us ‘special’! She knows she can tell us we are crazy and we won’t be offended, right? We love crazy!

“Anyway. Fierce I need to ask you just a few more things. That self-hypnosis technique I taught you. I need to see you practice one last time so I can be sure you’ll be able on your own. I need you to reach that state of quiet and then answer me from a place of peace. You think you can do that?”

I nod. I’m going to add ‘fast learner’ to my CV! Mel has been teaching me self-hypnosis in the past days and I grasped it just like that. She says I should do it every time I need to reach within myself and search for truth or for healing. She gives me a vial to drink from. This woman is drugging me, I’m serious! If I get caught at the airport for carrying drugs in my system, I’ll sue her, she’ll see. I drink up.

“Before hypnotherapy we know how you felt what you felt and believed what you believed. And we know where you stood regarding your relationship with Elik”.

I know.

“Ok so let’s pretend Elik is not here at all. It’s just you and me. Close your eyes and drift away”.

“Be true to yourself, you’ve come too far to lie to yourself now. Can you do that?”

I nod. She knows I can. The question is not can I do that but can she

handle the truth when I give it to her? I've been through intense sessions of hypnotherapy and I'm starting to see clearer now and for once I feel like I know exactly what I want. I jump off the chair and sit on the floor. My legs fold into full lotus and my thumbs touch my index fingers as I rest the back of my hands on my knees (Jnana Nudra). I take a deep breath as I try to concentrate and detach my thoughts from my body. I find that empty space within myself and I hold on to it as I let Mel's voice into me. This is my last session and I have to make it count.

"Find your calm... Find your peace... Breathe... Yes... Stay there... Find your strength... Hold it there... Breathe into your spine... Another deep breath... Yes... Find your truth", her voice keeps guiding me.

"Detach... Allow your mind to happen... Allow your body to become... Breathe into your spine Fierce... Focus on your breathing... Allow your true nature to exist... Let go of your ego... Embrace your true self... Breathe", she keeps helping me.

When she is content with where I am, she starts the interrogation. I wish I could see Elik's face as he watches on! She starts with gentle questions about life and me in general then boom to Elik!

"If Elik cheats on you again. What will you do?"

"Nothing. I would forgive him".

"Explain", she says.

"I'm secure in my space and I'm happy".

"Explain".

"As long as he gives me my portion undivided, I'm good. As long as he loves and respects me, I'm good".

I'm sure she thinks she failed with me but she actually passed! She's helped me to not be apologetic about my queer choices!

"If Elik wanted to take a second wife in future, what would you say?"

"I don't think I'll mind. As long as nothing changes between me and him and as long as Miss New Thing knows her place and respects me, we shouldn't have a problem".

That's just my true self speaking and not me! I'm not responsible for what I say right now. What's wrong with polygamy? I'm probably not making much sense but I swear it makes sense in my head. And I'm sure Elik is thinking in his head *'That's my girl!'*.

"I respect you for being true to yourself".

Why don't I believe her?

“Do you truly want to marry Elik?”

“More than anything!”

“Do you want to forgive your mother”, she asks.

“Yes”.

She asks a couple more questions then helps me come out of meditation and gives me water to drink. This serum she makes me drink always leaves me with a buzz!

“Alright. That’s closed then. Let’s talk about something more serious. Sex. Most couples struggle to openly communicate in this part of therapy. I always save it for the last day. Most couples are embarrassed and afraid of voicing their opinions”.

Elik and I look at each other and share a smile. We’re not most couples, are we? Sex is our language. We eat, live and breathe sex. Without it we would crumble into dust and die miserable deaths.

“How would you rate your sex life, 0 to 10”.

“10”, we both say at the same time.

“Wow. Great”, she writes in her book.

“I need to establish if you guys have a healthy sex life or if one is abusing the other”.

“If anyone, I’m the one abusing Elik shame. I literally want him all the time! The number of times he wakes up with me climbing him!” I giggle.

The memories running through my head right now!

“So your sex is not ummm abusive in any manner? You don’t hate yourself or partner sometimes afterwards?”

“What? You know Mel, you should have sex with Elik and let’s see if you’ll be able to hate him afterwards! No way in hell you can hate him!”

I won’t mention those times he hurt me. When I forgive, I forgive. She looks at Elik and I don’t like her eye. Why is she looking at him like that? I was joking! She ain’t getting some of my dark chocolate. Na ah!

“So it’s not violent or abusive in any manner?”

“Depends what you mean by that? Are handcuffs and scratching and slapping and hard spanking and biting, violent?”

“I, I don’t know. I guess not if both parties are into that sort of thing”, she’s back to blinking like a doll.

I think I should steal that notebook of hers before we leave just so I see what she keeps writing in there! The talk goes on and I think Mel is just wanting details of our private life now! Some questions she’s asking are too

invasive but we answer anyway. She asked the strangest place we've had sex in, asked me to describe my orgasms and respectfully asked me the size of Elik's dick.

"I'm tempted to say your sexual appetite is abnormal but again what's normal? Who defines normal. If it works for you and I can tell from Fierce's face that it works then that's your normal".

Spot on.

"Fierce. Have you ever considered having sex with someone else that's not Elik".

This woman! Is she trying to get me killed?

"Yes I have!"

"With who?" Elik asks shooting me an *'I'll kill you right here right now'* eye. He's not laughing with me anymore. Obviously, saying Lumka right now would be a suicide mission. So I smile and lie. "Akon, obviously!" I chuckle. I see him relax. His chest actually goes down as he exhales. Phew!

"Don't make me a murderer, Fierce!" he says, quietly but his tone says he means it.

"I'd never, my love", I hold his hand.

Now I know for sure, that Lumka thing can never come out. But now the problem with a secret between two people is that no matter how hard you guard your half, you can never be certain that the other person will do the same. What if Lumka grows a conscience one day and sings like a canary? What if he has a fight with Elik and says

"That's why I fingered your girl?" or what if he decides he wants me for himself in future and so tells Elik so we break up. I can only hope none of those scenarios come to pass. As predicted, my goodbye with Mel is teary. I promise to keep in touch and she says she'll keep checking up on us.

"Stay true to yourself, love who you want to love and quieten external voices trying to tell you to do things they themselves wouldn't do. Everyone suddenly becomes an expert in relationships when they are not involved, so stay woke young lady. I'd never tell anyone who to love. I can tell you that Elik loves you".

"Thank you so much Mel".

She brings her palms together and I do likewise. We bow towards each other as we bring our palms to the heart and both say, "May your heart be full of love and compassion".

To the lips, “May you speak only truth and kindness”.

To the third eye (On the forehead), “May you see the beauty in the world”.

We bow towards each other.

“Namaste (The divine light in me recognises the divine light in you)”.

Back to Cape Town, back to Kofi having taught my step children more bad habits. I start lecturing tomorrow, Elik goes back to Joburg tomorrow and Kofi stays here with me and will go down to Joburg end of week with me. And Lumka is here! Like why is he here? He doesn't live here, he lives in Joburg for crying out loud! I give away my hugs and ask to go take a nap. I'm tired. The whole thing with my mother is killing me. I'm getting anxiety attacks just thinking about it and I haven't told Elik how terrified I am. I don't want to stress him. I'm still grateful he did the whole retreat thing with me. It's a Sunday and as soon as I'm about to cross over from wakefulness to sleepiness, the two mini-Eliks jump on my bed and bounce and bounce.

“Auntie Fierce. What you doing?” Peter says.

“I'm trying to sleep sweetie. I'm tired”.

“But we want to play!” Paul says.

“I'll play when I wake up sweetheart. I just need 5 minutes”.

“We miss you aunt Fierce. You're never here anymore. We want to go camping”, Peter says.

“I'm sorry baby. Come here”.

I ask them to stop bouncing and give me hugs. As I hug them I just start crying. I'm failing them. I'm all the mother they know now and I'm failing them.

“Why are you crying auntie Fierce”, Paul asks.

“It's nothing sweetie, I, I... *sob sob sob*”, I just breakdown.

Poor kids shame. I'm sorry I'm doing this to them. Paul the sympathiser starts crying and saying “Don't cry auntie Fierce. We will let you sleep. Please don't cry”.

Peter the problem solver runs out of the room and comes back dragging his father.

“She's crying. I don't know why and Paul is crying now”, Peter says.

I can't see Elik because I'm drenching Paul's small shoulder with my tears. I can't stop crying.

“Baby, what’s wrong? What happened?” he pulls me away but Paul clings on and cries harder.

“Make them stop crying, daddy please”, Peter says.

I can tell from his voice that he’s one second away from breakdown.

“Come here Peter”, I say in between sobs.

He jumps onto the bed and crawls until he’s in my other arm. My children. These are all the children I have and I’ve failed as a mother.

“I’ll never leave you again”, I promise them.

These kids can cry tjoo! And their high pitched cries tear at my heart and make me cry harder. Poor Elik. I’m pretty sure he doesn’t know what to do.

Kofi and Lumka come in. I guess the screams of the twins called them. I don’t see them but I hear them.

“Bro. What’s going on?” Lumka asks.

Kofi comes to us. “Fierce? What’s wrong?” he touches me on the shoulder. He tries to pull Paul away from me and I become a lioness. I guard my cubs and cling on to them. This is embarrassing, crying here like a baby with the kids and three grown men looking on. But Elik, Lumka and Kofi are not just any men. They are my men and I have no reason to be embarrassed around them.

“Elikplim, what did you do to them?” Kofi says, I think going to the side Elik is sitting on.

“What’s going on? What’s wrong with them?” Lumka asks.

Poor Elik. He doesn’t know shame.

“I don’t know. Peter just dragged me here”, Elik says.

“No man, Elik you can’t keep doing this to her man. Come on. This is fucked up man!”

Lumka says and throws something against the wall. Lumka acts like my second husband sometimes you know! Maybe I should take him as my second because clearly, he’s ready.

“Elik, what did you do?” Kofi asks.

“So it’s automatic that I did something?” Elik asks. Can they all just shut up! Some of us are still trying to stop crying over here.

“Yes. You always doing this to her! So ya”, Lumka says.

Kofi agrees with Lumka. I rub my eyes and look up and they are all ganging up on my poor Elik.

“You need to grow up Elikplim! This bullshit you keep pulling is getting

old. What the hell is wrong with you?” Kofi says.

Elik gets up and paces. “Kofi, you never, you hear me, you never ever speak to me like that! And Lumka if I didn’t know any better I’d say you want my girl for yourself!”

Lumka wants to say something but he catches my eye. I shake my head a little. He has said enough already. Don’t they know when to shut up? And can they go easy on the language, there are two kids here. They may be sobbing now but they can still hear!

“Both of you get the fuck out of my house”, Elik says.

House not room?

“Take all your shit and fuck off”.

Oh boy! All this war because Fierce cried! Am I the next Helen of Troy?

“Stop. Just stop all of you!”

Wait. I think Paul is falling asleep. So the whole cry yourself to sleep is actually a thing?

“Elik didn’t do anything to me. It’s just, I’ve been abandoning the kids and it hurt. It’s not him”. The three of them stop and look at me.

“Why are you two still here? This is my house! Get out”, Elik says looking at Kofi and Lumka.

“Please baby, don’t do this”, I plead.

Lumka can hold his own, he’s got multi millions. Kofi on the other hand is nothing without Elik’s money. Where would he start? And all because Fierce cried, brothers will break up?

“Elik stop”.

“Stay out of this woman!” he snaps at me.

I didn’t expect that. I thought I tell him what to do? When did that change? I silence his demons remember? My jaw stays dropped but my tail recoils and I shut my pie hole.

“Elik...”, Kofi tries.

“Get out Kofi! I won’t tell you twice. Get your stuff and fuck off!” Elik says.

What have I done? If I hadn’t cried all this wouldn’t have happened. Kofi walks out and Lumka just stands there with his arms folded looking at Elik. He has this grin on his face like he’s not taking Elik serious. I put Paul down and Peter is dozing too! Perfect. I try to get out of bed. I’m wearing only a T-shirt but they all know my thighs so big deal. I need to tell Kofi to let Elik calm down a bit. He doesn’t mean anything he’s saying right now.

“Lastborn! Where do you think you’re going? Didn’t I tell you to stay out of this?” Elik says.

“Kofi...”, I say.

“Get back in bed”. He’s so upset!

“He’s your brother baby, you can’t...”, I try to reason with him.

“Exactly. MY brother not yours. So drop it and get your pretty ass back into bed”.

Tjo! I get back into bed. Lumka shakes his head and walks out. Elik follows and stops by the door.

“Stay here! Don’t even think of it Lastborn!” he closes the door.

I sink under my duck feathers, cover my twins and close my eyes. I feel so bad I cried, I resume sobbing. It’s like when we take one step forward we take two steps back. I don’t even know what happened. I lie in bed sniffing a little and rubbing Peter’s back so he can sleep. Paul is already snoring softly. I didn’t want this. I got home, I was tired and I wanted to sleep. That’s what I wanted. Then the crying happened and even then it shouldn’t have escalated like this. It was my moment with the twins and the guys should have never gotten involved.

Lumka and Kofi just assumed Elik had messed up again and he just became defensive and retaliated with anger. I think he’s angry at me too. He called me Lastborn! But what did I do? Since when is crying your own tears, through your own eyes, in your own house, a crime?

“Auntie Fierce”, Peter says with a thin voice. I don’t know why he’s still fighting sleep shame. Can he sleep already!

“Shhh. Sleep sweetie. Get some rest”, I stroke his back.

“I love you, you know that?”

“I know. I also love you”, he says.

He snuggles closer to me and I hold him. I know I can’t cry now no matter how I feel. My tears have done enough damage already.

The door opens.

“Lastborn. Living room. Now”, Elik’s voice says.

I sigh and get out of bed and assure Peter that he can sleep it’s ok, I’ll be right back.

“Is daddy fine? He was shouting and uncle Lumka was shouting and uncle Kofi was shouting”, he says.

I lean over and kiss him on the forehead.

“They are all fine sweetie. Sometimes grown-ups shout for no reason

but they are fine”.

“Is it me? I went and called daddy. I wanted him to make you stop crying. He always holds you when you cry”.

My heart. “No sweetie, it’s not you at all”. It’s me and my crying that started everything.

“I’ll be right back. If I find you fast asleep, you can have ice cream before dinner when you wake up. Deal?”

“Ok. Deal”, he says.

“Wait”, Peter calls.

“Yes baby”, I turn and look at him as my feet touch the floor.

“What does *fuck* mean? Daddy and uncle Lumka always says fuck. I said it at school and Mrs Monnay said it’s a bad word but she didn’t tell me what it means”, he says. Oh boy!

“Sleep sweetheart. I’ll be right back”.

I kind of started parenting midway. I don’t know how to deal with most things. I’ll ask Lizzy to tell me how to deal with this later. The first thing I see when I open the closet is gym shorts so I put those on and make my way to the living room.

When I walk in, it’s dead silent. I guess they were waiting for me. Kofi’s eyes look red and I don’t know if he’s angry or scared. Elik is the only one standing at the head of the table and he has his hands folded across his chest. Lumka is sitting looking like he doesn’t give a care in the world. He’s leaning back on the chair at an angle, has one hand loosely placed on the table and one hanging freely. I take a seat on the other side, opposite Lumka. The silence is too loud!

“We are all here, so get on with it. I have places to be”, Lumka says.

“Fine”, Elik says.

“You are all going to listen. I’m not going to repeat myself and this is not a discussion, I’m telling you. I’ll be the only one doing the talking!” Elik says.

Eh! Hitler is risen! Controlling much? Kofi and I stay silent. Lumka laughs and say nc! Elik just shoots him the eye.

“I will not be disrespected in my own house!” Elik starts.

Technically it’s my house but ok he can claim it for now since he’s so angry!

“I know you all think I’m an asshole and because Lastborn here decided to cry you all decided to blame me for it! No questions asked, it was

automatically ‘Elik you are jerk!’”

“Maybe because you are!” Lumka says.

Can they go play outside and leave Kofi and I out of this? Elik ignores him.

“Kofi. I’m 11 years older than you! I’m not your peer. There’s Lastborn, your age mate, you can talk to her like that not me!” I look at him.

So I deserve to be disrespected because I’m a decade plus younger than him?

“Actually no! You can’t talk to her like that. You know I’ll kill you if you ever disrespected her! That goes for you Lumka as well”, he says.

“I’m not her age mate”, Lumka says with an undertone. Elik ignores him.

“Kofi, I’m your brother! You will not disrespect me like that ever again! You don’t get to talk to me like that! Am I clear?”

“Yes. All clear! I’m sorry”, Kofi says.

I don’t like seeing Kofi not happy. Elik should stop bullying us here!

“If you ever even think of talking to me like you talking to one of your buddies, I’ll ship your black ass back to Ghana to go and learn some respect!”

Kofi already said sorry *bathing* ! Can we move on now?

“Kofi I do everything for you. Everything you want I give you! Is a little respect too much to ask for?”

The way he said that hurt me a bit. I don’t know why.

“I’m sorry Elik, it’s just...”, Kofi says.

“Save it! I’ve said what I’ve said to you. I don’t care why you did it, you just will never do it again. Do you understand?”

“Yes. *Me nua, kose* (I’m sorry, brother)”, Kofi says.

“Good!” he says then turns and faces Lumka.

I guess he’s giving us the speech one by one. He looks so serious I want to laugh.

“Lumka, do you want Lastborn?”

Where’s that coming from? I’m hoping with everything in me that Lumka doesn’t sell out. I already saw the wedding dress I want!

“Go and sleep Elik, you’re tired and right now you’re just talking crap. What’s this? Sitting us down like pre-school kids!” Lumka says.

“I asked you a question!” Elik says.

“You are out of your mind!” Lumka says.

He's so chilled shame. Elik on the other hand is getting agitated. This is going to be fun to watch. Fun until Lumka decides to tell the truth. Then I don't think it will be much fun after that.

"Kofi was right you know. You need to grow up!" Lumka says.

"The fuck did you just say?" Elik says.

Lumka stands and is all chilled still.

"You know you can tell Kofi and Fierce what to do because they are your disciples. But you can't tell me what to do!" Lumka says.

We are disciples now? Why is he throwing side shade now? We are all victims here, we must stick together!

"Lumka sit down! I'm not done talking!" Elik says his voice laced with anger.

"I don't care if you're done or not Prof Nkrumah. All I know is this is stupid and I'm going outside for a smoke", Lumka says.

Elik grabs Lumka by the arm.

"I asked you a question! Do you want my girl or not? Be a man and tell me to my face", Elik says.

"Do I want your girl? The same girl you still have because of me?" Lumka says and laughs mockingly at Elik.

"How many times have I covered up for you so this girl of yours doesn't leave you? How many times did I go out of my way to go and beg your girl to take your corny ass back? So let my arm go or I swear, I'll fuck you up right now", Lumka says.

Kofi and I look at each other.

"Go ahead", Elik says.

Ok that's enough now. I push my chair back so I can stand and put a stop to this madness. The chair makes that skrrrr sound.

"Sit Fierce!" they both say at the same time. They are not even looking at me. They just knew it's me. Wow. I sit. They have a serious staring contest, throwing daggers at each other with their eyes. Elik swears and I'm relieved when he lets Lumka's arm go. All this is ridiculous seriously. I bet you, they also don't know why they are fighting! If we asked them now they wouldn't have an answer!

"So Prof Nkrumah. Tell me. How was the retreat and therapy? I hear people tell the truth there", Lumka says smirking and half sitting, half leaning against the table and looking at Elik.

"So did you tell your girl everything? So she knows the real truth about

...?” he starts.

Elik jumps in so quick I’m shocked. I kinda wanted to hear what Lumka had to say.

“What are you doing? What the hell man?” Elik snaps.

Lumka laughs showing off that pretty row of teeth.

“What? Isn’t therapy about telling the truth?” Lumka says.

“You pull that stunt and when I’m done with you, you’ll wish you’d never met me”, Elik says.

He’s fuming. Now I’m even more curious to hear what Lumka has to say. The way Elik is reacting tells me it’s serious!

“What are you gonna do Elik? Huh? Frame me? Have Lemon take care of me? What? You forget all those contacts you use are mine! I ground you Elik! That company may be yours but if it wasn’t for me you’ll have run it into the ground! So tell me, what are you gonna do?”

Lumka is so laid back today it’s making Elik upset. And I thought the company was theirs! I’ll ask Elik. I want to come between them but I was rudely told to ‘sit’ so I stay seated. I look at Kofi and ask ‘what do we do?’ with my eyes? He shrugs his shoulders. I’m watching my main and my almost-side go at it. It’s funny watching them fight but I also know that once words are spoken they can’t be swallowed back. So I hope they don’t cross the line and talk too much and tear their bromance apart. I love them together. They inspire me.

“I’ve had it with you! You boss everyone around and I let you because you are my man. But I’ve had it. And now you think I want to steal your girl? For real? I’m nothing like you man. You took my girl and I let you because she was a piece of shit anyway and was better off with you! And she served you what you deserved, didn’t she?”

What girl? My lips part so I can ask but I fail to form the words.

“Lumka...”, Elik starts.

“What? What you gonna do? You forget that I know you Elik. I can destroy you with the snap of my finger! So go ahead and bring me down because we’re in everything together, remember? I go down and I drag you down to hell with me!” Lumka says.

This is getting out of control. Can Kofi do something please.

“Oh and this girl of yours you are so scared of losing, if I tell her about that Pretoria thing, do you think she’ll still be sitting pretty here? So please, stop testing me bro!” Lumka says.

Lumka! Fine! Even though Elik might have done wrong, Lumka has no business just spitting it out like this. Now instead of being upset at Elik I'm upset at Lumka. I know what he's trying to do and I'm getting sick of it. Telling me all the wrong things Elik does behind my back so I can leave him. That's too childish!

He's so relaxed. Elik swallows and clenches his jaw. He punches the table so hard I jump. I think he got hurt, the way he's rubbing his fist on the palm of his other hand! I want to feel for him but I'm just hearing that there are more secrets. Will it ever end? Why is this happening? What happened? We were in Mozambique and we were fine. What went wrong?

"Get out", Elik says.

"Nah fam. I'm not going anywhere. I want a drink... Fierce, you have some Courvoisier in the house?" Lumka says looking at me with that corner eye.

I nod. Elik takes the vase I left on the table and flings it through the window. I flinch at the sound of glass breaking through glass. The window shatters and the vase flies through. I can only hope there's no one outside. I need to look at shatterproof glass!

"Kofi. Go to your room", Elik commands.

Kofi gets up and leaves like he's been waiting for this the whole time. Elik storms off towards the kitchen and as he disappears around the wall I follow. Creeping like a thief. I stand at earshot but out of sight.

"What the hell man?" I hear him ask in a hushed voice.

"What?" Lumka says.

He sounds too chilled and not in a nice way. He looked cold when I caught his eye. Almost dangerous if I had to describe it.

"You know where to find me. Here, have a drink. You look like you could use it. I'm out of here", Lumka says. I hear footsteps then they stop.

"Oh! And the Zambia gig tomorrow. I've decided I'm not going, you are going! I'll email you the details", I hear his footsteps again.

"But Lumka bro!" I hear Elik say.

"What?" His voice sounds further than earlier. He must be closer to the door now.

"You'd really do me like that?" Elik says.

"No I wouldn't. You know I wouldn't. You pushed me! Talk later?" Lumka says and is gone.

What? Talk later? Are these people not fighting kanti? I just hope they

are not breaking up. All because Fierce cried!

I'm still shook and unsettled by what Lumka said. I can't take anymore new things from Elik. I recently found my peace. I can't bear to lose it again. I sink down the wall all the way to the floor and hug my knees. What do I do? Elik needs me but he also needs to tell me the secrets he's hiding. On second thought, I don't want to know what all that was about. What's the point? I'm lost in my thoughts when Elik's voice brings me back to the present.

"Hey princess", he gives me a hand. I stand with my back against the wall and him in front of me.

"I'm sorry", he says.

I look down. I've heard the word sorry so many times it doesn't hold the same value it once used to.

"I need to go and talk to Lumka. I'll be back soon", he says and leans over, lifts my chin up with his index finger and kisses me full on the lips. He's so close and his scent is flooding my brain. Damn, this man smells divine!

"But? Are we not going to talk about this?" my stupid voice is trembly!

I know I said I don't want to know but again I don't know what I don't know, so maybe he should just tell me in case I need to know it.

"Talk about what my love?"

"What just happened! Things Lumka insinuated! All that!"

"Nah! There's nothing to talk about!"

"Elikplim! You can't just ...", I start to say.

He leans down and before I know it, he slams his lips on mine, nearly knocking the wind from my lungs. He grabs my body, pulling me closer to him. I'm not sure what's happening. Surely, even him can't be horny after that altercation he just had with Lumka!

"Baby", I say when his lips give mine a break.

"Shhh", he hushes me and gets back to tonguing me. I push him back and he stumbles backwards but holds his footing.

"We're going to talk now! You can't just act like nothing happened. I demand answers Elikplim", I say sternly, crossing my arms across my chest.

"You demand nothing, my love". He has that same calmness Lumka portrayed earlier!

"But El...", I try to protest.

“Shhh!” he silences me, so gently.

He steps towards me and pins me hard against the wall. His hands grab my bum and he pulls me closer to him until there's no space left between us. He brings his lips down to my ear, pauses there and just breathes. I'm trapped and I'm grabbed. I can feel the beat of his heart.

“We're not going to talk about anything!”

“No Elik! We can't just pretend...”

“Shhh!” he brings his hand from behind me and his index finger comes to my lips. “We're not going to talk. You know what we're going to do?”

“What?” I snap.

He's so annoying!

“First, we are going to fuck. Then I'll go and find Lumka and make sure he goes to that meeting in Zambia tomorrow. While I'm gone, you'll cook dinner for us. I feel like pap and stew today. Then we'll all eat as a family. Then I'll help you prepare for your lecture tomorrow. Then I'll take you to bed and fuck you again. That's what we are going to do, in that order”, he says, slowly and precisely. He breathes down my neck and I have no idea why him commanding me right now sounded so sexy!

“Do you understand Cupcake?” I find myself nodding.

“That's my girl. So what do we do first?”

“We fuck”, I say.

“That's my girl”. My body and mind are not in sync at all, I need joining surgery to fix the broken communication. His hands unbutton my shorts and one hand slides in.

“So smooth”, he says and I blush.

“No Elik. Kofi could come out of his room! And the twins! Not here”, I whisper.

His free hand comes up and his index finger touches my lips signalling me to shut up.

“Spread”, he says.

I step my feet apart. My neck falls back as his finger plays around and around till I'm slippery when wet. Then it finds its way into me. I gasp and hold on to his neck. He keeps alternating between nibbling on my neck and earlobe.

“You're my life. Do you know what that means?” he speaks into my ear. His voice is mesmerising. Confusing me. Oh lawd! I shake my head no.

“It means you are mine, all of you. Head to toe. In and out. Mine. You

understand what that means, right?” he says so sensually. His voice alone! I shake my head no again as I gasp for air.

“It means we’re bound together, for life”.

That would be creepy if his finger wasn’t sinfully torturing me right now.

A second finger joins the first and I arch my back forwards. I hit the back of my head on the wall but now is not time for pain. Elik and I are having a conversation here! I feel my feet turn to jelly. He balances me and makes sure I stay put.

“Open your eyes”, he commands and my eyes flap open.

He bites his lower lip as his free hand cups my breast over the T-shirt and gently kneads. His two fingers keep twirling and going in and out. He holds the stare and his eyes speak of a dangerous passion. I swear he has fire dancing in his eyes! I close my eyes and moan back into my throat.

“Open your eyes ma”.

I’m quite the obedient lover so my eyes open. I struggle to keep them open. My breath is shaking. My lips are slightly parted as I fight hard not to make noise.

“Do you love me?” he asks. I nod.

“I didn’t get that”.

“I do”, I say.

He removes the one finger and digs deep with his remaining. If he wasn’t pressing me against the wall, I’d have long fallen! I’m being questioned under duress!

“I...love...you”, I say in between pants and shallow breaths.

“I love you too”, he says.

“Would you forgive me for anything?”

“I...don’t...know”. I’m finding it hard to speak right now for obvious reasons.

“I’d forgive you for anything”, he says.

Such emotional blackmail! He knows he would kill me first before forgiving me if I ever betrayed him. He kisses me deeply and I feel shivers run up and down my spine. He tastes like crisp autumn air, like hot chocolate on a winter night that I want to sip up and keep drinking. He tastes like Cinnabon with extra icing and midnights under turning galaxies. The kiss is long and deep and demanding and I just keep wanting.

“My T-shirt looks good on you. You can have it. You can have whatever

you want”.

You mean he still doesn't know that all his T-shirts are mine? His hand rides up the inside of my T-shirt and closes around my bare nipple that's now all perky from the strain I'm under. I'm trying hard not to get loud. I'm still worried that Kofi or worse the twins will walk in.

“Would you do the same for me? Forgive me for anything? Spoken and unspoken of?” he asks, simultaneously pushing a second finger into me while squeezing my nipple.

“Yes”, I yell out.

My yes was a *'yes, don't stop'* not *'yes, I'll forgive things I don't know'* ! But he knows me all too well and he just used that against me. This sly fox! He knew I'd scream yes when he did that! He kisses me on the forehead.

“Thank you my angel. I'm glad we've resolved this. Since you've forgiven me there'll be no talking about this, ever!” he says.

“But...”, I try to explain my yes but his lips close on mine and swallow my sentence.

His fingers pick up the pace and I'm turning into a marshmallow.

He pulls out his hand and with both hands pulls my shorts together with my little lace down. I step out of them. His lips resume working mine, nibbling, wetting and smooching. His left fingers find their way back home. His right hand works his belt. I've lost all sense of reason and awareness. I've lost all sense nje. He picks me up and I know the drill. Thighs apart. He rams into me, legs dangle, hands hold on. I have to keep myself up because the only support I have from him is his left hand holding on to my bum. His right hand is closed around my mouth so I don't make a noise. It's not working and I keep sliding down. He gently lets my feet slide to the floor and he turns me around to face the wall. I pop my ass backwards and receive him. His one hand closes my mouth shut and the other is on my stomach. He just nails me to the wall till I have a shaking orgasm. He stays there, his hand tight on my mouth, till I recover and my legs stop shaking.

“You're my salvation”, he whispers in my ear with a husky voice. I smile even though he can't see my face.

“Thank you”, he says.

“For what?” I ask.

“For being you”.

He pulls out of me and stands there behind me just holding me and breathing down my neck. He's not done but I guess this was just about me.

He pulls his jeans up then makes me step back into my shorts. He picks me up like a baby and carries me to the bedroom. The twins are still in bed. He opens the covers with one hand, lays me down and covers me up.

“I love you!” he gives me a kiss on the forehead.

I say a silent “I love you too”.

“I’ll be back. Take a nap and when you cook, count Lumka! He’ll be joining us”.

Before I can even ask what in the name of Pharaoh! He’s leaving the room! What just happened? Did he just trick me into forgiving him? I can’t help smiling to myself, I got got!

Twenty-Three

I reach for my phone and check on Kofi.

Fierce: *Boo .*

Kofi: *Sup*

Fierce: *I'm about to take a nap. Wake me up in 45 mins.*

Kofi: *Sharp. You ok?*

Fierce: *More than *wink**

Kofi: *You don't mean to say... *shocked face**

Fierce: *It just happened*

Kofi: *So you fixed him? He's no longer mad?*

Fierce: *He's good now (I lie! I have no clue what's going on in Elik's head right now)*

Kofi: *You are a superhero bro! You deserve a cape! Only you!*

Fierce: **Tongue out emojis**

Fierce: *He loves you, you know that, right?*

Kofi: *I know. But not more than he loves you*

Fierce: **Blush emoji* Duh!*

Kofi: **Laughing emoji**

Fierce: *Let me take a nap*

Kofi: *Cool*

Then I quickly send a message to Lizzy.

Fierce: *Please make food enough for six people or so. I'll make the pap when I wake up .*

I agreed to cook but I didn't say what I'll cook. I don't think Lumka is going to come. He looked done with Elik. I'm tempted to text him just to make sure he's alright but maybe not. Let me take a nap.

Kofi didn't wake me up! I wake up alone in bed, the twins gone. I'm relieved when I make it to the kitchen and find that Lizzy came through for me. She even made the pap. I hear laughing from the garden so I go there. We are miserable in this house today, so who can be laughing? I'm all shades of confused. Elik is sitting on a chair with Peter in his lap, Kofi is sitting next to him and Lumka is there too and has Paul on his lap. They are smoking a joint and passing it around! I'll deal with their smoking herb around the kids after I'm done being shocked. But I thought these guys fought! I thought they broke up! I thought! I'm hella confused right now.

“Aunt Fierce”, Peter runs to me.

He has spotted me. I scoop him up and walk with him. My little angel. He’s getting very heavy! I give him to Kofi and I perch on Elik’s lap and lean to give him a kiss. He blows smoke into my face and I cough. This idiot of mine! They keep laughing. I guess the joke was told before I got here. But I’m so lost! I really thought they fought! Do people forgive each other that quickly these days?

“Baby. I need help reaching in the top cupboard”, I lie.

He passes the splif to Lumka and follows me into the house. As soon as we are in I drop the act and jump in front of him.

“And then? I thought you guys would never speak again!”

“We are men baby girl, we deal with shit and then we let it go. Lumka is my blood, it would take more than words!”

He pulls me to him and lowers his head till our foreheads touch.

“We need to prepare for your lecture tomorrow baby. It’s your first day and I want the students to see beyond your booty. They have to know that Dr Nkrumah means business”.

I blush. We’ll deal with that after eating. I’m jumpy all evening and through supper. I keep waiting for Elik and Lumka to stab each other, but they keep laughing like earlier didn’t happen. Are they really ok ok or am I missing something? And then people say women are difficult to understand! Try men!

“So bhud Lumka, what are your plans tomorrow?”

“I have a meeting in Zambia, so I’m on the first flight out tomorrow”.

What? Zambia? He arrogantly told Elik he wasn’t going nje? How did Elik convince him to retract his statement? Wow!

After dinner, after putting the kids to bed, after shouting at my men for smoking and swearing around the kids, after going through my notes and after some slow, passionate leg over with Elik, I lie down waiting for sleep. His hand is wrapped protectively around me and I’m confused. The things Lumka said, so really we’ll never talk about them because I was made to forgive under duress? That doesn’t sound right. I think I need a relationship lawyer, Elik is tricking me! I’m sick ne? Because the way he tricked me I find it ummm, how can I say, genius? I’m amused and impressed. I turn to face him and fit myself into his body. He’s drowsy so he just wraps his hand around me and says a low “I love you”.

“I love you too. Always”, I say.

I woke up at 4:30 am. It's my first day as a lecturer and to say I'm nervous will be downplaying it. I've never worked a day in my life! Tutoring and stuff, that's not working! I know the Chemical Engineering Department in and out and I know that campus in and out, but still I'm so nervous. I'm not a student anymore. All the lecturers that taught me will be colleagues now. Will they respect me? Will they really see me as an equal? Or will they just see that timid girl who knew all the answers but never raised her hand, they taught in first year? And the students? Will they take me serious? Will they respect me? Elik said I'll be just fine. He lectured for some years so he says he knows lecturing is not a big deal really. But I'm nothing like Elik. He's smart and super confident. Me on the other hand my confidence is seasonal and my intelligence is highly questionable.

I chat up Lumka as he leaves for the airport. These men are strange! You'd swear yesterday never happened. He tells me he got done with Thando and wants a break from this whole dating scene. He says he's this close to giving up on ever finding the right girl. I promise him she's out there and waiting for him to be born again and go to church before she reveals herself. He says that means she'll wait for a very long time. I'm tempted to ask about the girl Elik stole from him but it's too early for truths.

"You? You're going to be celibate?" I can't help laughing.

"Who said anything about celibacy? I said I'm staying away from the dating scene!" he explains. Ooooh! I get it now.

Before he leaves he asks for a hug.

Then it takes me over an hour of going through my closet to find something to wear. I don't know whether I can wear my ripped boyfriend jeans and a crop top so I just blend in with the students and be that cool lecturer. Or maybe go all formal like lawyers and look all serious and mature. Or be myself, tiny shorts? No? I settle for a dress that says *'I'm sexy and I know it but I'm not desperate'*. That says *'Hey student you can drool it's fine but you can't afford me!'* This dress says *'I might be wearing a ring on my finger but honey, I might just be available if you play your cards right!'*

I'm starting to wonder if I hallucinated yesterday. There's no hint on Elik that says something might be wrong between us. Not that anything is wrong. Maybe I dreamed it all? But the texts between Kofi and I confirm that it was real. I found out Elik has secrets! What's new? And I bet it has something to do with a girl! What's new? As long as daddy gives me my

portion, I'm good. If Elik wanted me to know something and it threatened my life or my health or our status, he would tell me. When he keeps it from me it's for a good reason. He keeps reassuring me that I'll love lecturing. I'm not convinced. You see, I'm not the hardworking type. I'm more book oriented and can write you an academic article in 30 minutes, but work, that thing is not for me shame. I like doing things at my own time not told *'Monday; 10 - 12 Class'*. No.

See where trying to please society has gotten me! Isn't I got a job to prove I can hold my own! Now I'm alone suffering and having to talk and talk for over 90 minutes, three days a week! I could have stayed at home and chopped Elik's money and made a good housewife. He said I can have whatever I want yesterday when he tricked me into forgiving him!

I'm twisted I know but if I ever die and be reborn a boy, I want to be exactly like Elik. Like just have everything I want, have the brain of a nerd but live like a baller. Have all the money in the world, smooth talk myself out of situations, sex my girl confused till she's forgiving me even for sins I haven't committed yet. That's my wish. I stand watching him make me a lunchbox as I tell him how scared I am of my first day. I want to resign before I even start. Give me a job as a promoter in a club and I bet I'd kill it. These serious jobs where you are expected to look a certain way don't do it for me. And because I'm a Dr everyone will expect me to know everything!

"So I won't see you till weekend hunn?" I sulk.

He's flying to Joburg this afternoon then to Zambia. I miss him already and he hasn't even left yet!

"I'm taking you to campus. It's your first day and I wouldn't miss it for the world", he says.

I think he means he will drop me off at the university and then go his way. That will leave me without a car to get back home though but it's fine I'll make a plan. That's what I thought until we make it to campus. I make it up the steps, down the corridor, past my old lab. I back step a bit and peak into the lab. Memories flood my brain and I feel so down. This lab was my home for years and Bunke, Brain and Ndivhu were my family. I miss them so much I feel a lump in my throat. I wonder how Ndivhu is doing. He doesn't respond to my emails and his number doesn't go through. I miss them so much. Anyway, chin up princess, or the crown falls.

"Baby", Elik's voice comes from behind me. I turn around.

“I thought you left already”.

“You forgot your lunch!” he hands me the lunchbox he made me.

“Thanks baby”.

“Come, let’s go”.

“Go where?” I ask, feeling a bit confused.

“To Prof. You need to talk to him, no?”

“No Elik!”

I will not be known as the lecturer who came with her fiancé on her first day! He takes my hand and leads me down the corridor. Everything here is so familiar. This was my home. I belonged here. Prof’s door is open and Elik just drags me in and offers me a chair! Prof just looks at him over his glasses. Oh Elik! What will I ever do with you my love? Sigh. Prof used to be like a father to me until my engaged to a married man saga. His attitude towards me changed. He tried to hide it but I could see it. I can see it right now in his eyes. He doesn’t like Elik at all. Elik knows that but he doesn’t give a rat’s ass about it. I greet Prof and shake his hand. He thanks me for coming through for the Department. He says he didn’t know what to do about the students not learning and he didn’t want SRC on his neck.

“So you’ll take over Dr Nanda’s workload and a few other things around the Department”. I nod cheerfully. I’m excited and trying to be positive. Today I become an adult! Let’s see how this whole adulting thing feels like. He does something on his laptop then looks up at me.

“I’ll put these notes, guides and practical manuals in a flash drive for you. So, your main subject will be Eng Tech 2, there are 101 students there. You will also take Chemical Process Industries 2, there are fewer students there, I think 95. And I’ll ask that on Fridays you teach Research Methodology to the S6 students. There’s just 50 of them”, he says.

That sounds like a lot of work but positivity Fierce!

“Of course you’ll help with invigilation on Mondays like other lecturers, and the practical component of Eng Tech is yours obviously and Friday meetings are compulsory”.

I don’t know if I’m ready. I’m being thrown into the deep end! I’ll drown!

“And Lastborn. Do you think we can finish that insect protein project we started on with Bunke last year? You can work on it for about 3 hours a day in your spare time”.

I nod slowly. I don’t know really. I don’t think I can do this. But my

upbringing taught me not to be rude to my elders and I still don't know where to draw the line between being disrespectful and just voicing my concerns. I won't cope with this work. By week two I'll be crumbling but I don't know how to tell this man.

"Wait, wait Prof. Hold up", Elik says.

He's been quiet this whole time. Can he just stay quiet, please. Prof said we almost done. He better not say anything to embarrass me!

"She's not going to do all that!" he says.

I look at him. He said I should get a job. I got a job and now he's sabotaging me?

"What do you mean Prof Nkrumah?" Prof says.

Elik takes out his phone and does stuff as we wait.

"Yes here. Her contract. It says: *'The University appoints Dr. Lastborn F. Nkomo as Lecturer (Grade 8.) of the subject Engineering Technology 2, reporting to the Head of Department: Chemical Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering'* . That's the only module stated here and here's your signature Prof! So I'm sorry but you're not going to make her teach all those extra subjects and work on your personal work!"

Prof looks at Elik visibly annoyed. I mean I had already agreed and then Elik spoils his plan.

The day I received the contract, Elik went through it to see if I was being given fair working conditions and to see if the salary befitted the workload. He said it's easy for junior academics to get bullied by seniors. He said he learnt the hard way and found himself underpaid yet drowning in work. As such, he's determined to make my path smoother. He says he'll not let me go through the same.

"If Dr Lastborn is up to it. Who are you to say she won't do it?" the older Prof asks.

"It's not about who I am. You can Google me if you want to know who I am! This is about what's right and what's on the contract. My wife is going to teach Eng Tech 2 only", Elik says.

Prof's eyes thin and close a little. If he could, I think he would throw Elik out of his office right now.

"But the students. They don't have a lecturer to teach them the other subjects I mentioned. They will fail", Prof says.

"Ey Prof, that's sad but unfortunately it's not my wife's problem. She's not here as a philanthropist. She's a qualified Engineer and you will treat

her like one. You will abide by the contract”, Elik says. *Wife?*

The silence that follows is too loud for my liking. Deep down I’m glad Elik spoke up for me because on my own I’ll have said yes to everything and then worked myself into a breakdown. Prof tries to reason with Elik but no he’s not budging. He says contracts were designed for situations like this where experienced people take care of the naive fresh graduate!

“The students will be writing FISA (Finals) next month. Each student submits on average 3 scripts for 1 exam. So do you realise that she’ll end up sitting with more than 500 scripts? That you’ll demand she marks in 2 weeks for Re-Evaluation purposes? How will she manage that? And she’s on a junior salary, so no Prof, slavery is an ugly thing!”

He’s right. I hadn’t thought that far. I was going to die from marking! I’m just quiet. It’s like I brought my parent to the headmaster. It’s eventually agreed that I’ll teach the one subject stated on my contract. What a huge relief! Prof says there’s a shortage of offices and I don’t question. He’s probably just upset and is trying to punish me by not giving me an office. I don’t care. This to me is a job not a career. I’m not here to stay. I volunteer to sit in my old lab. He says there’s new occupants and I say no problemo, I get along alright with people from most walks of life.

My class is at 10 and by 9:45 I’m almost having an anxiety attack. Elik is still here and I’m thankful that he is. The older lecturers just say hurried hellos and welcomes as they pass us in the corridor. I know they are expecting me to go office by office greeting them. Not happening! Elik says he will walk me down to the lecture theatre and leave me by the door. I nod. Elik Nkrumah! They don’t make them like him anymore. He’s a special breed, crafted just to be understood by me. He’s so precious I don’t know whether to laugh or be embarrassed or to cry or to run away! I’m still not fine by the time we make it to the lecture theatre and just hearing the noise of the students inside makes my stomach hollow. I’m terrified. I used to sit in here for Engineering Technology 2 back in the day when I was second year.

He walks into the lecture theatre before I can even stop him and the students fall silent. Wow! How did he do that? I stand by the door for like 5 minutes still trying to calm my breath. I take a deep breath and walk in. He’s already made himself at home and jumped on a desk at the front and is sitting facing the class, dangling his feet. He tells a joke and the class laughs. Not good! He’s charming them then they will love him, then when

they discover I'm their lecturer and he's not they might not be so happy! He's dimming my shine! He's already talking to them and there are already a couple of hands up. How is he doing that? I need that skill right now.

"Oh, here she is, your new lecturer, Dr Nkrumah, my wife", he says when I walk in.

Did he have a dream of us married? Today I'm being called wife and now I'm Dr. Nkrumah!

"She's flames isn't she?" he flashes me that beautiful smile and gives me that eye that's responsible for most of my bad decisions.

"Yes", the class erupts.

"That's why I had to have her from the day I met her", he says.

What's he doing?

I put down my laptop bag and sigh. I take the bunch of keys out and open the boom box so I can take out the microphone. My palms are sweating and I think I'm shaking. I'm just hoping it isn't showing. Elik is on the whiteboard and he and the class are rating me! They don't even know me! They give me a 10 for first impressions, a 10 for my hair, 10 for dress code and a 5 for being too serious! They are all just having fun at my expense.

"Ya, but boys, that's my wife right here so don't get any ideas! I've killed people for less".

The guys make a sulking sound. And students are students! They are so taken with Elik.

"Any questions?"

Seriously? And these students actually raise their hands.

"Does she have a sister?" one guy asks and they laugh.

"She has sisters. I'll hook you up if you behave in her class".

"Are you going to be teaching us Sir?" one student asks.

"No I won't. But my half will teach you and she's 10 times better than me with these things".

There are still hands! I hope those hands will still come up when I start lecturing!

I take the microphone and speak. Playtime is over.

"Good morning class. My name is Fierce. Dr Lastborn Fierce. I mean, my name is...". I can't do this. I don't even know my name now?

"Here's her name", Elik writes on the whiteboard. '*Dr Fierce Nkrumah*'
!

A hand shoots up at the front. Oh dear! Those front row students who just ask questions unnecessarily. I'm glad Elik took the attention away from me. At least now I can breathe and calm down with students focusing on him.

"But we were told that our lecturer will be Dr Lastborn Nkomo", she says.

I quickly jump in because I can see that Elik won't say anything nice to this student.

"Yes. You were told right. I'm Dr Lastborn Fierce Nkomo", I say.

I take a white board marker and walk to where Elik is. I rub off the Nkrumah and write Nkomo. Elik rubs off the Nkomo and writes Nkrumah. I erase and write Nkomo. He sighs and says fine. He puts a hyphen and leaves it as '*Dr Fierce Nkomo-Nkrumah*'.

"I hate you. I'll get you for this", I whisper facing away from the class.

"I love you too my cupcake", he says back.

That might have been fine but I have a microphone so the whole class got that. I'm failing my first day dismally and Elik keeps saving me every time I do something off. So the 'woooo's that come at us make me so shy. And these students, I don't know why they are so excited! I hope these girls ain't eyeing him! I can share with anyone else but not with students in my class. I try to tell the class what we will look at today but I stutter so bad, I almost breakdown to tears.

"Sorry class, it's just that her dog died yesterday and she's had him for 5 years. So ya, she's not in a good space today, please bear with her", he gives me a hug. The students mutter 'sorries' and 'awwws'. He switches off the microphone and whispers.

"You're doing great. Just breathe", he says.

I'm trying!

"Let's give Dr Nkomo a warm welcome. And then let's introduce ourselves, first name and surname, starting at the door", he says.

The class claps and claps. For university students they are extremely nice! My class back in second year would have just folded their hands and ignored him. He goes and connects my laptop to the projector and opens up my slides.

As I wait on Elik I scan the classroom. I spot a guy I did my undergraduate with. He failed and failed and failed and he's still doing second year? Why hasn't he been excluded? Oh wow! I spot a hot guy by

the far side sitting alone, with a beanie on and glued on his phone. Ok maybe hot is not a good word but he has a striking bone structure that caught my eye. I wonder what he looks like when standing. And you know the universe has a way of answering unasked questions! My eyes are glued on him and his phone rings and he gets up and walks out of class. Damn papi! Fuckboy alert! Shame on me for looking at a student like that! This is going to be fun.

Elik is done setting up for me and has adjusted the volume of the microphone. He walks to the back of the lecture theatre and sits there. The students start introducing themselves. Ya Xhosa surnames will have you questioning if you really of Nguni origin! And there's the Afrikaans names as well! I don't think I'll remember any of these names anytime soon. I just know Xabiso because he was in my class in first year and I don't think I'll forget the hottie in the beanie. He pronounced his name so beautifully. Ongowam Maqaqasi.

Elik sits through my lecture and I have to say I feel so much better with him around. He has this way of making me feel safe. I'm tired of talking by the end of the first period. I have another hour to go! Again, Elik comes to my rescue. He comes to the front and says, "How about we stop here for today and let Dr Fierce go and mourn her dog?"

The class excitedly says yes. If there's anything students really like, it's free periods! As Elik packs my laptop and books away, a few students come by to introduce themselves and to offer their condolences for my 'dog'. I hope none of these students run to Prof and tell him how I made the class into a circus.

"I'm proud of you", he says after class when I walk him to the car.

"Thanks baby". This is me taking baby steps towards adulting. I'll probably hate every second of it but at least my man will be proud of me and in his own way, he'll support me. I might just love it, who knows, teaching the likes of abo Ongowam!

"Those kids will love you. You did great today", he assures me.

"Because you were there", I give him a hug.

He leans down and gives me a kiss.

"I love you Fierce. And I'm so proud of you", he takes another kiss.

I hear 'woooo' and I turn around and come face to face with a group of faces I saw in class. I'm doing great, ain't I? The image of me I'm giving these kids is *'I'm not serious!'*

“Bye Dr Nkrumah and Sir!” they giggle as they walk by.

Elik doesn't see anything wrong, as always. He says “Bye” back.

“Kofi will come and fetch you after school”, he says.

I give him a hug. I want him to stay with me.

As he drives off I feel sad. Most times I'm unaware just how dependent on him I am. It's like without him my little heart refuses to go on. It's like a part of me lives inside of him.

I'm convinced there are ten times more men than women in the world. Today all the people I interacted with for over a minute at a time were men! These creatures are everywhere! Isn't it bad enough that I already live in a testosterone dominated kingdom? I have to suffer men at the university as well! Even my boss is a man! I make my way into my old lab. I find two guys in there and thankfully none is sitting on my old desk! I introduce myself and they introduce themselves. They are postdocs. Meli and Judas, are their names. Their names are all I need to know right now. I'm not here to make friends. Thinking of Bunke and Ndivhu and Brain is killing me and I won't form the same attachment with these guys. I gotta guard my heart. They won't stop chatting me up and they are asking me too many questions!

I call Elik and complain about my new lab mates and he says I should ignore them and focus on my focus and on missing him. He's right. My focus right now is on this job and on my projects. Right now, Elik is my project and I plan on doing that project with excellence. We have a wedding coming up and I have done nothing at all.

“Think if I send this song to Lumka he'll like it?” Elik texts me and the next message is an attachment of an audio.

“I don't have earphones, I'll listen later”, I text back.

I forgot my earphones. I don't function well without music. On days like these I need Akon to motivate me and tell me everything will be alright. Without music I get stuck with my thoughts and they get ugly pretty fast.

I have a lot of notes to go through and my class is writing a test on Wednesday and a practical exam on Thursday. I need to go through the class's progress marks to see the current pass rate so I know how easy or difficult to make the upcoming test. And since I'm back in my lab, I need to decide which projects to pick up. I haven't published in a while. And in the academic field, it's either you publish or you perish. I guess I'll be here till late then. Might as well have my lunch now, I'll need the energy boost. I

smile as I meet the inside of my lunchbox. It's nothing special but it's very special to me because it's a gift of love. It's a peanut butter sandwich, just the way I like it. He cut it into four triangles shame, my baby! And when did he get so soft? He put a note in here. I smile even before opening it.

It reads: *'I wasn't sure whether to cut your sandwich at a 22.5 or 45 or 90 degree angle. I finally decided to cut it like this, you know why? Because, the hypotenuse length of each triangle will maximise your tongue-to-peanut butter contact area and I know my nana loves her peanut butter. Besides, the small corners will be a perfect grab-zone for your little hands.*

Always.

E.N' .

I'm literally giggling like a little school girl. That's a lot of thought he put into slices of bread! Oh, another one! Elik's love is raining on me mos today!

This one says: *'I honestly can't wait for you to be my wife! You are the only thing I've ever done right. Love you my sexy thing.*

E.N' .

My perverted mind laughs at the done right part! When did he write these? I text him a thank you with so many heart faces. I turn around and these guys here have earphones on so I can play my music out loud I suppose.

It's almost 7 pm and I'm still here. I haven't even gone through a tenth of the work. The Department is deserted already. I'm sure I'm the only person left. My phone rings and it's Kofi saying he's outside. He says he's been waiting for my call all afternoon so he decided to just show up and take me. I say I'll be down in a minute. I forget about him and keep plotting this pass rate graph. My phone beeps.

Kofi: Dude, it's been 20 mins now!

Fierce: Sorry boo. I'll be down in 5.

Kofi: Hurry up

Fierce: Packing up

Kofi: My friends and I are going to this new joint in Loop Street. You in?

Fierce: I've got a job now Kofi! I can't party on a weekday

Kofi: Your loss.

But I'm so tempted to go out though! After today I could really let my hair down. I check my timetable and yay! No class for me tomorrow. Great! So I can go out tonight after all! Do I have to come to campus if I don't

have classes? I need to check my contract again. If Elik hadn't fought that anti-slavery battle for me I would have classes every day! I wouldn't cope, he was right. He really cares about me, doesn't he?

Fierce: *Count me in*

Kofi: *Count you in where?*

Fierce: *The going out, Dumbass!*

Kofi: *Oh that! Thought you said you have a job?*

Fierce: *Kofi!*

Fierce: *Easy Sunshine. Chill! We're going out!*

Fierce: *I'm coming down, we need to go home first and have dinner with the kids then read them a story then put them to bed then we can go out.*

Kofi: *Yes mum!*

I pack up and grab my bag and go down. I say hi and bye to the security guard on my way out.

Twenty-Four

It's midnight and we are somewhere in a club in Loop Street. Don't people have jobs or school or something? It's a weekday but it's so packed! Then there's those on their phones or who are just sitting down looking gloomy. What are they doing in a club? I'm with Kofi and three of his friends and we are blowing Elik's money like there's no tomorrow. If he complains, I'll just tell him I'll pay him back on payday! I'm making my own coins now! Kofi will be going back to Germany end of next week so I plan to turn up with him as much as I can. He loved me enough to come down for my graduation, so the least I can do is turn up with him like the old days. We used to annoy Elik yeerrr! And I'd come home tipsy and horny. Ok he liked that last part because nothing was off limits!

'Leg over Remix - Mr Eezi' comes on and I scream "My jam y'all!"

It's not mine, it's Elik's. But me + Elik = 1. Quick Maths.

I grab Kofi by the arm and drag him to the dance floor. One thing I like about partying with Kofi is that he dances with me. And this boy can dance! He's fluid, he just flows shame. It looks so natural. He has this relaxed way of dancing that just looks effortless. Elik doesn't dance. He just sits there and watches me dance for him. It's not a problem but having someone dance with you is better. The lyrics plus the way my dress has ridden up my thighs and the way I'm grinding on Kofi would have one think we are an item. And he's holding me by the waist as I bend over (The song suggested I do that!). Watching Jamaican twerk videos has taught me life. This slow whine and twerk brings my ratchetness alive. I don't think you are supposed to dance like this with your brother in law but that 4th Strawberry daiquiri had my mind spinning round and round.

As French Montana starts off, the freak in me has been unleashed by the time we get to the chorus and I'm dancing like I'm auditioning for a Vybz Kartel music video. And as I drop it low slowly and bring it back up, my bum bum is all up in Kofi and his hands are on my inner thighs and we just flowing. As we dance the movement keeps his hands sliding up and up. We have this rhythm and we just go. I'm so in love with the way this boy dances! When Mr Eezi hits us with his part, it's game over. It's just the two of us on the dance floor and it's like we don't care who's watching. We feeling this song deep in our veins. Kofi turns me around and his hands go

around my waist and mine go up around his neck. He sings along, his rum and redbull breath on my face. This boy has so much rhythm, and his dancing face is heaven.

I don't think Elik would approve of his brother holding his girl like this and singing to her Ty Dollar's part of '*Leg over*'. But as Kofi serenades me and his hands move so effortlessly with my waist, I can't stop smiling and watching his face. Does alcohol make one high? Because I think I'm high! It's just words anyway, Kofi has no idea what he's singing about! He maintains eye contact as he sings to me and I just smile up at him like a love-struck teenager. We just keep dancing. I pull his neck down so I can peck him on the cheek. Our lips brush in the process because we both moved our heads in the same direction. We laugh. We are young and dumb and drunk.

I'm a lot drunk and Kofi handles his alcohol better than me, clearly. I tell him maybe it's time to go home. His friends say the night is still young. I know they don't want to see their wallet for the night go. So since I'm the generous queen, I tell them to order up all they want so I can pay and Kofi and I can leave. I feel very drowsy so I sit on the couch and throw my legs over Kofi and snuggle up. My hands are around him and my head is resting just near his neck. He wraps one arm around me and pulls my dress down with the other hand. The dress is too short and I'm seated so it barely moves so he places his hand at the gap between thigh and dress so his friend on the opposite side doesn't see through.

"Hey, don't sleep. We'll go home just now", he says.

"Two minutes boo, please". I'm getting a headache.

"Want another drink?" he gently forces my eyes open with his fingers. I hate it when he does that! But I'm too drowsy to fight him.

"No I don't want".

"Ok then, rest. I'll take you home just now".

He pulls his jacket, which he had dumped on the couch at dance time and covers me with it. I just cosy up and close my eyes.

"So Kofi, you said this girl is your brother's fiancé?" his one friend says.

"Yup. They've been together for years".

"What's she to you?" friend asks.

"My brother's wife! Watchu mean?"

"Never dated or nothing?" friend asks.

Kofi laughs a little. “Never!”

“Could have fooled me with the way you two were all up in each other”, friend says.

“She’s my best friend man and we just love dancing together”, he readjusts his jacket so it covers more of me.

I’m his best friend? I didn’t know! It’s good to know. Elik says I’m his best friend though and I think Lumka once said I’m his other best friend. So I guess the four of us are best friends then?

“And you’ve never smashed? If I was you I’d have smashed that a long time ago”, friend says.

“Thank God I’m not you then. You don’t know my brother! He’d cut off my balls and make me eat them! I’d be six feet under”.

“Besides, no man, she’s not like that. She’s loyal to my brother. I respect her a lot”, he covers me some more with his jacket and pulls me closer to him.

I smile in my head. Do they think I immediately fell asleep? That annoying,

“You can’t sleep here!” from a bouncer comes and I’m forced to sit up.

“Let’s go home boo, I’m sleepy now”.

“I want one more dance. Just one and we leave, I promise”, Kofi says.

He runs off to the DJ and requests for *‘Leg Over’*. I guess he really loves the song, just like his brother. He comes back for me and we hit the dance floor. He dances behind me and I just feel the song. My head feels so light but when he pulls me back by the waist and my bum bum nestles into his groin, I fall into tune. I move, I grind, I step. These kinds of dances are my thing and he knows it.

Elik would have a heart attack if he walked in here. Our bodies are so close to each other, and his hands just keep roaming. We’re moving as one. We’re drunk! This boy is just into singing looking into my eyes today! I have a thing for eyes and I compare every pair to Elik’s. Kofi’s eyes are gentle and pure. They are innocent. Their penetrating brown makes them seem like they have autumn leaves falling in the backdrop. He twirls me around and grabs me. I don’t think he meant to grab me by the bum because he quickly moves his hands away. He brings his hands to my face, cupping my cheeks. I just move with him slowly, my hands around his. I smile up at him as he sings that pidgin!

Now it’s me wanting another dance but he says it’s time to go. The way

these Nkrumah men can be commanding! I don't remember leaving the club. I just remember laughing all the way home. In my right mind I wouldn't have allowed Kofi to drive. But my brain cells are in a coma right now, drowning in alcohol. We get home alright though and he helps me out of the car and it's a miracle really that I'm still standing on heels! I think we skipped several red lights and went over a hump at full speed!

Mental note : Use a cab if I'm planning to get sloshed! Kofi takes off my heels and helps me stand and pulls my dress down. He balances me as we walk into the house and tells me to be quiet so I don't wake the kids up. I just keep laughing and almost falling over. I get the door and I feel so much better now.

"Elik", I say.

"No. Kofi", he says.

I laugh as I fall on him. It feels so wrong and yet so right. It feels so different. Like I'm coming home but to a different address. Like I'm right here but not exactly. I'm not screaming, I'm just whimpering and my demons are wide awake and my angels are crying for my soul. My eyes won't stay open for long but I feel everything. I'm reaching a familiar high just taking a different path. It's different. Different good. St Jude, why have you forsaken me? We are so dead!

I reach my high but it's way too different. I took a whole different path and I got lost. I didn't even get to heaven, just got stuck in purgatory. It felt good but as I come down to my low, something's missing. A lot is missing actually. I'm not panting, I'm not screaming, my legs are not shaking, my brow is dry. There's no hand resting on my stomach. The heat I often feel in my womb is missing. There's no endless kisses and heavy breath down my neck. So much is missing. If I just sinned with Kofi, then this was a waste of sin! Now Elik is going to murder me for nothing.

Elik. That thought has me having a panic attack, not the expression no, a real attack. My thoughts are accelerating and are all screaming in my head, each wanting to be heard. I can't do that to Elik. Especially not today. He's been so good to me and he prides himself on having a faithful girl, loyal to the end. Now to turn around and bang his brother? Oh please no. It can't. I love him. I can't have done this to him.

I'm having a brain seizure and failing to join pieces of my memory together. The pieces are flying past my brain so loudly, talking over each other, each demanding attention. My head is banging so hard, I have to hold

it in my hands. Kofi is here. I'm here in his room. On his bed. On him. What am I doing on top of him? I open my eyes wide and the bright light hits me so harshly I slam them back shut. Oh shit! What happened? What did I do? Did we just? With Kofi? My boo, my dude, my bro, my day 1? No man. I'm going to start a petition to have alcohol banned! Elik. No matter how far they wander, all my thoughts return to Elik. I see his dark face with that scar over his eye in my head. I see those eyes. The way he looks at me after he's made me cry all day and has made *'I'm sorry'* love to me. The way he looks up at me when he's been crying. The way he looks at me each time he thinks I'll leave him but I give him a big hug instead and cry on his shoulder. Those eyes come to me and my heart threatens to stop beating. How will I look into those eyes and explain how I gave leg over to his little brother? Drunk or not, no excuse is good enough.

Elik. After this he'll be all alone in the world and will dive right back into drinking and sexing and probably run his company into the ground. He already thinks Lumka is fake AF meaning Kofi and I are the only people he fully trusts. Then we do this? I'm still lying on top of Kofi and I raise my head so I can look down at him.

"Please tell me we didn't.....". I meant to speak out loud but I'm not even sure he heard me. I can't even say the words right now. Oh Lord, we are so dead! I should have signed up for that Hollard funeral plan they advertise every five minutes on TV! Elik is going to chop us up into pieces and put us in a black bag and throw us in a river.

Maybe now will be the right time to start praying to Santa Muerte (St. Death) the saint of death. She's been said to help those who are too shy to ask God for help. It's kinda awkward to ask God to save you from some situations you know, like the one I'm in now. Yet a higher power is still needed. St. Death has been said to be non-judgemental and accepts you as you are. But she's also been said to be a demon and the Church doesn't recognise her so maybe I shouldn't pray to her. I have enough demons as is, so no need to invite any more. Legion is not my goals.

"Fierce, breathe!" I can hear Kofi's voice.

I think he moves me off him. I'm not sure. It's like I'm frozen, trapped inside my own body.

"Kofi?" my voice comes out as a small whisper.

What's happening to me? I feel like I'm drowning. Blood is pounding in my ears. I'm struggling to breathe. My stomach is churning and I feel like

death. I'm scared. Elik's face keeps flashing in my head. I can't be the end of us. I can't. I'm terrified. I can't breathe.

"It's ok, I'm right here. Please, breathe", he says.

"We are so dead!" I say.

What's he saying? Talking about it's ok! Ok is here and we are over there, very far from it! We are as good as dead. I feel fear grab a hold of my heart and twist. That pang of regret takes over and my heart palpitates so hard I can hear it drumming against my chest. All my emotions are heightened. I need to get to my phone and call Elik right now and tell him everything. Maybe if I just come clean he'll forgive me. He said he'd forgive me for anything. Let's find out if he meant it.

My thoughts are still racing. I want them to stop so I can breathe. But they seem to be picking up the pace. I'm trembling as Kofi helps me sit up. My nasal passage feels constricted and I feel like I'll black out any second now. I try to stand and I almost fall off my feet. Kofi balances me and keeps telling me to breathe.

"I'm calling an ambulance", he says.

"Elik", I say.

He shouldn't call an ambulance, he should call Elik and tell him what just happened. The room spins and the walls look like they are closing in on me. I can't breathe. I balance on the bed and sit down on the floor. I feel so sick. I want to hold on to Kofi but he seems so far away, too far away. I need my phone. Who to call? Yes, Elik. And say what? He's as good as gone from me. He won't forgive this. I won't forgive myself for this. Elik is gone. My thoughts are still banging against my skull and the lights are too bright. Kofi is pacing and is on the phone. His voice is too loud, I cower and cover my ears.

"Lights", I whisper.

He understands and switches off the lights. Blackness. That's much better. I need Elik. The room is still spinning, faster now. I lie down and hug my knees in foetal position. Kofi is kneeling next to me now, feeling my forehead with his backhand and begging me not to die on him.

"Fierce", he says.

It's like a hurricane is building inside me. Like my brain is running a marathon at the Olympics. All except my body feels paralysed so all the chaos inside me stays contained. All the energy remains unreleased and is now flowing through my veins causing havoc inside me. I hug my knees

tighter and try to rock and hum away the voices in my head. I need to tell Kofi to call Elik. He keeps asking what's wrong. How can he not know? He's wrong. I'm wrong. We are wrong! Elik, the thought of him triggered this attack. I try to explain to Kofi but the chaos in my brain is fragmenting my sentences and my words come out missing. My thoughts keep jumping from here to there, not making much sense at all.

"Elik... Kofi... I can't... I'm his only... I'm wrong... sorry... the club... alcohol... Elik", I rush through the words. I need to be heard. I don't know how much time I have because I really feel like I'm dying. I'm breathing wrong, gasping for oxygen like there's not enough in the room.

I hear Kofi say something but the voices in my head are too loud so I can't make out what he's saying. He keeps talking though until his voice finds a window and I catch what he's saying.

"I need you to calm down. Please Sunshine, do this for me. The ambulance is on its way. Please don't die on me bro", Kofi says.

"Should I call Elik?" he asks, dialling. I shake my head no, vigorously. I'll be the one to tell Elik, not him. I try to direct my mind to meditation but it blatantly refuses.

He sits by my head and pulls me to his lap. He keeps stroking my back and begging me to stay with him. I want to stay. I just don't know how. I don't know what's happening to me. I'm trying to replay what just happened between us but my mind returns blank. I can't remember.

"Make it stop boo please. We need to leave", I beg him, tears flowing out of my face. I need us to leave. To go far away from this situation. It's enough now. He just strokes my back and holds my head in his lap. I just want it to stop.

"They are here". He gently places my head on the floor and runs out. People rush to me and I hear so many voices. I cover my ears with my arms and fold myself some more. I think Kofi tells them everything. I'm lifted and made to lie on the bed. Why are they not rushing me to the ICU?

"Hello. Can you hear me?" an unfamiliar male voice says.

"Yes", I respond.

"You are alright. Just keep breathing. It's just a false alarm. Nothing is happening to you. Your body is fighting but there's no fight here. You are safe".

"She needs a familiar voice. Tell her you are here and tell her where she is", the voice says.

“Sunshine. I’m here. It’s Kofi, I’m right here. You are in my room and you are safe. Please bro”, he snuffles.

Is he crying? He came back extra nice from Germany this time. He calls me all sorts of nice things and lately I’m Sunshine and I love it.

“Get her a wet towel”, the first voice says.

“Breathe. You are safe. Try and open your eyes”, the voice says.

I clench my teeth hard and it’s like I can hear Mel in my head saying “Breathe Fierce”.

I take a deep gulp of air and another and another. My eyes open slowly and the first face I see is Kofi’s. He’s kneeling near the bed with a towel on my brow.

“Kofi”, I whisper and my hand holds on to his wrist. My lips feel so dry.

“I’m here. You scared the hell out of me. Never do that again!” he says.

“What happened?”

It’s like I’ve forgotten how to use my voice. My throat is dry. Kofi looks up, over his shoulder at the paramedic. There’s a second paramedic with him. I don’t know why that one is here because he’s just standing there looking lost.

“You had a panic attack. It’s completely normal. Something must have triggered it. Fear perhaps? Anxiety. A painful memory. Did anything like that happen?” the paramedic asks.

“Fear”, I say.

They all look at me with ‘explain’ eyes.

“Elik. I hurt Elik”.

My throat starts constricting again. They help me sit up and Kofi goes out and returns with a bottle of still water.

“Breathe”, he says.

I’m trying. I never knew breathing could be so hard! As Kofi hands me the water, I stare at him. Why is he still dressed? I reach for his T-shirt and lift it up. His belt is still intact. So he did me, then dressed up? What? Or did he dress up when I was on the floor busy dying? I lift my dress a little. I don’t care that there’s three men here. Underwear is there. I put a pillow over my lap and put my hand under my dress. It’s a bit wet. So we really did the deed? Then he put my panties back on? I’m confused now. I think. I thought. I don’t know what I thought. I slouch on the bed and sigh deeply as I open the bottle. Breathing is such a mission.

You know what. Let me get straight to the point. What’s the worst that

could happen? I mean this is just Kofi and we just slept together, surely nothing I say right now will shock him. It doesn't matter anymore. I'm a whore mos. I have three men in my life and I've slept with two and made up with the third.

"Kofi".

My voice is getting better now.

"Yes. I'm here", he takes my hands.

The three of them huddle around me like I'm an alien that just fell out of space.

"Did we, did we do it?" I ask.

He looks at me and laughs. I'm even more confused. Was my sex so bad it's funny?

"Dude! For real?" he says.

"Ya for real! Did we?" I really need to know. And no, it's not funny!

"No. No ways! Do I look like I'll look good dead? You know Elik!"

I want to be relieved but what I want to know more, is what happened. "But... but...", I stutter.

Yes Mr Paramedics I saw the look you two just exchanged!

"Dude, you mean to tell me you're so terrified of losing Elik you had a whole panic attack because you thought you'd cheated on him? Wow! Elik is goals bro! Damn!"

I look down. I want to laugh but I don't feel so good. The paramedics explain to us what to do next time I have a panic attack. This was my first real one and it just happened. They say I have to pay the ambulance fee either with medical aid or with a bank card. I can't do that. I'm Elik's beneficiary on his medical aid and the card I use is his, I have no idea what happened to mine. It has coins anyway so I never really needed it.

"How much is it?" I ask.

"I have to go to the car and make a call, then I'll have an amount for you", he says.

"Just a rough estimate. You know these things. How much do you think it will cost?"

"Anything between a thousand and R2000".

"Is it necessary to do the whole Medical Aid thing? Can't I pay cash?"

"No ma'am, I'm sorry but we are not allowed to accept cash".

"I see. How about I give each of you R5000 cash. Will that make you allowed to accept cash?"

I'd rather use the cash Elik left than leave a trail of evidence! He calls it '*emergency cash*' and this is an emergency. They look at each other and they agree. Elik taught me well when it comes to paying up. I make it to my room and return with two stacks and hand each of the guys one. I thank them and they assure me it's nothing serious and I should drink water and sleep and I will be alright when I wake up.

Kofi is sitting on his bed. He moves back until his back is resting against the pillows.

"Come sit".

I sit in between his legs and snuggle up. He pulls the comforter over us, up to the knees.

"What happened?"

I'm not crazy. I know it when I orgasm and I remember orgasming!

"You jumped me", he says.

"Huh? I raped you?" I feel another panic attack building up.

"No, no, relax. Nothing like that".

Phew! But can he talk already!

"We got here and you know you were sloshed. You're so strong, damn! You kept saying 'Elik, Elik' and trying to rape my lips".

"What?" I don't understand.

"So I jumped you and we had sex?"

I look back at him over my shoulder. What am I gonna do!

"Chill. I'd never do that to you, you know that. We didn't have sex!"

Phew! Phew! Phew!

So what happened? Although my memory is hazy I remember feeling things and feeling good and I'm a little wet so definitely something happened. I actually remember coming. So he can't now try to say it's nothing. I'm not crazy!

"What happened?" I ask.

"We didn't fuck. So can you relax now and let me talk?" he says.

He pulls me closer back into him. I roll my eyes.

"Tell me! Did you, did you finger me? Did you muff me? Mango me? What?"

"No, dude! Eewww! I didn't touch you like that. I promise".

"So what the fuck happened? Tell already!" I raise my voice.

He holds me close. I know the way we cuddle is unnatural but it's never meant anything beyond innocent love and friendship.

“Fine. I’ll tell you. Don’t feel bad hey. I swear I’ll never repeat this to anyone and we’ll sleep and pretend it never happened. And this whole ambulance thing, never happened. Ok?”

I nod and swallow. I pass him my palm over my shoulder and we do our signature handshake.

I’m no longer that drunk. When I opened my eyes, Elik’s face flashed through my mind and I instantly became sober. Alcohol is such a coward shame! The moment the panic attack took over, it evaporated. Gone. Leaving me sober!

“You rode my knee”, he says.

“I did what?”

“You, umm, you kept trying to climb me and saying ‘Elik’. I tried telling you that it’s me. I held you back though. But you so strong! What are they teaching you in yoga class!” he laughs.

“Come on boo, please”.

Can he be serious. I want to hear about this me and his knee having sex.

“Ya so you just started grinding on my knee and calling out Elik’s name until you umm, finished?”

Question? Statement? I don’t know. All I know is I’m flushing red. OMG! Say what now? I had sex with his knee?

“And you didn’t stop me because?”

“I tried but hay girl you were on a mission!” he snickers a little.

“So what did you do?” I’m not even sure I want to know.

“What could I have done? I just hugged you and let you abuse my knee. I couldn’t get you off me. I tried!”

This is so embarrassing! I did what?? I dry humped his knee and came all over it calling his brother’s name? That’s some major mess up. I never cease to amaze myself.

“I’m sorry Kofi”.

I’m embarrassed. Can he open a case of rape against me? Or is it assault since I assaulted his knee. I snap my eyes shut. I will not imagine what I was doing or what movements I was doing or whatever sounds I was making. It’s too humiliating.

“Fierce. I’ve known you for the longest. You’re a good girl. And dude, come on, you put up with my brother so really, don’t be so hard on yourself”.

I feel terrible. A tear wells in my eye and I blink it back.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s so embarrassing”, I whisper.

“Come on. Don’t cry now. It’s me... You’re worried Elik will hear about this, ain’t you?”

I nod and sniff some more.

“Don’t worry. He won’t. No one will. And to be fair you didn’t do anything really, so don’t cry”.

He wraps his arms tightly around me and buries his face in the back of my neck. Sniff. Sniff.

“Fierce. You know I care a lot about you and you are my best friend. You are the best thing that’s ever happened to us. If we didn’t have you, Elik and I would’ve never survived after finding out we were not related. You kept us together and you made him forgive me. For that I’m eternally grateful. Besides, dude, you literally anchor Elik! And I’m grateful for that. I would never do anything to hurt Elik, you know that, so relax. I have your best interest at heart. I love you man”.

Sniff. Sniff.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. So what if you got drunk and attacked me? At least it’s me right? And like I said, we’ll never speak of it”.

“My poor knee though! I need knee replacement surgery!” he laughs. I giggle too. Oh Kofi! He’s so kind. Does he have to go back to Germany?

Kofi’s phone rings and he reaches into his pocket and moves me away so he can sit better and he answers. I just hear his side.

“No El, it’s not like that”.

“She said she didn’t have class tomorrow”.

“I’m sorry I didn’t know”.

“I’m sorry Elik. I didn’t mislead her!”

“She’s drunk yes, but she’s ok. I think she’s sleeping now”.

“It will never happen again, I promise”.

“Right away. I’ll go make sure she’s in bed, right away”.

“I think her phone is on silent or something”.

“Ok hold. I’ll get her just now”.

He then walks out of the room and 10 seconds later knocks on his door then opens. I’m giggling over here. Kofi!

“Fierce. Wake up. Your man wants to talk to you... Sorry to wake you”. He hands me the phone and silently says, “He’s upset!”

I make a yawning sound into the mouthpiece. We could pull off those

high school dramas, I think. As soon as I say my feigned sleepy “Hello” Elik just goes off at me!

“What’s wrong with you baby? You have a job now, remember? You need to report for work tomorrow! You can’t be out partying all night! That’s so irresponsible of you! Didn’t you have slides to go through?” he yells.

I keep quiet and sit up straight. I need good back balance if I’m to handle Elik. He’s giving me a headache with his yelling!

“Where’s your phone? I called you a thousand times!”

“It’s on silent. Sorry. I was sleeping”.

I don’t know where it is. Maybe in the car?

“So, what made you think it was a good idea to go partying?”

“I don’t have class tomorrow”.

“So? You have to go to work Monday to Friday! Class or no class! Lecturing is not just about class time!”

“I didn’t know. We just went out for an hour and then came home and played video games then I went to bed. And now you’ve woken me up!”

He laughs at me.

“You know I hate it when you lie!” Oh boy. Does he know? How?

“Your ignition went off an hour and a half ago! It’s 4 am now so that means you came home at 2:30! Quit being a spoilt brat Lastborn! You’ll wake up in the morning and you’ll go to work!” he yells.

“Yes daddy!”

Who shouts at someone at 4 am though! And I just had a panic attack so can’t he be more gentle!

“I’m not playing with you ma! You need to take this job serious!” he yells.

I roll my eyes.

“Fine, but how will I make it to work? It’s past 4 now and I have a headache!”

“You are a very smart girl, you’ll figure something out. Be at work, on time! I’m serious Lastborn!”

Mxm. So annoying! He thinks he’s my father I can see!

“Why aren’t you sleeping vele?” I ask.

“I was worried about you. You wouldn’t answer your phone. I must have left a hundred messages”.

Oh! There’s the reason he’s upset! Kofi had left his phone charging at

home so he couldn't reach both of us and probably dozed off and now woke up and is biting off my head. I see.

"Give Kofi the phone. Both of you are acting like small children! But he sounds like he's got more sense than you right now!" he snaps.

"Love you too baby", I say.

My head is spinning and Elik is annoying. I give Kofi the phone and he gets shouted at strong. All he says is "sorry", "I understand", "Yes Elik", "Never again". He sighs deeply when he's done.

"You really want Elik to kill me bro! Gosh! The way he's so protective of you!"

"Sorry boo. He's too cranky that one". I love how protective of me Elik gets and I love how Kofi is so protective of me and I love how Lumka is so protective of me. My men!

"Can I sleep here?" I lie down on the bed.

"No. You can't. Come let's get you to your room".

He has to carry me because I'm fine here and we long established that I'm a princess. If someone doesn't want me here, they have to fork lift me! We get to my room and he puts me in bed, dress and all. He kisses me on the forehead and says, "I'll wake you up at 6. Sleep tight Sunshine".

"About earlier...", I start.

"What about earlier? Was I there? Nothing happened. Now go to sleep!"

"Will you come to the lab with me tomorrow?"

"If you want me to", he says.

"Alright. We up at 7 not 6, then we can wear dark shades and sleep on my desk all day", I say.

"I'm game", he flashes me that smile I always thought looked like Elik's.

"Love you Kofi".

"Always", he says.

He covers me up, gets the light and is gone. Thank you St. Jude (Patron of lost causes). Tonight you came through for me. I gotta give it to Elik. He's boss. I went and had a whole panic attack at the slightest thought of cheating on him! I can't afford to lose him. Literally can't AFFORD to lose him.

Twenty-Five

I think I'm a true representation of a Capetonian. Of Cape Town rather. My city is made up of a mixture of beauty and ugliness, poverty and wealth, the beautiful ocean and the heart-breaking shacks, the perfect suburbs and the imperfect squatter camps. Just like my city, I'm a mixture of it all and I come in extremes. I don't half-ace. I'm all that and more but that's not what I mean. I mean, just like my city, I go through several weathers per day. I transition from loved, to spoiled, to bored, to happy, to amused, to hurt, to silly, to crying, to confused, to resentful, all the way back to loved, all in one day.

It's Wednesday and I'm having my morning lemon water and going through my slides for class. Kofi is sitting next to me and helping me go through the notes. Because he's so silly and so happy and such a free spirit, I often forget that he actually has a brain and is three months away from getting a Masters degree! Another excuse for a family vacation! We're all going to Germany for that graduation. I'm taking the twins with us this time! I'm done abandoning them.

I hope Lumka would have found a girl and would also have come to his senses. He needs to stop talking bad to and about Elik! It's not helping anyone, because nothing he says is going to make me move. I'm a mountain, I can't be moved! And yes he says Kofi and I are Elik's disciples but he's the biggest disciple of us all! I don't know how he doesn't see that! And making out with him was a huge mistake. I'm so thankful we didn't sleep together because the guilt would have buried me a long time ago. I think I should just tell Elik. I hate always having to cross my fingers whenever Lumka opens his mouth. That's no way to live. I know he thinks he's doing what's best for me, but I'm ME and I know what's best for me and it's not him!

"Kofi".

"Ya. Wait, let me get this calculation right. I'm on question 4, I'm doing the static coefficient of friction, do the kinetic".

That's not why I called him. I wanted to tell him I made out with Lumka and ask how I should tell Elik, but now I've gotten cold feet. I get my notebook, read the question and do the Maths.

"What you got? The static is 0.2. What did you get for the kinetic?" he

asks.

“Wait... I also got 0.2”, I say.

“For kinetic? Let’s see”, he takes my book and looks.

“No man, you used 6N instead of 5N. Ok let’s see...(Calculates)...It’s 0.167! See?” he shows me.

Ooohhhh. I read the question wrong. I took the value for the force necessary to move the object not the force necessary to keep the object in motion at constant speed! Silly me! That’s a careless mistake. I can’t make such mistakes in class.

Ever since Kofi confessed that I’m his best friend, I’ve been on serious BFF goals with him. I drag him with me everywhere I go. And so when lecture time comes, I drag him with me. I hate lecturing, I can’t even pretend. It’s not lecturing that’s the problem, it’s working! And it doesn’t help that the HOD is making my life hard. He dumped 202 scripts on my desk this morning and said the lecturer I’m replacing left without marking them so I should mark them. I called my self-appointed legal adviser, Elik, to complain. He said I don’t have to mark them because the test was written before my contract began. He says he can come talk to Prof if I don’t have the balls to. That won’t be necessary, I’ll just mark them it’s fine. I’m going to go down in the books as the worst lecturer in history. I’m giving my second lecture today and I’m redefining Murphy’s Law [*Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong*]. I’m a coward and I’m scared of students. And since I don’t have Elik to hold my hand today, I take the next best engineer I know, Kofi, with me instead. I just need him for moral support.

That’s mistake number one.

I’m very nervous, so Kofi has to take my hand and we walk into class hand in hand. That must be confusing to my students, because on Monday I had another man rescuing me and today I have a younger model rescuing me. And my Nkrumah men are quite affectionate and touchy. Watching Kofi and I, you would swear there’s chemistry between us. Most people think we are a couple and if we don’t know them, we don’t correct them. As Kofi sets up for me, I lean on the podium and giggle at him like a little girl. We gossip about his brother giving me a hard time about this job. Elik thinks I’m not serious. I am though, in my own way! I’m here in class, ain’t I? Kofi thinks Elik should allow me to take a gap year. He says he should also be allowed a gap year after his Masters. He makes a valid point when he says Elik should give us money to travel the world in that gap year while

he stays behind and works. I support that. I can already see us dancing in Ibiza, the way we danced in that full moon party in Koh Phangan, Thailand. We danced from sunset to sunrise. My travels are a story for another day. Give Kofi and I alcohol and music and you have a party!

Mistake two.

We're still going on and I make myself useful and set up the mic. The battery is dead so I find another one in the boom box and replace it.

"Kofi no flirting with my students please. You'll sit at the back and shush!"

"Too bad, I already spotted my prey", he says.

"Not funny boo. Don't disturb them. Wait till after class at least".

"I just want to be friends with her. Best friends, if you know what I mean", he winks.

"Whoa! Wroight! I see you! You're replacing me just like that? That hurts", I clutch as if clutching my heart and make a sad face. Then silly me turns on the mic to check if it's working now and just then Kofi says, "You know I love you Sunshine. I can never replace you".

The students just get all excited and some laugh and some make cheery sounds. I'm sure they think I'm a whore! I feel like explaining to them that no, you see this is my husband's younger brother. But I decide to let it go. And just like Elik wouldn't, Kofi doesn't see a problem at all! He's not fazed even one bit! He's done setting up and gives me a 'you got this' reassuring shoulder squeeze, then scans the classroom before deciding to join a girl sitting on the second row. I wonder what he's saying to her because the way she's blushing and smiling! Mmmmm! Suspicious. I teach and teach. At least my voice is alive today so that's something. Then I have to pull up another set of slides with some models and equations I need the students to familiarise themselves with.

Mistake three.

I minimise the PowerPoint presentation and my wallpaper is now splattered on the screen for the whole class to see. I'm oblivious of what's going on and I think students are making noise because I'm not paying them attention at the moment. Silly me! I'm a lecturer now so I probably should have changed my wallpaper! Kofi comes running down to me and yanks out the cord connecting the projector to the laptop. He gives me such a fright!

"Ya hey. This teaching thing is not for you!" he laughs a little.

I'm confused. Then I get it. I stare open mouthed at my screen. I know it's no longer projecting but this is what my students saw. I bring both my hands over my open mouth. It's a photo of yours truly. Nice picture, great quality, clear. Perfect as a picture but all these attributes are bad in this scenario because that means the students saw everything clearly. In this photo, I'm standing on the bed in black lacy boy-shorts and nothing else. I have my hands over my boobs. So technically I'm naked! And because Elik took the picture, I posed as if I wanted to send the picture to PornHub! But again, I wish I could explain. It's not what it looks like. I was doing a 30 day yoga challenge and part of the challenge was to document my body every day in as minimal clothing as possible so I could see changes in the outline of my body. But now my wallpaper is not static, I set up a slideshow. I honestly had no idea that these pictures were in the folder I selected! So ya, I just showed my students a picture of me in panties only, on a ruffled bed that you can tell that ya here, real work was done! It just had to be this picture to project at that moment, it could have been any! I wish I could tell them it's not me, but my face was right there smiling excitedly at the camera. I was never prepared for this lecturing thing! I think I'm still a student in my head. There was no induction, no interview, no guidelines. Nothing. I just got here and was told 'go teach' and now I'm fucking up bad. The Department didn't even have the decency to give me a laptop so now I'm using mine! AAAGGGHHH!!!!

Kofi, like Elik on Monday, saves me and directs the attention to himself. He's telling them tricks of cramming since finals are around the corner and which energy boosters actually work. He tells my students that if they opt for weed they should stay away from skunk because it will fuck up your brain and have you hallucinating if you're not strong. For exam studying, he recommends kush and haze. He's even telling them how to answer a question if you are not sure so you can confuse the examiner and have them giving you free marks! By the time he's done talking, the class is taken by him. Good. Kofi asks if I'm good and ready to proceed. I nod yes and he goes back to his girl.

Mistake four.

The fun starts when I do calculations on the whiteboard. The students at the back keep saying "Higher". I have to stand on my tippy toes to write at the top so the back sitters can see. I keep writing and working out the problem, when I feel a tap on my shoulder. It's Kofi! Again! I might as well

appoint him as my Teaching Assistant mos!

“Let me do the calculations. They’re making you keep writing so they can watch your booty and that ‘higher’ is just to get you to raise your hand higher so the dress goes up”, he whispers.

Oh Lawd! Seriously? I should have known not to wear this dress though but I had a long coat on. Then Cape Town weather happened and I had to lose the coat. See what I mean? Everything is working against me today! Murphy’s Law.

“But do you know all the calculations?” I whisper back.

“Dude! I did Eng Tech 2nd year! Besides, this is just Chemical Engineering, it’s not even real engineering! I could teach this in my sleep!”

He gets that from Elik! The both of them think their Engineerings are better than mine! So another Nkrumah saves my day! Kofi takes over the explaining and I walk to the door and stand there watching him. I have this unintentional smile on my face. Why do they have to be so cute when they spit knowledge? He’s so sexy, my goodness, I could do better than the knee next time! Shame on you Fierce!

It’s towards the end of the lecture and I didn’t really teach, Kofi did and he did it so nicely, I’ve decided to make him teach my class again tomorrow. Then maybe Elik can teach my classes next week when he’s in Cape Town. Then Lumka can come down that week and teach as well. They all did Engineering and at the level I’m teaching, we are not specialising yet so it’s basic Engineering and my men surely can teach it. They always say they love me mos, they should prove it by doing my job for me. If they don’t help me, I swear I’ll quit! Let’s see how they like it then.

As for the marking, after the first 20 scripts I decided ‘I’M DONE!’ So I sent a message to our WhatsApp group and got straight to the point.

‘Elik, Kofi and Lumka. Be in Cape Town this weekend! We are having a marking fest!’

No one responded but I know they’ll come. They do say I bully them after all, maybe they are right. I don’t care! I’m the matriarch of our circle, what I say technically should go. It’s 20 minutes before end of class and Kofi has done a beautiful job. He’s still taking questions and explaining some equation he derived. The class is quiet and fixated on him. I’m here by the door forgotten and admiring my best friend’s brain.

Mistake five.

My phone rings somewhere in my bag. The bag is over there near the

podium and I'm here by the door. It's so loud but that's not the problem. The problem is my ringtone! I need to get to it because the lyrics are not lecturer-like. Again, I can explain. Elik changed it the other morning as a joke, saying it was a dedication to me. I've been meaning to change it, but my phone has either been on silent or vibrate almost all the time so I haven't really paid it much attention.

Mistake six.

I run across the class to get to my bag. In high heels no gal. I stumble forwards as I get to the podium and I fall. Not like knees-scrap-the-ground-fall. No. I fall flat on my stomach. I get up quarter way and I crawl forwards, snatch my bag and hide under the podium. I'm never getting out of here. I'll hide here till I die. I can hear the students laughing and they'll never see me again. I'm staying here forever. By the time I find my phone, Akon has gone and sang a whole four lines of pure embarrassment and Elik had trimmed it so it just keeps looping! And the lyrics! Goodness gracious! Who puts the song, *'I just had sex'* as a ringtone! Damn you Elik! Damn! Damn! Damn! Now will be a good time to die. I'm never coming out from under this podium. Mistake seven. Staying under this podium has the students laughing! How will I ever face them again? If there was a wooden mic for lecturing, I would win fair and square, I'm certain of it. Kofi is crouching and for the first time he's not saving me, he's laughing at me. I clutch my phone and bite my lower lip hard so I don't cry.

"How did you even fit in there?" I can tell he wants to laugh hard so bad.

I hear a voice by door and Kofi stands.

"Don't you have a class?" it asks. I know it's Prof! Just perfect! Can this day get any worse?

"We do", the class says.

"Where's your lecturer?" Prof asks. I think they point or something. I know I have to come out. I scramble from the small space I'd fit in and when I make it to my feet, I come face to face with Prof. If I still have a job by end of today, it will be a miracle. The students are laughing and I think I'm on the verge of tears.

"Lastborn? What were you doing under there?" Prof makes a confused face.

"I was, I...", I stutter. Can I tell him I was hiding? Kofi clears his throat and I know my melanin knight is telling me to shut up so he can save me.

What would I ever do without these men in my life though! “Sorry Doc, we were wrong, the switch is not under there, it’s actually this side”.

I get it, luckily.

“You kids had me crawling on my knees when the switch was out here this whole time?” I fake snap at Kofi.

His eyes laugh with me but his face remains stoic.

“I’m so sorry Doc, won’t happen again”, he says.

“Wait, I’ll deal with you just now, let me speak to Prof first”.

“Prof?” I turn to him.

“No, I was just checking in on you. I see you are good. Let me leave you to it”, he says.

“Alright”, I straighten my dress and my face. Prof walks out and a student in the front laughs.

Mistake eight.

The tears are here. They just burst out of my eyes and there’s no stopping them. Kofi pulls me into his arms and coos me. He doesn’t even tell me not to cry today. I just inhale his perfume as I cry on his T-shirt. I’m so humiliated, it’s funny. I’m done crying now but I’m too embarrassed to lift my face. I hope no one is taking pictures. Oh boy! I need a manual if I’m to pull off this lecturing job! I’ve decided I won’t be handing out lecturer evaluation forms. I have no desire to know what these students think of me. I’ve never been one to take negativity and criticism well.

“Attention”, Kofi says turning his head towards the students, but keeping his arms around me. The students fall silent. It’s like they have a button! You press and they shush!

“We’ll stop here for today. Sunshine is in a bad state as you can see. We’ll see you tomorrow”, he says.

“Oh and Qaqamba don’t forget to hit me up on App”, he says.

Oh boy! Poor girl! They exchanged numbers already and he just had to go and expose her like this? And the way he pronounced Qaqamba as car-car-mber is so funny.

Wait? Did he just dismiss my class? Like Elik did on Monday? I’m sure my students are no longer sure who their lecturer is exactly, they have seen Elik, Kofi and I, and I haven’t done much to be honest. The noise becomes less and less as students go out of the theatre.

“They are gone, Ostrich, you can bring your head out of the sand now”, he says, chuckling. I believe him so I lift my head. Our eyes meet and we

laugh. This is ridiculous. Who the hell is bewitching me? This amount of bad luck can't be natural. I need to go see a *sangoma* . I wonder if I can find one online.

“You fell like a bag of potatoes bro!”

Ey! What's wrong with this boy kanti! It's too soon!

Mistake nine.

I check my messages in class! Damn Elik for calling me in the middle of class! He's the reason I fell, with that stupid ringtone he put. I quickly go on WhatsApp to take out my frustrations on him. He already left me messages. The one at the bottom has me thrown off. *'Check your email for flight tickets for Kofi and you. We're all flying down to Bulawayo tomorrow evening then Saturday we'll put this thing to rest once and for all'* . What has my heart almost stopping is not the fact that that old Elik who goes and makes decisions all on his own then tells me last minute is back. No. It's the fact that on Saturday I have to face my mother! I'm not ready! I don't think I'll ever be ready! I've been avoiding it hoping it will go away.

“You alright?” Kofi places a warm hand on my shoulder.

I pass him my phone and he reads.

“It's that ritual with your mother?” I nod.

“Why is Elik saying I'm also going? I'm never going back to that place! No offence but your people are crazy!” he says.

“Kofi!”

“You know I love you and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you. But your mother bro, that woman is shit crazy. I'm serious, I'm scared of her”.

Mxm. His mother is just as crazy! But we don't talk about his mother because of what she did to Elik. Even when Kofi goes to Ghana, he only tells me and not Elik.

“You don't have to come, I'm not even sure if I want to go myself”.

Tears. I need *'Crier of The Year Award'* and *'Worst Lecturer Ever Award'* . I quickly wipe the tears away. There's a group of students coming in, maybe there's a lecture after this. “Take me home”, I say. “Alright!” he says.

I balance on the podium as I wait for him to pack up my stuff. He takes my hand when he's done and we pass students huddled outside. They look at me funny and some giggle. Too bad, I'm not scared of them right now. My brain has travelled all the way to Zimbabwe. The last time I was home, it got so ugly, I don't think I'm ready. I can't face her. I look out the

window as we drive out of campus and turn right onto Symphony Way. I asked Kofi to pass by a pharmacy in Bellville. Elik calls again and now we're in the car so it rings on the speaker. Kofi says something but my thoughts have border jumped already. They are somewhere sitting on a stone next to a kraal in our village. So he goes ahead and answers.

"Where's Fierce?" Elik asks after hearing that it's Kofi.

"She's here!" he says.

"Put her on", Elik says.

"She can't talk right now".

"Why not?"

"Because of you! The fuck Elik! You had to send her that in a message? Couldn't you call? Couldn't you come down and talk to her in person? The fuck dude?" he sounds pissed.

"I tried calling but she wouldn't answer!"

"You could have waited! You know she saw your message in class! That's not on bro!"

"I didn't mean to upset her. I didn't think it through! Is she alright?"

"What do you think? If someone just dropped a bomb like that on your big head would you be alright?"

I smile to myself. Ain't I just the luckiest girl in the world?

"Ya hey, my bad. How is she though? Is she crying?" Elik says.

"She's as good as anyone who just got a message like that would be!"

"I get it. Geez man! It's just, I need the both of you here so we can leave tomorrow evening. Do you understand?"

"I'm not going!"

"I wasn't asking lil' bro! You are coming with us and that's it!"

Kofi makes an 'I'm annoyed' sound.

"You know what? Fuck it. I'll be there tonight... Take care of her Kofi! Please", Elik says.

"You know it", Kofi says.

I feel so sad. At least my man is coming home and if anyone knows how to cheer me up, it's him. Kofi's hugs are nice and cosy, but Elik's hold is what I crave right now. Only he can make me ok ok. I'm trying not to think of my mother. The one woman who gave me life then took it away from me just like that. In front of everyone! The one who was supposed to hold me afloat the raging river but pushed my head under instead and laughed as I drowned. That pregnancy she insulted me for, I lost it. I wonder if anyone

told her. And if they did, did she care? Does she think of me? Does she care at all what I go through? Does she miss me sometimes like I do her? Does she have nightmares of me like I have of her? Will she hate me for coming home with Elik?

We're in Bellville now and Kofi turns left, leaving Robert Sobukwe Road and turning towards the taxi rank. He keeps cursing at how taxi drivers drive like Elik! He says they should have a special lane just for them so they can kill each other there and leave us alone. I give him a weak smile. He turns towards the train station and pulls over to get me some grapes from a stall. I keep looking out of the window. All these people are selling something. Keeping up the hustle. Somalians over there with their container shops, Zimbabweans selling everything, Coloureds selling fruits in boxes from the back of a bakkie, a man concentratedly doing a lady's dreadlocks over there. Hair dressing ladies carrying signs written on cardboxes, harassing anyone with natural hair. It's a rainbow nation. All united in the struggles only them know.

There are cars everywhere parked over the yellow line with no care, a taxi driver makes an illegal U-Turn, almost scratching my car, two policemen leaning against their van over there see all that and do nothing. It's utter chaos. I used to buy my vegetables from that woman over there. She's still here, still hustling. She used to speak to me in Shona and I would speak to her in Ndebele and we would have a little taste of home. That seems like a long time ago.

Home. My thoughts just had to go back there! Kofi jumps back in with four plastic bags.

"They are still R10!" he puts them on the back seat and drives off.

As dirty as this place looks, it holds more memories than the clean side of town we now live in will ever do.

"Cheer up Dr Nkrumah, I'm sure the ritual will go well. I've decided I'll come with you".

Decided? Elik didn't give him an option!

"We'll be there for you. Elik and I will be there. And if anyone does anything remotely stupid, you know Elik will deal with them!" he says.

"I love you Kofi. And thank you for everything". I sound so sad and people always look at you like you are dying when you just randomly declare your love. That's the look I get from Kofi. Not even an "I love you too"!

“We’re here”, Kofi shakes me. I had zoned out bad and wandered too far into my thoughts. My heart is crying and I’m so scared. Like Kofi, I’m scared of my mother. Him he’s scared of the outside. Me, my fear runs deeper than that. I loved her with everything and how did she repay me? With a curse!

“Jump into the back seat”, he says.

Something inside me chuckles. His brother always tells me to jump into the back seat but it’s always for a whole different reason. I obey, get my door and jump into the back. Kofi slides towards me. My tears just fall. I don’t know if he knows why I’m crying or not. But he doesn’t ask. He just wraps his arms tightly around me and keeps telling me I’ll be fine. When I stop sobbing he says, “Look on the bright side. Elik is coming home tonight and you won’t need my knee. He’ll take care of you”, he says and laughs. *He bana !* This guy! He said we would never talk about that day mos! I can’t help laughing though. Laughing through tears, one thing I do with ease. I calm down eventually and he insists on getting in with me.

We start at the clinic and I have my implant removed. She wipes my upper arm with an alcohol swab, gives me an anaesthetic then cuts a small slit on my arm. She didn’t wait for the anaesthetic to fully kick in so I wince in pain. She takes the implant out then dresses the slit. Kofi says it looks like a bloodied matchstick. This boy!

My mood was brightening until we got to the till. The cashier asks me what I’m buying my mother for Mother’s Day. I’m instantly knocked out of my happy bubble and brought back to thoughts I’d silenced. I’m trying to shelve my thoughts but ever since Mel the Therapist demolished my walls, I fail dismally. The drive home is sour and I’ve mentally travelled to Zimbabwe again. I go straight to my room when we get home. I put on my earphones and listen to Akon and curl up in bed and hug a pillow. I asked Kofi to give me space. After my panic attack, I have no wish to go through that rollercoaster of emotions ever again. I can’t be alone right now. I have a man next door who loves me and would love to be there for me. I’m not the strong type, I need support.

I get out of my room and find Kofi sitting on his desk playing Mortal Kombat against the PC. He pauses the game when he sees me. Nothing is said and I think he understands. He comes and gives me a big hug as I sob into his chest. I’m not sure if I’m ready to forgive my mother. How do you forgive someone who didn’t apologise? It’s not the hate but the hurt that’s

stopping me. Her words never left my ears and the look of disgust on her face the last time I saw her haunts me to this day. I need to man up though and put on my big girl panties and do this. Put it to rest once and for all. Elik has already done everything in terms of buying the black cow and making sure they are brewing *umqombothi* (traditional beer) back there. He's been communicating with my father, aunt, brothers and even found my prodigal brother, Nqobizitha, in Hillbrow. He's done everything that needs money. It took him a long time to find Nqo. I didn't ask him to find him, he just decided on his own. I heard him on the phone plenty times, giving his contacts orders and following up on leads. He said he knows I loved my brother and it's not fair that I ditched him when he didn't show up for Replace's funeral. He says family is all we have and he needs my brothers to take care of me when he's not around one day.

I know everything is set for Saturday, he's made sure of it. Funny because he thinks the whole ritual is a charade. He's taking me there even and I know he will hold my hand through the smelly herbs and the eating of ash and the reciting of ancient lingo. Unlike me, he doesn't care what the villagers will say. He says if someone doesn't contribute anything to his life, then their opinion is invalid. Each time I bitch and moan about someone judging me or saying bad things about me he reminds me that a lion doesn't concern itself with the opinions of sheep. And I know how this hurts him. He doesn't have a mother and Kofi's mother did him very wrong. So for him to try and mend my relationship with my mother can't be easy on him. But he says he's doing it for me. He's holding me down like a G's supposed to. So maybe I need to meet him halfway and actually show effort. Such a heavy burden placed upon me! For that 'curse' to be undone on Saturday I'll have to apologise to my mother and mean it. Apparently the ancestors will know if I'm lying and I'll vomit blood and bleed through my nose then I'll choke and drown on my blood and die a slow painful death! Pretty scary. And the reason I took out the implant is because my aunt said the ancestors don't like people with contraceptives! The fuck they know about contraceptives? They are too finicky these ancestors!

There's a long list of things I need to do. It's too much and half the things I'm not sure I'll be able to pull off in front of people. I'm not looking forward to Saturday at all! Can I quote Akon's opening piece for *Blame It On Me* when I apologise to my mother? She has no clue who Akon is so she'll think it's original. The last part speaks to my mother after all. To her

I'm wrong because I'm the child who chose a penis over her while she carried me for 9 months. It's a good penis I chose there, but that's not the point. If I had to go back in time, I'd choose Elik again. I'm getting worked up again and maybe Kofi's arms are tired of balancing me, shame. It's his fault he chose to be born by a woman whose husband had an illegitimate son who dated a very emotional girl! No one held a gun to his head to be born there! He's here now and we are in his life, he has to deal and comfort us when we cry!

Maybe if I forgive umama the universe can forgive me too. Maybe I can carry a child to full term too. Maybe my wedding can go well. Maybe Elik and I can find our happily ever after. Maybe, just maybe. I haven't done any wedding planning at all because deep down I'm expecting it to fail. I don't see it happening because everything I touch turns to stone. What would be so different this time? Things never go well for Elik and I. We can't seem to catch a break. I take a deep breath, wipe my tears and breathe. I was beginning to fall asleep on Kofi's chest. If I'm to silence my thoughts I might as well redirect them to something else, like a video game. Let me use CGI (computer-generated imagery) to let out all my anger and resentment. I'm the self-proclaimed best gamer girl in our circle! Let's ignore the fact that I'm the only girl and focus on 'best'.

"Exit that, let's start a new game", I say to Kofi. He smiles at me with that smile.

"A, we missed you Elikplim would be nice you know", the one voice I love to hear says.

We've been so lost in the game, we didn't even hear the door open. No one is losing, I lose the first, win the next and just like that. I'm going easy on Kofi today. I always win! I drop my controller and run to the door. My personal person is home, all because Kofi shouted at him for breaking the news to me through a message! I jump on to my black king and he drops his bag so he can hold me. My legs go around his waist and he turns me around so he can balance me against the wall. Then he kisses me. He doesn't hold back, he just kisses me. His kisses are desperate and demanding. My lips are just like 'I receive papa'.

"Get a room you two, seriously", Kofi says.

He's right but Elik keeps kissing me. It's like something happened. I know this Elik and when he's like this, he's a ball of emotions. Can he stop snogging me now so we can go to our room and he can offload? Excuse the

pun. I don't know when but Kofi pulls us apart hard I almost fall. Elik is forced to drop me and my legs find the floor.

"What do you think this is? A booth in Adult World? Get out of my room", Kofi pushes us out of his room.

I giggle on my way out and Elik picks up his bag. I'll apologise to my BFF tomorrow morning. We make it to our bedroom and something is wrong I know. Elik's eyes look so distant and he looks like he hasn't had much sleep. Even his face looks exhausted. I want to ask but I also want him to tell me on his own, when he's ready. He just wants to kiss today. I thought by now I'd be legs in the air roughing it up since he looks stressed. But I'm still sitting on top of him.

He hasn't said a word to me. He keeps alternating between holding me by the back of neck, looking deep into my eyes and kissing me slowly, savouring every moment. When he looks into my eyes it takes the last bit of strength in my soul not to ask him what's going on. My poor baby, who did what to him now? I'll kill someone, I swear. We are at the kissing interval when there's a loud knock. We ignore it.

"Open guys or I'll open the door", Kofi bangs continuously at the door.

I hope he doesn't wake the kids up! It was a mission getting them to sleep tonight. They just wanted to play with aunt Fierce. Kofi keeps knocking and threatening to come in! Elik sighs, gets me off him and goes to open the door.

"Don't you know it's rude to go to people's bedrooms? We could be making twins here, what would you do?" Elik says.

"But you budge into my room all the time!" Kofi says.

"Because it's my house?"

"Is that a question? Answer is no, it's not your house, it's Fierce's house", Kofi says.

An L for Elik.

"What do you want bro? I'm trying to reconnect with my girl here", Elik sounds annoyed.

"Oh! Her? I'm here for her. She left mid game and even you Elik know the rules! A gamer never abandons a game midway!" Kofi says.

"You're not serious!" Elik says.

"I am".

He walks in, takes me by the hand and pulls me towards the door. I'm chuckling and Elik looks shocked but Kofi is resolute.

“There’s a third controller baby. You can come and see if you can help Kofi win. Actually, let’s go game in the living room. You two can team up, I’ll school you boys today. I breathe Mortal Kombat!” I sway my hips away.

“Let’s show her Kofi! This girl thinks she’s the business! You still can do those combo attacks and those fatalities?” Elik hands Kofi a controller.

“Ya. No mercy?” Kofi says looking at his brother.

“None”, Elik says and they high five.

I just roll my eyes. I always win, what makes them think they’ll win today?

“Let’s bet. R500 a round”.

When it comes to Mortal Kombat I’m very sure of myself. Four rounds later I’ll have R2000 in my pocket. I can already see the looks on their faces when I’m done with them. Sulking and beaten by a girl. So they will take turns fighting me. Elik picks Scorpion, and I pick Kitana. I’m ready! We start. I bash my buttons like four times and game over! What just happened? How did Elik do that? My life just disappeared but his is still full! Maybe it’s just a bad start. Second round, same thing, I’m out faster than I can say Mortal Kombat! Kofi is laughing and cheering Elik on. Kofi comes next. Same thing. He destroys me in a heartbeat and even finishes me off with a gruesome fatality that makes me cringe! How brutal! By game five I start complaining that something is wrong with my controller, so Elik switches with me and beats me again. We game on and they take turns murdering me. It’s like I’m doing nothing. By game eight, I owe R4000 and I’ve won zero. What’s going on? Did they maybe use to go easy on me so I win? I refuse to believe that! I’m good at this, let me sit up straight!

They are having so much fun, laughing loud and high fiving and being each other’s cheerleaders. I’m not having so much fun anymore. But a gamer never quits. The total score when we done is 10 - 0 in their favour. I promise to pay them their 5 grand. I’m sulking now but I’m so competitive, I don’t take defeat lightly. Elik will thoroughly beat me in Mortal Kombat that much I know but not Kofi. I don’t know how he’s winning.

“Fine, you guys are cheating! You repeating moves and I don’t know how your superpower bars are always full! I know it’s you Elik, you manipulated the game!” I throw away my controller.

“Sore loser!” they laugh at me. I won’t take this L lying!

“Fine! Let me battle Kofi alone without your commentary Elik! Let’s

exit the tournament and play a clean game, one on one”.

“Just accept you lost sunshine”, Kofi goofs at me. I can’t accept that!

“I’ll give you my X6 if you win. If you lose, I take whatever I want from your things”.

“If I beat her, can I take her X6?” Kofi asks his brother. Elik shrugs his shoulders.

“It’s hers. She knows exactly what she’s saying and if she loses I’ll be on your side bro. I’m a witness. Actually make her sign a promissory note!”

He goes and comes back with a notepad and these Nkrumah brothers make me sign off my car should I lose the game. Elik has this smile on his face that’s just melting my heart. I love seeing them so happy. I wish Lumka was here and our circle would be complete. I sign the note and Kofi signs and Elik signs as a witness. Apparently this piece of paper is legally binding! We game with Kofi and I win round 1 and my confidence levels shoot up through the roof and I get up and do a victory dance. Two rounds to go. If I win the next one it’s two thirds so I’ll have won! I already feel like I’ve won.

“I want that grey hoodie of yours, I want your suitcase as well, the grey one. I want your gym bag and I’ll take those black Ray Bans of yours as well”.

I think I saw Elik and Kofi exchange winks. They think I can’t win this? Let me show them. Kofi looks more focused when we play round 2. I lose round 2. I lose round 3. I’ve lost the game. What the hell just happened? I think I just lost my car! Elik makes me go and take the cars keys and hand them over to Kofi.

“That car is no longer yours baby girl! It’s Kofi’s now, fair and square”.

I’m frozen. I know I have my Jeep but I was so sure I’d win. I don’t know what the fuck just happened.

“Take your girl Elik, I think she’s gonna cry. I need to take my baby for a spin”, Kofi says.

He’s right. I’m about to cry. They are still laughing and they both stand and high five each other. They keep asking me what happened to breathing Mortal Kombat.

“It’s all yours bro!” Elik says.

Kofi kisses me on the cheek, gives me a big hug and a big thank you and runs towards the door.

“I’m coming with you”, Elik says getting up. Oh man!

“Coming?” Kofi returns 30 seconds later and finds me still standing with a controller in my hand, trying to figure out what just happened.

Whatever! I’ll go with them for now and sulk later. I’m made to sit in the back seat and Kofi says if I don’t take out my earrings and lipstick out of HIS car by tomorrow, he’ll throw them out. We end up driving through McDonalds and picking up McFlurries, then all the way up to Signal Hill to just sit and eat McFlurries in winter. A part of my heart is smiling though. He can have the car it’s all good. He’s my boo! I beg Kofi to prepare for tomorrow’s class until he says yes and I email him the slides. I have a class and I didn’t even look at the notes. But it’s all good, Kofi’s got this. He taught well today. Elik says we all going to class tomorrow and will take turns teaching. I’m loving having these back-up lecturers in my corner. I’m serious. I like to think of them as ‘guest lecturers’.

As I sit on Elik, clothes lost, legs around his waist, looking into his eyes, I just see so much sadness, I have to ask.

“I want to tell you about Pretoria. I want to tell you everything”, he says.

“Does it affect my health?”

“No”, he says.

“Will it end up with me dead or people coming after me or me being implicated in a crime?”

“No”, he says.

“Will it make you leave me?”

“I’ll never leave you. You are my life”, he says.

“Will it affect the way I look at you?”

“Yes”, he drops his eyes .

“Then I don’t wanna know”.

“So I should just lie to you?” he asks.

“It’s not lying baby, it’s withholding the truth”.

He once pulled that line on me.

“You are everything. I don’t know how I ever got so lucky”.

He holds the stare a little while longer before smashing his lips on mine. Then we are crashing and our hands are all over, our hearts are racing and my moans pronounce his name. And gods, the scent, taste and feel of this man! Words can never articulate and my body can never get enough. As I lie down to sleep in his arms, I know no matter what happens, I’m home.

Twenty-Six

Tonight we're flying out to Zimbabwe via Joburg. Then Saturday morning we're going home. A home I was told never again to set foot in. Shoot me for not being so enthusiastic about it! I'm not one for traditional rituals and I'm convinced my ancestors don't like me much.

I managed to drag myself out of bed at 5 am because I have so much to do before our 1 pm flight to Joburg. We'll meet Lumka at the airport for the Joburg-Bulawayo leg. Why Lumka is tagging along, I have no clue. But he's always been BFFs with Elik and although they fight like little girls sometimes, their bromance is stronger than Rome.

I almost take the X6 then I remember it's no longer mine so I go for the Jeep. My first stop is Father Francis. I show up at the Fathers' Quarters and I'm told he is doing his morning prayers. They say he started at 5 am and he'll be done at 8! 3 hours? What will you still be praying about for that long? It's not like I don't respect religion or people's personal time with their Creator but I have a tight schedule here. Besides, it's almost 6 am so what will I be doing till 8 if I have to wait?

I go to the church and make it in through the side door that the priests and altar servers use. I peep in. There are four nuns praying heavily with heads bowed and hands clasped over rosaries. The smell of incense is intense and I feel like all these statues of Mary, Joseph and St Somethings are looking at me like they can actually see me. The stained window glasses look beautiful like ancient Greece, filtering the early morning light, allowing just an orange-red hue to bounce off the neat rows of benches. This church like most Catholic churches is heavenly. Stepping onto the altar is like walking into the holy of holies itself. So much gold! Fake yes but golden nonetheless!

There he is, that beautiful devil. His holiness, Father Francis! Looking at him in that robe, kneeling down with his eyes closed as if he's sleeping peacefully, I can't help but wonder what those lips he's silently moving taste like.

"Depart from me devil! Do not make me Jezebel!" I silently scold myself.

I take off my shoes because this red carpet sprawled across the floor of the altar looks like holy ground, therefore sandals off Moses! I dip my

fingers in the stone bowl with the holy water and make a quick sign of the cross then tiptoe to where Father Francis is kneeling. I kneel next to him and close my eyes and pray. 2 minutes later I'm done praying. My earlier point made. What are you praying about for 3 hours when sinners like me can say it all in 2 minutes?

When I open my eyes, I feel eyes boring into me. I turn my face slightly and I can't help but smile at him. He really is a looker. And those lips look like sin dunked in honey! Priests shouldn't look like this!

"Fierce!"

You know this man always sighs around me like he doesn't know what to do with me. Like I'm beyond deliverance or something. If I didn't know any better I'd say he finds me draining. But that's his problem not mine. I find him so deliciously gorg, I just wanna gawk at him and appreciate the work Thy hands has made.

I might as well sleep with Father Francis mos because I think they say if you lust after someone with your eyes it's as good as you've committed adultery and the punishment will be the same! So I'd rather be fairly punished. I'm never one to waste sin. Ok, now I'm staring. *Get it together Fierce!*

"Hi. I didn't notice it was you", I whisper with a silly grin on my face. He shakes his head and sighs again.

"Are you here for prayers or for confession?"

"None of the above. I'm here for umm, to just look at this beautiful statue of our blessed mother Mary and baby Jesus. I particularly love how she's crushing that snake with her foot! What type of snake is that anyway and why is she standing on it? Is it venomous?" I go on a tangent.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed. She shall crush your head, and you shall strike her heel. Genesis 3:15", he says.

That's not really an answer! He can't just hit me with a scripture and think it will silence me. Only one thing silences me and that thing can't be spoken about in this holy place.

"Genesis? Mary didn't exist in Genesis! I may not be a diehard Christian but I did Religious Moral Education in primary school. I know that Eve was the woman in the earlier chapters of Genesis!"

"Yes, you are right but Mary is the new Eve!" he says.

Whaaaaaat? Like what happened to the old Eve? Why do we need a

new Eve? I have so many questions right now. But I'm not here for a debate.

"Anyway, forget Eve and Mary. I'm not here for them. I'm here for you. Let's focus on that", I say.

I think I'm looking at him with lust. Weird cause I kind of literally got out from under Elik an hour ago, so for me to be lusting after another guy so soon? It's worrying. It's just, I enjoy the forbidden fruits in life or the idea of them at least.

He looks at me and his eyes, those amber cat eyes that look like the sea trapped in small glass marbles, glow with an unnatural sparkle. They are like silver lightning, if that even makes sense. He looks at me the way the other disciples looked at Judas' Iscariot after he betrayed their Master.

"What is it this time, dear child? I'm having my morning devotion", he says .

Is it just me or this man always looks tired when he's talking to me?

"Can we talk here? I'll be quick quick. I'm going to Zimbabwe and I have to pass by the boys' school and I have a class at 10 and a flight at 1 and I was hoping to surprise Elik with breakfast in bed. So quick quick. One question", I grin like the idiot I am.

A nun lifts her veiled head and shoots us a disgruntled look. Our whispers, mine especially, are too loud.

"Follow me", he gets up and walks out.

He takes me on another stroll through the graveyard.

"Father, do you remember when I told you about my mother?"

He nods.

"She wants us to make peace but I'm not sure how I feel", I get straight to the point.

"Then make peace. The fourth commandment says honour your father and mother. Your mother wronged you and you carry that resentment and anger with you everywhere. You carry the cross and you suffer under the weight. You need to forgive her, for your own sake. Not forgiving her is the same as staying trapped in a prison of bitterness; serving time for someone else's crime. Let it go, dear child", he says.

Child? Pshhhh. He's not that older than me!

He's right though, I know.

"To forgive her and her me, we need to do a traditional ritual. What does the church say about ancestors and those types of practices? Is it right?"

Will I be cursed to the seventh hell if I partake in this?"

"You see where we are right now?" he says.

We're in a graveyard.

"If I stop here at Father Thomas's grave and ask him to ask our Father above for protection. Have I sinned?"

I shrug my shoulders. I don't know. Has he?

"Ancestors, like saints, like our mother Mary the ever virgin, can be mediators between our Creator and mankind, provided they lived virtuously. There is a great deal of a difference between ancestral worship and asking for intercession from or for those who have gone before us. Sure we can pray to our ancestors in the hope that they can mediate for us. But worshiping them and trying to appease them for past wrongs and all that is wrong. For a start, the spirits of the deceased are not in this material world", he explains.

"I'm not following".

"Beseeching them for their help in asking the heavenly Father for things on your behalf is not wrong. The Church says it's not wrong. A decree of December 1939, authorised Catholics to observe ancestral rites".

I nod. I feel better knowing I won't be signing my soul off to the devil on Saturday. That's a huge relief.

"So just to be clear, it's not wrong?" I ask for confirmation .

"It only becomes wrong when you start idolising, worshiping or invoking them. Then you'll have crossed over to the dark side, the dark side which you want, right?" he looks at me like I'm the one who caused the recent increase in VAT!

"Hey! I didn't say I wanna cross over to the dark side! I just wanna be a vampire or werewolf! Bite me!"

He looks at me blank. He didn't get the pun *roll my eyes*.

"You should go to Rome sometime and explore the archives of the Vatican City. You will learn a lot", he says.

"I've been there with Elik, on our Italy tour 2 years ago. We attended the mass with the Pope one Sunday. It was all in Latin though so we heard fokol and I just took pictures and videos. But I agree, the chambers and the archives and the museums are to die for. The Sistine chapel and St. Peter's Basilica had a lot of history to tell. I think that's when I decided to be Catholic Catholic, you know".

He then questions me about the Vatican City and I'm a bit shocked that he didn't know that the Vatican City is a country! He thought because it's in Rome, in Italy, it's just a place. It's a whole country with its own flag and all! And no the pictures don't lie. It's that magnificent.

For once he seems taken by me and is listening to me. I'm not all bad, you see! We talk some more then I thank him graciously and leave him removing weed with his hands from an old grave of some Father Ranieri. As I leave, the Angelus rings and I know I'm supposed to stop and pray but time is of the essence and I really have to hurry along. I pray in my heart though as I jog towards my car.

The twins' school

I tell the principal that they will miss school today and tomorrow because we have a funeral to attend. She says she doesn't understand why black people are always going to funerals. I tell her maybe because we are a lot it looks like we die a lot, yet we die at a relatively average rate like everyone else. She says I'm wrong, we die more and black people always lie about funerals and in one month they will go to ten funerals. I look at her with that 'Stop talking!' eye. "You wouldn't know. You're not that kind of black. Even your boys, you can tell they are well cultured, speak eloquently and are familiar with everything. They are not that black, you know. They are different, you know, they are not like the other ones. Good job", she gives me a typical smile.

If I hadn't just returned from church, I would have smacked her resting bitch face upside down. What does she mean I'm not that kind of black? What kind of black am I then? And good job for not being black enough? That's not a compliment! If anything, it's an insult! But you know what, I'm having a really good morning, so bitch don't kill my vibe.

She writes me something to give their teacher.

"Is that your real hair?" she asks with a smile I can't decode on her face.

I have a Peruvian wig on and this time I'm annoyed by her. On a good day I'd take it as a compliment because for someone to think this hair grows out of my scalp means it's flawless. But she's pissed me off with her remarks. I take off the wig and hand it to her.

"Feel it. It's real and it's mine. I bought it with real money. Wanna try it on?" I ask with a smile.

I know I look mental right now but whatever. She just stares at me like she's scared. I put my wig back on and smirk. She needs to grow up! Peace out. Sorted. Kids are taking their first flight to Zimbabwe today. The twins' teacher tells me I need to do better with the kids because they say words like *'fuck'* and *'roll a joint'* and *'booty'* a lot. Apparently Peter told the teacher, *'you have a fine ass'* and when questioned he explained that his daddy always says that to his aunty and his aunty smiles in response so he thought the teacher would smile. I'm mortified. Elik! Kofi! Lumka! I need to wash their mouths with Jik! I don't know what to do really.

Class

My students must think I'm loco. At least I'm in jeans and trainers today. I'm done with dresses and high heels! I show up with my deputy lecturer, Kofi. The students love him and the girls especially are taken by him. I didn't look at the slides. I actually have no idea what needs to be taught today! I'm just a lecturer on paper. Kofi knows so he gets to teach and I stand by the door so that should Prof approach, I can sit Kofi down and pretend to be doing the teaching. See, the benefits of dating well! Make sure you date a guy whose little brother knows your field of study so that he can do the job for you!

Elik went to his old Department, Mechatronics to see his old buddies. Someone needed to babysit and I can't have kids in the lecture theatre. Then Kofi is done and hay shame, I'm planning on employing him full time. He's good at this! In fact till he goes back to Germany he'll teach. I've made up my mind. We still have 40 minutes before the end of class and I (through Kofi) have given them a group assignment.

Elik and the twins show up to say we must go. Peter and Paul just run in and hug me screaming 'Aunt Fierce'. This class of mine is a circus! The students remember Elik and he asks them nicely if they can let Kofi and I go as we have to go to a funeral. He says in exchange, they get to ask him anything. I thought they would ask something school related or exam related but no.

First question is from a student wanting to know the relationship between Kofi, Elik and I. I'm in stitches by the time Elik is done answering. Like, why would Elik do this to me though! I guess he really doesn't want students hitting on me.

“I’m her first husband and Kofi here is her second husband. Those two (Peter and Paul) are her children, one by me and one by Kofi”, he says all that with a straight face.

“But bro, you’re limiting my chances with the girls here”, Kofi complains.

“You shouldn’t have agreed to be a second husband if you still wanted to fool around!” Elik says.

“So Ma’am has two husbands! And the both of you guys are ok with it?” a shocked student asks.

“Yes, polyandry is very cultural. We are proud to be her chosen ones. Aren’t we Kofi?”

I’m just laughing over here and Kofi is laughing too.

“Kofi pack up let’s go”, I say.

“And see, she bullies us around! But what can we do?” Elik says.

I just love him, my word. I just love all of him with all his silliness. If I could I’d spend the rest of my life curled up in his arm. He always jokes that after marriage we are going to go broke because we’ll live with each other permanently and all we’ll do is make love and sleep and repeat. And we’ll never get time to go to work.

Now I know my class will never take me serious. I mean I can’t even teach to begin with. I have my ‘husbands’ teaching for me. Wait. Kofi is my husband! Should Elik die, Kofi has to take me, right? Isn’t that how culture works? I can’t picture myself having bedroom relations with Kofi though. I’d probably make jokes and laugh the whole time. But if he sexes the way he dances then maybe we can work something out.

Joburg

We land in Joburg and I’m thinking we’re only meeting up with Lumka but the whole squad is here. I run into Lumka’s arms as soon as I see him. I have so much to tell him! He’s a jerk but ain’t they all? Then Clive is here. I hope he’s just here as a friend and not a lawyer! Although I might need some legal representation if the ancestors refuse to cooperate.

Butho made it. Butho is going home! Oh happy day! I hope Elik didn’t threaten him and he’s doing this because he wants to. He assures me that he wants to when I ask.

Then Lemon! What the hell is Lemon doing here? I don’t want drugs in

my village.

Then Nqobizitha is here. Nqo! He looks older than he is. Of all the men here, he looks unrefined. I don't want to say he looks poor because he actually is the only one poor here, so that would be a fact and not a description. His skin is rough, his lips look pink from cigarette burn and his hair looks unhealthy nje. It's like life has been unkind to him. I wouldn't be shocked if he's on Nyaope. He's still my brother though and Elik went through a great deal of trouble to find him for me. I hug him long. I haven't seen him in forever and I regret abandoning him. It's just, I was so angry. But seeing him now, looking like he eats herbex for lunch by the way he's so thin, makes me feel guilty. I should have done better as a sister.

"Baby, what is Lemon doing here? And why are all these guys going on this trip with us?" I pull Elik aside and ask him.

"Besides your brothers, these are my groomsmen and we taking this as one of our many pre-wedding guys out".

Only Elik will take something as serious as what I'm going home for so lightly. He thinks we're going on vacation?

And Lemon? Groom's man? I have nothing against him but he ratted me out to Elik last time I tried to buy drugs from him. I know he saved me but still, doesn't make snitching right!

"Be serious baby. Why are they coming?"

"We need to be out of the country this weekend. Something big is going down and we need to be far away from here".

"What? What's going on Elik?" I don't understand.

"Trust me. You trust me, don't you?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then trust me on this".

I must look worried because he gives me a hug and says, "All will be well. Don't worry about anything".

Maybe I should have let him tell me about Pretoria? I shake the thought aside. I have more serious stresses. Can't these men find girls already so I can stop being the only girl in the group! Everyone treats me like a child because I'm a girl. But Elik is extra around his guys. It's like he thinks they don't believe I'm his and he has to keep kissing me and picking me up and touching me and just being all over me like vinegar on chips! Not that I'm complaining.

I have an appointment with the ancestors today to undo a particular curse that I don't quite understand, if I'm being honest. And I've never met ancestors as picky and as finicky as mine! They are on the 'All-Black' tip, you'd swear they support the New Zealand rugby team. They want a black chicken, black goat, black cow and everyone is expected to wear black. On the positive, I suppose they'll approve of my choice of Elik seeing he's black. I don't get why everyone has to wear black though. It's not a funeral! I was dead to my mother but today I'll be resurrected, so shouldn't we be dressed in all white? They all got the memo clearly and we are all in All-Black. Kofi and Elik got the memo more than the others because I swear from here I can't tell where the T-shirt sleeve stops and where the arm begins. I don't even know if maybe they are topless because it's just darkness nje. I point that out to Elik when he gets closer and he says isn't that blackness the reason I've been arrested so many times for public indecency!

I only see the message from my aunt saying I shouldn't give Elik my velvet cake. Oh boy that velvet cake was eaten. I was too emotional and needed healing. Surely my forefathers will understand. I ride with Elik and the twins. Poor Kofi is forced by his bully of a brother to give up his car to Butho and ride with us. Not that I'm complaining. I love it when it's just us five. This is my true family. I feel pain in my heart as we drive on the dust road I trod for years to get to and from school. We pass familiar homes, all fashioned differently. The poor and the rich are all here in this village. I transformed my home from poor to rich with Elik's money. Yet that didn't stop them from kicking me out like a dog with rabies!

We pass homesteads of mud huts with caving in grass thatched roofs. Then we pass our neighbour's home. It just screams *'My children are in Johannesburg, doing crime but they send the money home so I don't care'*. Tears stream down my face and I quickly wipe them away. I feel like I'm coming home to a home that's not mine. It seems like a lifetime ago when I used to excitedly come here and come bearing gifts. I feel like I don't belong anymore and now I have to eat ash to be accepted back home. Really? That sounds like some sick joke!

My aunt is already at home, having arrived last night to check on everything. She kept me updated and the list of things to be done just kept growing. I love how our convoy just shows up and we park our black SUVs in line. We are an hour late but we know there's no rush in Africa. I step out

of that car looking like some forgotten African princess from the past with modern day bodyguards clad in black. I look Fierce! Dripping sauce and popping flavour honey! I came to slay. That apologetic timid girl who was terrified of her mother, is dead. This one doesn't hold back.

Butho and Nqo give me a hug, a word of encouragement and a thank you before they walk towards the gate. I can't believe Elik did this for a family that treated him the way it did. He was never mad at them. Even on nights I'd cry and scream and say nasty things about my mother he would just hold me and afterwards say 'she's still your mother baby'. He wanted my family to unite. And now he's brought the lost sons home. I wonder if anyone will thank him.

I watch as everyone rushes towards Butho and Nqo. My heart smiles. I see Zibulo too and it's greetings and handshakes going around. All my mother's children are home today. Inflation is the only one who passes them. He doesn't know them, he was too young when they left us. He runs out the gate towards us. He hugs Elik first then me. He's growing too fast and hopefully after the reconciliation with mother, she'll let me take him and give him an education he deserves. The rest of the guys chill by the cars, they are so unmannered my goodness, they don't even bother greeting anyone. Lumka and Clive already have beers in their hands and Lemon is smoking a cigarette. It's not even 11 am! I need to ban these men from doing these things in front of the twins, seriously. Peter now also tells me to 'pass the Hennessy' when I go to get his dad a drink! And Paul, that cute ball of sweetness, told his dad that he was 'pussy whipped' with the cutest voice ever. All because aboLumka and the guys always say that! I'm scared for these kids. They are growing up to be just as foul as them. Kofi is over there looking all slick and fresh in his all black. He comes to join us when he sees 'young blood' a.k.a Inflation.

I'm starting to feel nervous.

"Everything will go well, if it doesn't I'm taking you out of here", Elik says.

I don't think he has the power to protect me from the whip of the ancestors though. No one can. I did say I'm unapologetic today. When Elik pulls me towards him and brings his lips down on mine, I receive him and kiss him back, slowly and sensually. He's never one to hold back. In public or not he will kiss me so deep like he's about to make love to me. Kofi pulls us apart.

“People are watching! Behave you kids!” he says.

“For real! Don’t you guys get tired of each other? You’re all over each other all the damn time!” he complains.

Does he think we care?

“Come Kofi”, Elik says.

He walks us to where the other guys are and gives us instructions. I’m watching him, with a silly smile on my face, standing there, leaning against one of the cars, looking super in charge. Like a boss! Gosh I love me a strong man! He looks so good right now, it’s criminal! I’m not sure but I think he’s the leader of his pack. His guys always seem to listen when he speaks. And this all black dress they have going on here plus their black SUVs just screams ‘we are rich y’all, look at us!’. It looks good.

Lemon looks out of place. He’s too light skinned for this place and that silver tooth he has in his mouth and those tattoos. He has blue eyes even. He says during apartheid he identified as white because of the colour of his eyes. I don’t know what it is with me and eyes. He looks like he’s on the cast of Prison Break with those tattoos. Last night we had a moment and he gave me a beautiful ‘*Jammer meisie* (Sorry girl)’ for calling Elik on me last time and said he didn’t have an option because Elik would have killed him had he sold me those drugs. And he’s still calling me Elik’s goose! People always say ‘*Elik will kill me*’ if I do ABC as if he’s ever killed anyone. He told me he doesn’t kill people.

So Lumka, Clive and Lemon stay behind and Elik and Kofi follow me. I tell them to stay but they say they are coming with me. When I turn around, I see Lumka and Clive walking away with Zibulo. That means only Lemon is left on babysitting duty, and I’m not sure how I feel about that. What if he drugs them? What if he teaches them how to fire a gun? Or how to be criminals? Elik assures me that Lemon is an honest guy and if there’s anyone in the game who plays by the rules it’s him. I don’t know what that means. To try and explain he says, “He can’t hurt the kids baby, believe it or not, there’s honour amongst thieves”.

Since I’m not allowed entrance into my own home, I have to go around the fence like a stranger to get to the back! That hurts, no lie. There’s so many people here! It’s funny how the same villagers who were here on the day of my dismissal are here pretending to be supporting this reconciliation. They were more than satisfied with the drama that day and just kept clapping their hands and looking at me like I was the devil’s lastborn. I

know most of them are just here for the meat. We're killing a cow after all so meat is plenty. I wish I could see the expressions on their faces though when they discover that the meat will be served without salt. Isn't this whole ceremony is being treated like a funeral!

I don't blame them though for being here. Nothing ever happens in this little village so the idea of witnessing drama must have had everyone's excitement levels rocketing sky high. And I could die or so my aunt kept telling me yesterday in her texts so I guess not many have watched a person die before. A small camp has been set at the back of the homestead, with women going up and down and treating me like they don't know me. They had to put up a tent for me outside the home! Yet I made this solar lit, Fortuner harbouring home of theirs what it is today! My man though, he does the things that make the pots to be done shame. I should start calling him Nedbank, because he makes things happen.

My aunt finds me, hugs me and kisses me before ignoring me and catching up with Elik. She loves Kofi as well. Who doesn't? He's a sweetheart this Kofi of ours. I just stand there, forgotten, feeling a little jealous of how my aunt always seems to give Elik more attention than me. After forever, she takes me away from the Nkrumah brothers and into the tent they set up here. This woman talks! And I swear she wants to know if Elik is still hypnotising me in bed!

"You still making Ghana man speak Chinese in the bedroom?"

I can't with her so I just laugh.

"I know you are. Did you see how good he's looking? Phela, you can just tell when a man is satisfied".

"You gave it to him last night, didn't you? That's why you glowing like you drank glycerine", she adds.

I want to lie and say no but my giggling at last night's memory is betraying me.

"He just took aunty. I was sleeping and by the time I realised what was going on it was too late to stop. So I just cooperated".

She laughs at me so hard. She knows I'm lying.

"It's just, you know these traditional things, they need you clean. No traces of a man inside you", she said.

Oh well! Too late. I have a quarter of Elik's DNA in me, I'm sure. And the other three quarters keeps following me.

"Why did you dress your man in black Fifi, we won't see him after

sunset”, she chuckles.

“He’s not that dark aunty, hawu! He’s better now”.

“He’s not dark, he’s black! Coal black. I’m sure he bleeds smoke that one”, she says.

She never gets tired of calling Elik black and she makes me laugh all the time. And no, Elik is not as black as my aunt makes him seem and he’s not that charred so he doesn’t bleed smoke.

“I can see that this outfit of yours is expensive. It’s very stunning, turn around let’s see”.

I twirl like a ballerina, showing off my outfit.

“Mrs Ghana, look at you! Now take it off”, she says.

I look at her shocked but she’s serious.

“You need to wear as little as possible. And you really don’t want to destroy that outfit with all the things they’ll pour on you. By right you should be topless. You are not married so you are a girl!” she says.

What? I’m sure my face shows that I’m not going out there topless.

“But I’m sure Ghana man would skin me alive if I made you walk around advertising those oranges of his. He strikes me like a breast loving kind of man”, she says.

My aunt though. What kind of man is a breast loving type? Isn’t that true for all men? But in all fairness Elik does love my pair, he adores them and when I’m mad at him he always says I should just put a pillow over my face and let him play with what’s his. That always ends with the pillow thrown away and me not quite remembering why exactly I was mad. I lose my outfit and shoes and she dresses me.

“I know it’s not Gucci but I bought this cloth brand new and cut it up for you. Your body will have to just deal for today”, she says.

Seriously? I don’t even like Gucci! I’m not like that. I’d carefully planned that outfit but ok fine let’s trade it for this metre of cloth. She talks me through it and tells me it’s just for today and after this, things will get better.

“What do you give these men Fifi? Why do they always follow you around?” she asks as she ties the cloth behind my back.

I just laugh. They don’t follow me, they follow Elik and he happens to follow me. And right now they are just running away from something in South Africa and needed the stamps in their passports to prove that they were out of the country. When I emerge from the tent I’m on some

Wakanda type of tip. I'm dressed in a tiny black skirt that stops just below the bum. I have tiny yoga shorts underneath though so even if I faint no one will see my lady bits. All my thighs are out there, but so what? Who doesn't have thighs? I have a black bandeau tied around my boobs, beads on my ankles that rattle as I walk, a bracelet made from a cow's tail on my right arm and a string with the tooth of a bull around my neck. The bull because my surname Nkomo means Cow and the Bull is the king of the kraal after all. And I'm barefooted. Apparently, the ancestors hate shoes and clothes hence my minimal clothing. Picky much oh ye dearly departed?

I look African. Tshaka would have married me if I'd showed up at his palace looking like this! Kofi says I need to have been given a role in the Black Panther movie and I totally agree. He says I look like I travelled from the 1800s and all I need is a spear to complete the outfit. Elik has this grin on his face that has me blushing. I ask Kofi to go and be with the kids and make sure they are fine. The truth is I don't want him around for what follows. I don't mind Elik. I feel like Elik has seen me at my worst so there's nothing I could go through and not want him to witness. To be honest, I'm terrified and he always makes me feel safe.

"Is it wrong that I think you look hot? I seriously got a hard on when you got out of that tent!" he says.

I smile up at him and hang on his arm.

"Maybe I can keep these and when we role play next time I can be the Kalanga princess. What d'you think?" I giggle.

"Stop giving me ideas, I'm not lying about that hard on and now you're making it worse", he says to my amusement.

"I don't like that my guys will be gawking at you though", he sulks.

"I'm sorry, I didn't choose this lousy barely-there outfit. Go shout at your best friend (my aunt)".

Since when is he so jealous? He knows I'm entirely his and have no wish to change that! My aunt comes out and asks to speak to Elik in private!

"Fifi, go and check the beer for me. I'll bring your man back now now", she says.

As I pick up *uphini* (traditional stirring stick) to stir the beer, it all just becomes too real for me. They had to brew the beer outside the gates. The tent was set outside the gate. Everything pertaining to me has to be done outside. I'm an outcast! Without Elik around to hold my hand, I start

crumbling, piece by piece. I keep stirring the drum with trembling hands, afraid to stop and return to my thoughts. A tear rolls out of my eye and falls into the drum and I ignore it. The beer has been brewing for days now and I know it's ready, but I'm not ready to stop stirring.

I hear the sound of the goat bleating as it is led to the ash pit and women talking loudly in the background. Everything sounds so distant as my mind battles to maintain control. Everything inside me is crumbling. I need Elik right now. Another tear escapes my eye but I catch it before it falls out. I'll not shed another tear, I lie to myself. Finally, the person I need is here.

"You alright nana?" he stands next to me and bends over to look at my face. I put the stick down and give him a big hug. He just holds me saying nothing. That's all I need. I know the group of women over there are talking about me but it's not my fault their society decided that public display of affection was a disgrace! When I feel better, I take the matchbox near the pot and light a match close to the beer. It quickly blows out. It is ready.

I go to uMandlovu next. She's just behind the tent and we find her humming softly pounding on her herbs. She has a *ntsaro* (sarong – like wrap) spread out on the ground. Elik stands there looking like a bouncer, saying nothing. He's following me around like a puppy. When we left the fireplace, some woman tried telling him he couldn't be with me but he told her to 'fuck off'. Not in those words but. So now he's been tailing me as I get prepared for the ceremony. MaNdlovu is a seer in the village. She talks nicely to me and says the ancestors are not happy about all this because it should have never happened in the first place. She always looked serious and that hasn't changed. She has that witch face. My aunt says she's just ugly that's why everyone assumes she's a witch. I lie on my back and keep still as commanded. At least my aunt brought me new razor blades, they usually recycle blades here and no, sorry, I'm not about that life.

I already have so many tribal markings my goodness. I don't need anymore. I have the two strokes which we call 'elevens' on my lower back. I got those when I became a woman. They are supposedly to strengthen my back so I can never tire or get back pains from pleasing my man. Ok, those work miracles I suppose, judging by how Elik always wakes up in a good mood when I've been putting my back into it. I have the two sets on either side of my belly button, to ward off evil spirits and to protect my children through pregnancies. I'm not sure those work. I still think I'm being bewitched. I have another two strokes below my belly button, to strengthen

my womb so I have easy pregnancies. Those don't work now, do they? I have a set under each eye, a set on each ankle and a set behind my knees. All these except the womb and back ones, I got when I was a baby! Who mutilates a helpless baby like that though! Who gave them permission to do this to me? At least mine healed well and are barely there now, my cousin's didn't heal so well so she walks around with elevens on her face.

MaNdlovu says she'll carve a horn below my left breast to open up my heart. That sounds scary and painful. What if she digs too deep and cuts my heart open? I'm not here to die. I translate for Elik and he says hell no, no one is cutting me. Eventually after a back and forth with Elik saying I shall not be carved, and me playing translator, MaNdlovu agrees to slice me just a little bit rather than play tattoo artist and carve an entire horn. It takes some convincing before Elik says ok to that. As long as the old woman doesn't cut anywhere near his boobs, he says. I guess MaNdlovu has done this plenty times because 1, 2 and she's done. I just felt the pain of the razor digging into my flesh for a second. She smears black goo on the cut and gives me a leafy concoction to drink.

She says we are done and now I have to kill the chicken so I can retrieve its gall bladder. The last time I killed a chicken I made a complete mess. This chicken killing part has to be done with everyone gathered around as witnesses. My ancestors love an audience! Everyone is called and forms a circle around me. I was hoping somehow Elik's entourage won't come but they are here! What I see on Lemon's face is what I think they call culture shock. It must look like we are onto some voodoo mission with the women clapping and singing songs praising the ancestors while I stand over a black chicken with a knife. I don't even know which direction to bend to because my skirt is not there at the back. I signal to Elik and he comes and stands behind me and shoos everyone away from behind me. This man! I'm going to marry him with an open heart.

Where did they get a black chicken? I've never seen one before. I sharpen the knife on a rock, step on that chicken's feet and bite my lower lip hard and chop off that head. And because things always go wrong for me, the blood from the cut neck sprays onto my face. Yuck! I keep stepping on it though so it doesn't run away. The women are ululating and the men are whistling. The villagers not Elik's entourage. Those ones look mean and no one is going near them. Today I'd love to see anyone try anything silly on me. My men will slaughter them like I just slaughtered this chicken. I

throw the dead chicken into the boiling water provided and wait a bit then take it out, almost scalding my fingers. I quickly pluck out the feathers alternating hands to avoid getting burnt. The singing is still going on and I still have an audience.

My aunt comes and helps me and tells me I'm doing great. She guides me on how to cut the chicken. All I need is the bile. That green, bitter, gooey stuff in the gall bladder. Careful not to break it I cut around it then dig into the chicken and come out with it. I need to consider not doing my nails anymore. MaNdlovu comes and takes that bile and mixes it with a herby paste and says so many things I don't understand. Then she draws an X on my forehead with the paste, to open up the eye of my mind, I think she means my third-eye. Then this woman! In front of all these people, Elik's guys included! She pulls down the cloth covering my breasts leaving them out there staring at everyone! It was too sudden for me to react. She does an X across my left breast to open up my heart. I pull up the cloth but it's a bit late. Now Elik's friends have seen my breasts and funny enough none of them had the audacity to at least look away. Except Kofi shame, he looked down. Lumka stared and he didn't even hide it.

I've never seen Elik so pissed! Ok I have, but that's a common statement. He goes off at MaNdlovu and swears at her and tells her how what she just did was wrong. Luckily for the old woman, English is not a language she knows. So she just looks at Elik like he's crazy and mutters, "*Izizwe vele bathi ziyahlanya* (They say foreigners are insane)". She then gives my aunt the rest of the bile mixture for later use while I join the elders under a tree on the other side of the home. The best 'dale/dare' they could come up with. This will be the first time I lay eyes on my mother since I got here. It's strictly a family thing. No outsiders. But my father says it's fine if Elik sits in because he's more family than all of them combined. I think that's what Elik said to him at some point! My brothers, except Inflation, are all here looking like they would rather be elsewhere and my uncles ever so enthusiastic where meat and money are concerned, are here too. I wonder if they know that we not paying them a cent today! The talks go on and my eldest uncle chairs the meeting. He goes on and on and on about our lineage and our clan and our totems and taboos and omens and all that. It's like I'm in a history lesson.

Then after forever, he eventually gets to the point. I like how everyone is pointing out how I was wrong for leaving after my mother told me not to.

Like why are all these old men nodding their heads to this lie? They were there that day. They know what happened! How are they all choosing to forget all the events that led up to that? But it's all good. They are old isn't and culture says 'an elder is never wrong'. I'm made to apologise and I do. Whether it's coming from my heart or not, even I don't know.

My mother looks up at me and it's like I'm seeing her for the first time. She has tears in her eyes and the lines on her face have deepened. She looks hollow. She looks like an older version of herself. How she managed to age so quickly beats me. She's lost quite a bit of weight as well and her clothes are loosely hanging on her like she's a coat hanger. To put it as it is, she's thin. Not the nice type of skinny no, she's looks like a mosquito that overdosed on herbex. It's as if she'll step up to me and I'll breathe on her and she'll be blown away. She used to say I'm skin and bones back in high school before my hips decided to show themselves. She's that now. If I was a bad child I'd say that not having my (Elik's) money to splash around has taken a heavy toll on her.

Her eyes are shrunken and the pupils are moving too quickly as if she's checking for something in all four corners of the world. She looks... how can I say... deadish and battered and my heart is breaking at the sight. I blink back my own tears. I don't hate her at all. She keeps opening her mouth to say something but closing it again like a fish gasping for air. My eldest uncle then picks up a Kango cup that has seen better days and says it has ash water. We are led to the front of the home where the ash pit is.

First, I as the younger one who erred, I need to call out to the ancestors and ask for a sign of forgiveness. Oh Lawd! The sign apparently will be the goat bleating. There's a black goat tied by a tree near the ash pit, so I have to call out and beg for the forgiveness of the ancestors and if they forgive me then the goat will bleat. Sounds simple enough. I have so many questions though. Like what on earth are the ancestors doing in the ash pit? Shouldn't they be in their graves? And why am I the one asking for forgiveness again?

The twins are not here, thankfully. Inflation took them and went to the shops. I'm sure their little legs can handle a good 5 km walk. I was their age, in Grade 1, running that road to school in winter nogal. So they'll live. We have to lick ash mixed with ground herbs. I just can't get over this. Ash! Licking the ash is the only way to break the curse. The only way to bring forgiveness between my mother and I. For when mother dearest cursed me

and said I was dead, her words were bound by the ancestors. So to undo them we need their go ahead.

My uncle reminds me for the umpteenth time that if I harden my heart, I will drown in my own blood and choke to death. It sounds like a threat really! How brutal the dead can be! It's not cold but I'm shivering. I don't understand why I have to stand here. I've been calling out to my ancestors but they are not responding. My aunt says it's because I don't believe and I'm just doing it, she also reminds me that the dead ones don't understand English so I should try again in Ndebele or Kalanga. I won't lie, I don't believe. I don't believe in much. I know there's a higher power out there. As for ancestors I don't know where I stand. I take a deep breath and hold the spear high in the air and recite my clan names,

*“Nkomo,
Ngubeni,
Mntungwa!*

Nkomo ebomvu, engakhonjwa ngomunwe, elenzipho ezimnyama.

Eyavula intaba ngempondo oqhayaqhwayeni.

Ivula inqaba ngempondo kwelaseNgome.

Mantungwa amahle!”

I take a breath and continue. I have to keep remembering to speak in Ndebele.

“Ancestors, please give me a sign that you can hear me. I did wrong, with great humility I beg for a sign of your forgiveness”.

I almost laugh at myself. That was just terrible. English just kept jumping in there and believe me I'm trying. It's hard and frustrating. You would think the stupid goat will bleat after I so beautifully recited my clan names! But no! It just stays there grazing and not even listening to me. I try again, with less English and more concentration this time. Why the hell won't that goat bleat? Just a young mee-ee is all I'm asking for. I pick up a stone in rage and hit the goat square on its head. It runs around the tree, tangling itself in the rope but it still doesn't bleat. Aaaaghhh! I'd pull out my hair if I had any. Why won't the stupid goat bleat?

I fall down on my knees and spear the spear to the ground. I'm done. It's enough now. I tried my best. I have no fight left in me at all. I sob and I can't even wipe the tears because my hands are full of bile. Gosh! This sucks balls in hell! The first person on my side is Elik, he kneels and takes me in his hands. He has this way of cradling me like a baby when I cry. I

don't know if he's supposed to even touch me but I've failed anyway so nothing matters anymore. I just pray no one tries to stop him because I can't guarantee that he won't use that spear on them.

"It's ok baby. I'm sorry I said you should do this. Should we get out of here?" he asks. I'm not capable of replying. I'm having hiccups.

"Don't cry ma, I'm here for you. You're not alone in this. I'm right here. Come, let's get you out of here".

I want to get out of here.

Then Lemon happens. He's been a silent spectator this whole time.

"Goose", he calls me. I rub my eyes with the back of my hands and look up. "Don't worry about the goat. If I shoot it on the leg, it will mos cry, you'll see", he says pulling out a gun.

A whole gun! So Kofi wasn't lying after all! I know Lemon thinks he's doing me a favour shame, precious thing. The villagers shriek and move away and huddle together. He raises the gun in the air as if in surrender.

"It's licensed", he says, as if that makes it any less lethal.

"Tell them Goose, I've done this many times and I never miss. No one will get hurt. I'll just make the goat cry for you. Would you like that Goose?" he says with such honesty on his face it's amusing.

I would very much love the goat to bleat but not from being shot. That sounds like it will be cheating. And what if the ancestors take offense? Lumka steps up to Lemon and whispers something and Lemon tucks his gun back in his belt and just says "sorry".

Then another familiar voice and a hand on my back. Lumka. "*Mamela sisi ne* (Listen sis). I don't know how your culture works but in my culture for these things to work you have to open up your mind and believe. You have to relax Fierce otherwise it won't work. You can do this. We'll stand with you. We are here for you, ne Elik?" he says.

"Sure thing", Elik says.

They hoist me up and Elik holds my left hand while Lumka passes me the spear then stands on my right. I take like five deep breaths. I can hear the villagers mumbling and probably gossiping about me and my unmarriedness yet somehow I always show up with a man or men. I shut them out. I shut every voice out. Melissa, in Mozambique, taught me self-hypnosis and I need to reach that point of peace right now. I need to tap into my subconscious, it has more sense than my conscious. The only voice I hear is Elik's.

“She’s bleeding”, he says.

“Let her be Elik. She can do this. Leave her”, Lumka says.

Sometimes I feel like I have two bosbands (Boyfriend-husband)! Add Kofi to that and I have three! I can feel the blood trickle through my nose and drop onto me. For a moment, I panic. They did say I would bleed and choke on my own blood but I thought they were bluffing. I feel breathing becoming harder but I remember I need to breathe. I remember Mel telling me to ‘just breathe’. I need to own my breath and find my peace.

I lift the spear up and call out to my ancestors. In such pure Ndebele even I am shocked. I wait and wait. I need that sign right now, I don’t think I can speak anymore. Blood is coming out of my nose way too fast now and it’s starting to splash into the back of my throat. So they were serious about drowning in my own blood? What horror movie is this?

Elik shakes me till I snap out of my self-induced mini-trance. I feel weak and my whole face is burning. I literally feel like I have my face bowed down into a boiling pot and the steam is boiling me. So for real *‘Drowned In Own Blood’* is what’s going to be written on my stone? That’s how I exit life? Killed by my own ancestors?

Twenty-Seven

With all my loved ones, hated ones and I-don't-care-about-you ones surrounding me, I'll take my last breath, if the ancestors will it. I'll die just like I lived, in Elik's arms, surrounded by my men from Africa and as the centre of attention. Then I'll get to ancestor land and I'll kick ass, for I don't deserve this. A crowd has gathered around me. These people love things yeerrr! But thankfully it's a backward village where no one streams anything on Social Media. I want to tell people to move back because they are finishing my oxygen but that would mean tapping into my speech, a sense I don't have access to right now. I can barely breathe and I'm trying hard not to let the panic attack take over. That will surely send me across the veil quick quick. I now wish I had agreed to Lemon shooting la way. It could have saved me this pain.

My mother finds her way through and she takes me from Elik. Where was she this whole time? And why isn't she the one bleeding? She holds me and cries out shamelessly. I'm so confused. I thought my briefcase-stealing uncle said we can't talk to each other until the ritual is over and we are given the go ahead. Did the rules change? Or do those things only apply to me, mama gets a free pass through all of this?

"Forgive me. I can't bear to have you die. I know I failed you and I know how much I hurt you. But please forgive me. I'm begging you", she says cradling me, her tears falling on me. If I die, it's on her. I hope she knows that! Then she starts speaking to me in our mother language, Kalanga.

We never really speak it because Ndebele is what's taught at school and only a few people in this village can still speak it. We learnt it because my late grandfather refused to speak any other language, the language of royalty that's becoming extinct faster than morals, he used to say. One of the few memories I have of my grandfather was him and I standing next to the grave of his father, my great grandfather. He had said he knew his house was almost ready and he would leave soon. I didn't understand then and he had to explain that one day he would sleep and never wake up. I was confused still until he had to bluntly tell me that he would die very soon. I remember pointing out that he didn't look sick or that old or anything so why would he die.

“Because that’s the best way to die. Strong and with dignity. I won’t wait until I’m old, blind and senile before I die. Besides, the ancestors are calling me and my time is very near”, he had responded.

“But how do you know they are calling you? Can you see them? Can you hear them? Are they here?” I’d asked.

I was convinced that he was either going crazy or was bewitched. I knew the village mad man, he used to always seem like he was talking to someone yet there was no one.

“No, they visit me in dreams and they give me signs through nature”.

“Dreams? You are wrong *tategulu* (grandfather). Dreams are things we think about during the day, then they come back to us in our sleep”, I had educated him. That’s what Butho had told me.

“No little one, you are wrong. Dreams are voices of our ancestors. And in my dreams, I hear them telling me that my time on earth is almost up. Every night I walk to a river and stand at the bank. My father calls for me from the other side. But everytime I step in, I wake up. It’s not yet time, but one day I will cross that river and join my father and his father before him”.

“I don’t want you to leave me *tategulu* ”, I had clung on with my small hands onto his old callused hand.

“I may be gone but I will never leave you. I will watch out for you from the other side of the river. I will keep you safe. Just remember me when you need me, I’ll be looking out for you”.

“But how? You’ll be dead! I don’t like ghosts. They scare me”.

I’d never seen a ghost face to face but I had heard the stories. I had also seen the random fires that appeared from a distance in pitch black nights that were said to be ghosts.

“We’re all ghosts little one. We all carry inside us those who came before us. They are a part of us. When I’m gone, I’ll be a part of you and whenever you need me, all you’ll need to do is look deep into your heart, remember me and I’ll be there”, he had said.

I didn’t understand but I had felt a wave of peace sweep over me then. I was only 5 years old and I believed every word my grandfather used to say. He was an adult after all and adults never lied.

I’ve zoned out so far into memory, my mother’s wailing voice is just like an echo from a deep cave.

“No matter what happens, always remember that you are Kalanga, you are royalty, rise above situations and stand up tall and proud. The world

doesn't end at that horizon you see over there, there's more. Grow up and go out there into the world and live. Be whoever you want to be", my grandfather said to me in one instance.

May his soul rest in peace . Such a wise man he was. He died a month after that conversation. I was too young then so I didn't attend the funeral. As my mother keeps yap yapping, my mind is trying to quieten, searching for my grandfather's face. We had been close for the few years I knew him. I can't find his face in my head. I have forgotten him. That makes me feel so guilty right now. I feel like I betrayed him by forgetting him. He specifically instructed me to remember him but I forgot. I need to find his face in my memory, maybe he'll help me. My mother's tears falling on me bring me back to the present. She's still talking! I'm still nose bleeding. Not so much but if it continues, I'll surely die, no two ways about it.

"I'm so sorry Lastborn. You were my first girl, my hope. When I had you, your father and I had long fallen out of love", she says.

Really? They made more children after that! How if they didn't love each other anymore? But again, I'm trying to die slowly here and asking questions won't help me right now.

"I remember the day I gave birth to you, after all the crying, you smiled up at me, with your little thumb in your mouth and I fell in love. My life didn't start until you were born. I named you Lastborn because I was content with never having another child again. You were the gift I had waited for, for a long time. I watched you grow and all you ever did was respect me and love me and want to make life better for me, no matter how difficult I was. Then I failed you. When your sister died you said I was to blame and you were right, I just didn't want to accept that. I didn't want to think my words had killed my child but I did it again, with my words. I was supposed to be a mother but I failed you again. In my anger and my own resentment, I failed you over and over again".

The fact that she's saying all this in Kalanga has so much depth and meaning, if I wasn't dying I would say something back. Something nice.

"Then you found a man. A good man that worshipped the ground you walked on. I remember watching him take care of you at Replace's funeral. I refused to believe it was real. I couldn't fathom how a man could possibly love a woman that much. I watched him take care of the funeral. He didn't know us but he did everything and carried himself with so much respect. I couldn't believe that was real. I thought he would use you and spit you out

like chewing gum. I had never seen love like that and it didn't make sense to me. In my own selfishness, I stood in your way. Then when it came out that he was married to someone else I thought *'I knew it was too good to be true!'* . Looking back now, I see that all the trials and tribulations I endured when your father took a second wife made me react the way I did. I swore to you *ijoyi* and I didn't even know what exactly that meant. I failed you".

She's right there. She failed me!

"Then it was too late. I failed at controlling my temper, when all you wanted from me was acknowledgement. I was hard on you and I drove you away. I failed you my child, I'm so sorry", she says.

Every word drops into my heart with every tear that drops on my cheek. I can hear Elik panicking and talking ambulances and doctors and killing people and all that. But I shut him out and just let in my mother. The woman who killed me. I need to hear my murderer's words.

"I know you love that man and you have my support now. He loves you too. He has proven it over and over again. I was wrong. Please don't die, live and be with your man, and make your own children".

When she realises my nose bleeding is not stopping and I'm beginning to gurgle hard on blood, she turns to pleading with the ancestors instead. Why are they not punishing her? She did all this by herself. Why am I the one being punished? Elik takes me from her and joins in begging me not to die, he promises to buy me the world itself if I can just stay with him. Lumka is here as well, begging me too and Kofi and Lemon and Clive. Where are my brothers? My father yena? Uncles? It's just Elik and his guys begging me not to die. Everyone is saying I shouldn't die. Do they honestly think I want to die? I have a class on Tuesday in Cape Town, I can't die today! I try to sit up.

"Space", is all I can muster right now.

They move away leaving behind the one voice I love.

"Don't leave me my love. I'm on my knees here begging you. I'm nothing without you", Elik says.

"I'll never...leave you", I try to say but choke.

I want to sell him the whole *'if I die I'll become a star and watch over you from the heavens bla bla'* but talking is impractical right now. I hug him rather, staining him with my blood but who cares. If it's the last time I see him then a bloody hug is better than no hug at all.

I feel so light headed and I think I pass out. For a brief moment I think I

see my grandfather's face. I found him. He's standing on the other side of the river and he's shouting something. I can't hear so I get into the river and waddle through the knee high water towards him. The level of the water rises as I go deeper into the water. I'm getting closer to him, just a few more steps and I'll be there. The water is up to my neck now and for some reason I forgot how to swim. I'm beginning to panic.

"Lastborn stop!" his voice comes deeper than I remember and it's amplified. I stop and listen. Why is he stopping me? I'm almost there. I need to get out of this water. I stop though.

"You are alright. Stop fighting", he says.

I look at myself and at the water around me. I'm not fighting anymore, I'm standing.

"Why are they punishing me and not mother?" I ask.

"Because you are a Nkomo and she's not. The blood running through your veins does not flow in hers. She's an outsider and her surname is foreign to us", he says.

"But...she married a Nkomo so...?" I try to make sense of it.

"She took the surname but her blood is still foreign, her totems are still foreign, she's not one of our own. It's you little one that needs to make peace with us. We want to forgive you but you have to forgive first".

"Let me come to you. I miss you so much and I never said goodbye". I take a step towards the river bank, I'm almost there. I just need to get out of this water.

"Stop", he screams at me sounding desperate. I stop dead in my tracks or is it in my water?

"You are running out of time. The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is for the strong. So, decide right now, are you weak or are you strong?" he says.

There's this urgency in his voice that I can't place. Just like that he vanishes leaving me submerged neck down in dirty water, staring at an empty river bank. His words hit me. I'm dying and I'm running out of time.

I close my eyes and it's just darkness.

"I forgive you mama", is all I can come up with.

I'm forgiving her, not for her but for myself, because I'm strong. Even without a throne, I'm a princess. I'm strong. I hear the goat bleat and Kofi shouts a "Yes", the kind he shouts every time his team scores a goal.

Once. I'm not sure if I heard right. It bleats again, louder this time. That

meee-eee-eee can't be missed. Ululation and whistling follow and I smile a little, weakly. Like seriously? That's all I had to do? Forgive? You know what, whatever, I don't care right now. I just want to rest in peace. The last thing I say is "Elik" before my eyes close.

I wake up still lying on the ash mound with people around me and Elik gently rubbing my back. You gotta be kidding me! They still not done with me? How long was I out for vele?

"Baby", I say in the squeakiest voice I've ever heard. I have to squint to block out the sun rays that seem brighter than normal.

"My love. You ok? You are ok!" Elik says.

For some reason, every time I almost die, his face is the first I see when I return to the land of the living. His eyes are bloodshot and I hope he didn't kill anyone while I was lights out. He looks away and rubs his eyes with the back of his hand. My poor baby.

"Let's get this over with and I'm getting you the hell out of this place! I still need my wife in one piece", he says.

I agree. I need to get as far from here as possible. Apparently, I caused such a frenzy and people went mad. I know a couple of villagers here who would have celebrated if I had died! I know them. Mama warned me about them when she still loved me. My aunt cleaned my face so I'm not as bloody anymore. I wish I could fast forward the following rituals. That stupid goat that wouldn't cry has been slaughtered now as an acknowledgement to the ancestors that '*Yes we heard you so in exchange we'll kill your goat*'. Now I'm stinking of its bile! Can this end already, I'm done. Had I known this was what would happen, I would have never agreed to it. But somehow I'm resting in the thought that I know I made my grandfather proud. He loved everything cultural and I swear I saw him. I know I was probably hallucinating but it felt so real.

I lie down, more like dump my body, on the bed of ash surrounded by branches of *umphafa* (Buffalo-Thorn tree) that have such weird shapes, they look like they will come alive any second now. Why in the name of all that's alive did they choose *umphafa*! This is the same tree we use for burials. Hello, over here, I'm not dead! See, now I have no doubt these people are trying to kill me! Everyone is trying to kill me. I'm confused and hurt. Why is everyone wanting me dead? Even the ancestors nogal? They don't even know me! I was born long after they were dead. And punishing

me for a crime that's mine, now that's just unfair.

I just want to get through this. I just lie here and I'm flooded with a whole drum of beer. Thankfully it's cold because I'll have been boiled into stew now. The torrents of beer rain keep coming and I'm holding my breath as hard as I can. It doesn't help that I'm weak from the torture the ancestors put me through not so long ago! The stench of fermented sorghum plus the particles sticking to my skin and the wetness of it all is making me gag. Now this is a huge mess with a capital M. I want out. I'm DONE. But it's not up to me to say when I'm done. We have one more step to go. It's on to the grand finale. I stand opposite my mother, upright, my face stoic and all my mind is thinking is *'let's get this over with'*. My mother is hanging her head. Funny how she looked me straight in the eye the day she disowned me but can't look at me now! I might have forgiven her but the scars will never go away.

MaNdlovu puts a tablespoon of ash mixed with green herbs in each of our open hands. It looks yuck but the sooner I eat it up and lick the pure ash for dessert, the faster I get out of this accursed place. Just like I thought, it tastes as horrible as it looks. The final step is washing our hands with ash water. Then we shake hands and for once my mother's eyes look into mine. She has tears dancing in her eyes. I don't know why I'm not feeling sorry for her. Her words touched me but they came way too late in my life. I forgive but I never forget. She doesn't get that pass, she's not Elik!

Elik is standing behind me and I feel his arms close around my stomach. Seriously? I'm a wet mess and besides, people are watching! I know he doesn't give a damn what anyone says and should anyone try to tell him to get away from me, Lemon won't be the one pulling the trigger! And all this ululation is giving me a headache seriously. I'm quite weak and light headed still.

"You are free to come home now my child. Walk freely through the gates. This is your home. The curse has been lifted and the ancestors have spoken", my father says.

"I know baba. I just don't want to. Maybe one day, just not today".

He looks at me in shock and his jaw drops. Like I'm wrong for saying that! Every time I catch someone's eye, they look down! I wonder why they can't look at me.

"Are you staying?" my mother asks, her voice as thin as herself.

I shake my head no. Like Butho and Nqo, I'll be gone from home for a

very long time.

“Will you ever come back?” she asks.

“I don’t know”, I say. At least I’m being honest.

“I’m sorry Lastborn”, she says.

“I know. I’m sorry too mama”. I break the handshake.

The ceremony is complete. I take the time to hug my father and shake my uncles’ hands, my aunts, my brothers, my cousins and everyone with an extended hand. For most, this is the last time they will ever see me and for my brothers, I’ll only put as much effort in our relationship as they do. I need to focus on my family now and that’s Elik, Kofi, Peter and Paul.

I’m a mess from the beer, the bile, the blood and the ash. Gosh, I’m a complete mess. It’s like I was swallowed up by a pig, digested a little, then spit out. I need to clean up. But I’m not going into this home. The river will do, I used to bath there anyway. I look at Elik and he looks so helpless. Like he wants to help me but has no idea where to start. Our eyes communicate and we walk away.

Then Kofi happens.

“Dude, you stink!” he says covering his nose. I try and grab him so I can hug him and make him stink with me. He jumps back just in time. I’m smiling now. Kofi just lights up my world without even trying. He’s such a beautiful soul.

“I thought you were gonna die”, he says looking a bit serious.

“Well, I keep telling you I’m a cat, I have nine lives, don’t I?” still trying to grab him.

“I’m glad you didn’t die bro. I know I never tell you enough but I love you Sunshine. I can’t lose you”, he says.

“You need to find your own girl to love and leave mine alone”, Elik says.

“Trust me, with her looking like this, like she just crawled out of a grave, she’s all yours”, Kofi says.

“Not funny Kofi! Leave her alone”, Elik says his voice becoming stern.

“My cue to leave before grumpy bear here kills me”, Kofi says. I just look at them and smile. I feel more at home with them than I ever did with my own family. With them I’m myself and everything is effortless.

“I love you”, the words just run out my mouth. He stops and looks at me as if assessing the truth in my words. I have to stop too otherwise it will look awkward with me walking and him standing.

“I love you too. I really do”, he says.

“And about today. I thought I was losing you. I didn’t understand what was going on. I felt so helpless Fierce, not knowing what to do. I never want to feel that way ever again. I can’t lose you baby, do you understand? I’d be nothing without you, nothing”, he says.

One look in his eye and I know he means it.

“I’d be nothing without you too Elik”.

If I wasn’t stinking so much I would kiss him but I have to settle to holding his hand instead. He pulls me towards him and hugs me tight. When he lets me go, his clothes are stained but he says he doesn’t care about that, he already has my blood on his T-shirt.

I grab my beautiful outfit from the tent and he carries it. We walk in silence towards the river as if unsure what to say to each other. I have no care in the world as we get there. I throw off my clothes, I mean cloths, and find the stagnant water behind the rocks where we used to bath as kids and run away from boys. Everything looks exactly like I remember it. Things never change in this village. Elik just stands there, cross armed, looking at me, still looking somewhat helpless.

“What if someone sees you? I don’t want anyone seeing you naked. That’s my stuff”, he says.

“Stand guard then, I’ll be done in 3 minutes”.

“Let me”, he says, dumping my outfit on the ground and walking into the water with shoes and all! It might be better if we had a towel or soap but he has to bath me with his hands, splashing water all over himself in the process. There’s no towel to dry up with so I just put on my clothes. I’ll dry naturally. We walk down the bank and sit where we once sat when Replace had just died.

“So where to from here?” he asks.

“From here, you are my family. I focus on me and you and our twins. I’ll take care of everyone else to the best of my abilities but I won’t beg. I’m done begging to be accepted. From here, it’s me and you Elik”.

He puts an arm around me and pulls me closer towards him.

“I’ll treat you right. You are my queen and baby we’ve walked through all nine hells together. You didn’t give up on me. You loved me baby girl, you just loved me and wore that love boldly no matter who said what. Now sit back and let me take care of you for the rest of your life. Whatever you want, you’ll get. If you don’t want to lecture anymore, you don’t have to do

it. If it means me starting another company and another and working 48 hour days to take care of you then that's exactly what I will do".

He's so sweet but I think I love my students now so I'll just 'teach' till the end of my contract. I mean Kofi will teach. A long moment of silence.

"Oh, I was thinking baby", a thought just occurred to me. He turns his face towards me.

"Let's abstain from sex till our wedding night", I say confidently.

I saw it in a bridal magazine and I just had to say it now before I forget. Apparently, people do that so their wedding night feels special. He laughs at me.

"Alright. Tell me these words tonight when I have this ass in my hands", he reaches for my behind.

"I'm serious Elikplim!" I hit his hand away.

"I'm serious too ma. I know you'll be saying 'but Elik, just a little more. I want some more'", he mimics my voice.

"Or I'll wake up and you'll be molesting me and wanting to ride", he says. He's so silly and no I don't sound like that! Although I always just want some more.

"I'm serious hunn!" I am serious.

"Fine. If that's what you want, let's do it", he laughs.

I don't think he's serious. I wish I could sit here forever. The sunlight dancing through the swaying trees and falling on us like golden raindrops and the sound of singing birds and the stillness of the forest, have me wanting to stay right here, with my head on Elik's shoulder.

"Are you alright baby? Don't be afraid to feel. It's just me here, no need to pretend".

"I'm fine hunn. I don't feel anything".

"Come on baby", he says.

"Not now baby please. Can we just sit here forever please? In silence".

"For as long as you want ma", he says.

The sun is going down now and we've been here for a very long time. I even dozed off and Elik lay me down and just sat waiting for me to wake up. I feel more alive when I wake up. We take one last trip to Replace's grave. I need to tell my baby sister that mother and I are fine now but I'll be leaving home. As I kneel at the foot of her grave and pour my heart out to her, I know I'm done with this place. I'm done with everything. I need new ancestors. I'm so done with mine! Next stop is goodbyes to anyone who

cares to leave the home. I'm not going in there and I'm leaving, my mind is made up. No one seems to understand but it is what it is. I'm done with this place.

The twins will ride with Lumka. As Kofi drives and Elik and I sit the back seat, me curled up into Elik, I ask to listen to *'Burn That Bridge – Akon'*. I just want the chorus and the bridge. I look out of the window and say my silent goodbyes. I tried. I don't know what exactly I expected from this ceremony. Closure? Forgiveness? Reconciliation? I think I got all the above yet I still feel incomplete. I forgave my mother so she's free to live her life now. As for me, I need to start my own life now. I'm burning this bridge down. Akon keeps encouraging me in lyric to burn that bridge that brings me to this village so I never come back here again. Let it burn, that bridge.

I'm sitting on the bed in our room in Rainbow Hotel, feeling clean and fresh, wearing one of Elik's T-shirts only, chatting to Kofi. I have this wide smile on my face. He's just so funny, I can't stop laughing. Elik takes my phone and puts it away and takes my hands. Such a party pooper!

"You realise you don't have to be strong, right? I'm here, let me be your strength".

I look up at him and he's looking back at me. Those brown eyes almost have me singing Destiny's Child's Brown Eyes. How did I get so lucky? How did I get a man like this? Why does he love me so much?

"Cry if you want to, I'll hold you. Be emotional if you want to, I'll make love to you. Throw things around, break everything in here if that will make you feel better, I'll pay the damage fee. Punch me, hit me, kick me, yell at me if you need to take it out on someone, I'll take it and I won't make you feel bad about it afterwards. Tell me if you still have words to say to your mother, I'll drive you back there right now. Anything but keeping it inside baby girl. Feel. I need you to feel and let it out. We're done bottling things up. Feel. I'm right here for you", he says, looking into my eyes.

His look is desperate and bordering on despair. Desperate to make me ok? Despair because he doesn't know how to make me ok?

I smile a weak smile at him. Hardly a smile, just a show of teeth. His words strummed the chords of my heart and I'm at a loss of words of my own. I'm thinking of breaking everything in this room. It looks old

anyways, maybe they will take the opportunity to buy new furniture.

“I want a hug. That’s all I need”, I get off the bed.

“Since when do we hug with panties on?” he says.

Since when don’t we? I laugh it off and lose the panties though. I sit on him, facing him as usual, legs wrapped around his waist and arms around his neck. I just want to breathe him in. I love his scent, from day one it’s the one thing that got me wet in all the wrong places. I feel at home when his hands wrap tightly around my back and he gives me a peck on the neck.

“Let go. Let it all out”, he whispers.

I just stay there. I think he wants me to cry but I’m not sure I want to. Once I open those barriers, I’ll be a wreck all night. I’m stronger than that. What’s that grandpa said? Yes, I’m strong. So no tears.

“I’m right here. You don’t need to be strong. Let it all out. You are my baby, and I wanna take care of you. So let go. Allow me to be here for you”.

I stay silent.

“Cry baby. Cry for me. Let it all out. I’m right here and I won’t let you go. I’ll hold you. Cry”, he says.

I feel a tear, then another, then they flood my eyes, then I’m sobbing softly, getting louder. Then I’m crying my eyes out and my body is shaking and my throat is sore. I almost died. I thought the whole ceremony will leave me feeling better but no. I feel terrible and I’ve been pretending like I’m ok. I kissed death and I’m terrified. I hold on to Elik and cry my eyes out. He doesn’t even tell me to stop or that it will be fine or anything like that. He just holds me gently rocking me back and forth and telling me to cry. It takes forever to get it together. I knew I would be a wreck and I was right. When I lift my face up, he dries the tears away with his thumbs, making way for new ones and rubbing those away too, gently, telling me how beautiful I am. Telling me to let it all out. It takes a while. I find his eyes and look into them, trying hard to keep the tears back. I’m so grateful for him.

Tears are still coming but slowly now. I want to look away. I feel so small and so vulnerable and so weak and so needy. All my guards are down and I bite my lip and keep looking into those eyes looking back at me. I feel naked. I am clothed in a T-shirt but I feel bare. Like my soul is exposed and he can see how wounded I am. Like he can see the pain pumping from my heart. I can’t explain why I’m hurt so much but I know I am deeply injured.

“I’m broken”. It comes out more miserable than intended.

“I don’t care. I’ll fix you up. You are mine and I’ll put you back together, piece by piece, whatever it takes”. His promise makes that tear that had been dancing in my eye roll down.

“You’re all mine baby girl. Let me take care of you. Let me love you”, he says, holding the stare.

I look down and replay the day in my head. How Elik was there for me through it all. How he funded everything. How he never once complained. I realise he’s too good for me.

“I don’t deserve you”, I say.

“Bullshit. I don’t deserve you”, he gives me a soft kiss on my arm running over his shoulder to around his neck.

“I love you Fierce. More than life itself, I love you”.

I’m still sitting on him, legs spread and wrapped around him, my fingers splayed and digging gently into his back. The hunger in his eyes echoes mine perfectly. I’m drinking him up and my eyes say it all. I’m begging for him to love me the one way he really knows how. As his hands wander all over my body, under the T-shirt, needing to touch everywhere. His eye keeps holding mine as if asking *‘is it ok if I touch here?’*

I feel myself drenching his sweatpants more and more. Unasked, I take off the T-shirt and push his head down while I lift my chest up to his face. I let him stay there while I gulp for air. When he raises his head up, I lower my lips down to his and he gives back what I’m giving. Slowly, sensually, intentionally relishing every moment. I feel the saltiness of tears in our kiss and when I try to pull back, he holds me in place and keeps our lips locked. He lays me back on the bed and takes his time loving and kissing every piece of me while losing a piece of clothing every now and then, till it’s just us.

I keep pulling him down, closer, just a little closer. He slides down my body from the lips down and down. The touch of his mouth, the kiss of his tongue and those nibbles that I can never get used to seem heated and everywhere all at once. It’s too slow but too fast, too much but just not enough. He’s driving me crazy yet when he comes back up so his face is above mine and says “I love you Fierce” I’m soothed. I find my peace. I tremble under him with need. I need him right now but he’s still appreciating what’s laid before him and planting soft kisses on my parted lips. As he drives a finger home and takes my lips in his, I grab the sheets into knots and close my eyes. I won’t let go to his finger, it’s him I need.

Only him, inside me, completing me.

Ever so gentle, he finds himself into me and my head falls back just as my back arches.

“I’ll always love you”, he whispers in my ear as he indulges in me and lets our bodies dissolve into each other. I hope he knows that I’ll always love him too, I just can’t form the words in between these moans and gasps.

“It’s me baby girl. Let go. Let me in”, he says.

I didn’t notice how tense I was. I exhale deeply and relax and let him merge his being to mine, sew his very soul onto mine. He starts slow but it’s like he can’t be slow. I’m flying with him all the way, letting him guide me and take me and rock me and have me, all of me. I hold on to his back, crying out every sensation, pronouncing his name and asking for some more, just a little more, faster, harder, just a little more. He’s giving it to me like we are married.

My legs are the first to shake, betraying the wave of ecstasy coming.

“I love you Fierce... All of you... I love you...”, he says in short breaths as he joins me in letting go and pours himself into me in the warmest and most delightful way ever. My legs stay locked around him, keeping him in place, afraid to lose him. All that’s left is sweaty bodies, quiet gasping breaths and solid silence in between.

“You good?” he checks up on me, finishing the question with a kiss on my forehead. I nod.

“I’m... perfect”.

My breath is not all here yet though. I feel like I have loved him from the beginning of everything. Like we are made from the same substance and were destined for each other. I love him not only for what he is or what he has or what he looks like, but for what I am when I am with him. Myself. I love him for the part of me that he alone knows how to draw out. I love him, I just. Our breathing is more stable now.

“Marry me baby girl”, he says from nowhere.

“I said I’d marry you, nothing’s changed my love”.

I wear an engagement ring on my finger!

“Marry me tomorrow. Let’s do it when we get to South Africa. I can’t wait a day longer. I want you to be my wife”, he says, still trapped by my thighs. Trust Elik to enjoy leg over so much he wants to marry that cookie. I nod.

Wait, what? Did I just agree to getting married tomorrow? How’s that

gonna work?

Twenty-Eight

The guys sat together for hours in the living room. Lemon kept scratching his head with his gun, Elik paced, Lumka had his head bowed down and Clive sat there rigid, looking dead. We left Bulawayo excited because I was about to go and sign my marriage certificate and officially be a Nkrumah. Normally it takes time, interviews, verification of documents and all that, but it's Elik I'm marrying and he knows a guy everywhere so I'm sure we would have just waltzed into Home Affairs and signed and I'd have thrown my bouquet with no one to catch it and we would have left Mr Prof and Mrs Dr Nkrumah.

All that changed when we landed at O.R Tambo and Lumka got a phone call. He was on that call for a while and the look on his face told us whatever news he had received wasn't good. I thought maybe someone had died but it seemed bigger than that. He told Kofi and I to take the kids and go get coffee while they talk. At that moment, Kofi and I knew something bad had happened. We tried exchanging some banter but the jokes were dry and not worthy a laugh. Only Peter and Paul laughed around telling us stories of school, oblivious of a possible storm looming on us. I was worried. I don't know why but I was uneasy.

Then they came for us and we all went towards the car rental and picked up cars and drove in silence towards Morningside. Elik barely looked at me on the way but he assured me that everything would be fine. That implied that something wasn't right but he was in no talking mood. He kept alternating between burying his face in his hands and uttering 'shit!' under his breath and banging the steering wheel. As soon as we got home, the first thing he told me was "Today is not the day we get married". I just nodded because I could tell that was no time to argue.

Again, Kofi and I were asked to go and play video games and keep the kids in the bedroom. They were deliberately shutting us out of whatever was going on. I went to get a bottle of water from the kitchen and went through the living room. They all dropped silent when they saw me and did not speak until I had my water and had walked away to Kofi's bedroom. The atmosphere was intense. Their demeanour scared me and I communicated that to Kofi.

"Dude. Whatever happened in Pretoria and whatever they ran from this

weekend is huge!” he said.

“Tell me”, I said, desperate not to be left out in the dark.

“I don’t know and that’s how I know it’s huge. Elik would have told me otherwise”.

“Oh well, they fix everything. There’s nothing Lemon can’t do and Lumka has contacts everywhere and they will pay whoever is bothering them, right?” I’d asked, faking some confidence but just seeking for some form of reassurance. I did not find that in Kofi. He just shrugged his shoulders and continued looking worried.

We ignored Peter and Paul enough until they realised it and started talking to each other. After forever, Kofi’s bedroom door had opened and an exhausted looking Elik had walked in.

“Baby, Kofi, pack your bags and take the kids, you going to Cape Town now. I’ll be there this evening”, he said.

He still wouldn’t look me in the eye. I’d tried following when he left the room but Kofi grabbed my arm and stopped me.

“Let’s do as he says Sunshine. He’s under a lot of stress so let’s just do as he says”.

He was right. I went to our room and picked up my bag and a few things. Most of my things were in Cape Town anyway.

Lumka gave me a hug as we left, a big hug, long and silent, as if it was for the last time. When he eventually released me, he said: “Remember to always look in the mirror so you can see what I see”.

The flight to Cape Town was the longest two hours of my life. We barely spoke except to the twins when they needed something and the turbulence was bad as if taunting me. That night Kofi and I and the twins all slept together in his bed, huddled together, scared but not knowing what of. Elik had not shown up and his phone was off. All their phones were off. We tried again the next morning and the next and the next. Nothing. If Kofi hadn’t stopped me, I would have flown to Joburg to look for them.

Every morning, the kids went to school, Kofi and I went to campus and everything was as per schedule. Except I could see it in Kofi’s eyes that he worried as much as I did. I would lock myself up in the bathroom and cry then come out smiling. I know Kofi could tell from my eyes but he pretended not to see. I needed answers.

Four days later

It's been four days and I'm going out of my mind. As Kofi drives from campus to Newlands in the evening, I just hold on to his free hand. He's the only one left and we both don't know what to do. At least he's stronger than me, he's giving my lectures. I drag myself into the house and the kids run to me with their loud "Aunty Fierce". I kneel and give them hugs and I love yous. My hugs have become fonder since their father disappeared. I see remnants of him in them and I just need to hold on to that. I just want Elik back, or at least someone to tell me what happened to him. I want my man back. I want to go to the police but Kofi says Elik wouldn't want that so I don't know what to do. I tried tracking his phone, I tried tracking his car, I tried everything but I returned too multiple errors. I called his insurance but they wouldn't track him for me. I don't know what else to do. I'm falling apart and Kofi too. He has to leave for Germany but how can he when his brother is missing. He can't just leave me with the kids. Every time my phone rings I jump hoping it's Elik, but it never is.

"Let me go and change my shoes, I'll be back right now", I say to the twins.

"Ok", they say in perfect synchrony.

When I turn around, there's Elik standing, leaning against the counter with his arms folded across his chest.

"Peter, Paul, go to Aunt Lizzy's house. Stay there until I come and fetch you", I say to the twins.

They run off, yelling and squealing and racing each other. I'm so angry at Elik. He can't just disappear and then reappear and stand there like nothing happened. He can't! Does he know how hard the past few days have been? Does he know that I've had to sleep in Kofi's bed every night because I was terrified of sleeping alone? Does he know how I've been falling apart? I walk towards him, fast almost breaking into a run and throw myself at him. He doesn't say anything but just opens his arms. I start hitting him, yelling at him and asking him where he's been. He doesn't say anything but just holds me so I can stop hitting him. I hit him until I can't anymore and I just collapse into his arms. When Kofi walks through the door Elik takes me off his arm and hugs Kofi in a way I have never seen before. Tight, all arms, hard. They hold that hug and I watch. After a while, they break apart.

"Go and sit, I'm coming", Elik says.

We obediently go to the living room and Kofi sits on the couch and I sit

on the floor in between his knees and we wait. Elik comes a few minutes later and pulls an ottoman and sits opposite us.

“I’m sorry I disappeared on you guys. I know you are unhappy with me and I know you have so many questions. You’ll understand when I’m done talking”, he says.

I’m still grumpy and gods I’m so angry at him. How could he do that to us!

“Baby, do you know why I was so hard on you about doing your own thing and about holding down this lecturing job and stuff?” he jumps right into the deep end. I shake my head no. No clue.

“I needed you to learn responsibility. I have no problem with providing for you. In fact, I would love you to do nothing and let me work for you. But I knew this day would come and I needed you to be ready”.

“What day? Ready for what? What’re you talking about?” I ask.

“He’s probably just high”, Kofi says and we laugh a little uncomfortable laugh.

“Not today little bro. Please, both of you, listen to me”, he says with a commanding tone.

“I need us to talk about Pretoria”.

My heart skips a beat.

“I don’t wanna hear it”, I say with a jumpy voice.

“Ya Elik, you’re here, you’re home, that’s all that matters man. Let sleeping dragons lie”, Kofi agrees with me.

“No. You need to hear it. Even dragons don’t sleep forever and what happens when they wake up?” Elik says.

“They breathe fire and burn everything to the ground”, Kofi says.

“Exactly!”

I clasp my hands, I honestly don’t want to hear anything about that Pretoria saga.

“I should have told you guys this a long time ago but I wanted to protect you. I thought I had everything under control but now eey, it’s all belly up man”, he says.

“I don’t wanna hear this, please my love. Whatever it is, I forgave you so let’s not go there. I don’t wanna get hurt”, I say.

“You’ll be hurt this time and I can’t protect you from it”, Elik says.

He catches my eye for a micro second and he drops his gaze. His voice sounds exhausted.

“I should have told you this a long time ago, it would’ve saved you a lot of pain. I’m sorry. I didn’t want this. Lumka was supposed to take care of it. He thought he did but no. And now we are in deep shit and there’s no way out of this one”. Now he’s really scaring me.

I wrap my arms around Kofi’s calves. I need strength.

“Promise to listen and not interrupt”, he says.

I catch his eye and the pain in it makes me want to run to him and hold him in my arms. I stay put though and I promise.

“So what happened was...”, he starts.

His head stays bowed and never once does he look up at us. At first I gasp in shock, then I’m angry, then I’m hurt, then I’m shattered, then I’m traumatised, then I’m totally destroyed. I don’t see how we’ll get through this. There’s no way. Kofi taps me up on my shoulders, I look upwards at him through my glassy eyes and he signals that I come and sit on the couch next to him. I fold my legs under me and put my arms around his neck and I cry. Tears just fall out but I’m careful not to scream and have Lizzy and the kids coming here. My new job is to protect those kids with my life. I have to do everything I can to make sure they are protected. What are we going to do? Kofi is crying too, not like me though but I can feel his chest heaving up and down and his sniffs as low as they are, I hear them.

“Fierce baby, I know you think you can’t stand on your own. You think you can’t survive without me. But you can. I need you to. I need you to be strong. Can you do that for me my angel?”. I nod. What option do I have? Kofi holds on to me and I to him.

“You guys act like children and want to party every day of the week and want to dance and all that. I’ve never had a problem with that. Seeing you happy makes me happy. It makes me think that at least I’m doing something right. But I need you guys to grow up and fast. I need you two to grow up right now”.

I’m weeping now and clinging on to Kofi. I can’t help Elik and I feel so helpless. I want to help him. I don’t know how but I’m sure I can come up with a plan.

“What we discussed here stays here. And should they come, Fierce you are just my girlfriend, naïve and pretty. Kofi you are my little brother, studying in Germany, hardly home. You know nothing. This that I just told you, you don’t know, never heard of it. My people, my contacts, my guys you just know them by name through me. You have no idea what they do or

even what they are to me. And Fierce baby, when they take you I need you to cry. Just cry and maintain you don't know anything".

He comes and kneels down where we are and hugs Kofi and I. He's not crying though.

"I love you, both of you. With everything", he says.

"I love you too", I say.

"I love you too", Kofi says.

Kofi says he's going for a drive to clear his head. I'm a wreck and can't go anywhere. Elik has to carry me to bed because I'm a broken porcelain doll.

"I love you Dr Fierce. You are my life. And I'm sorry for everything. It was never my intention to hurt you, ever. I did this to protect you and Kofi and the twins and myself. I thought Lumka had everything under control and it's my fault I didn't follow up. We don't know how much time we have left and all I'm asking for is that you love me and you be yourself baby girl. That's the memory of you I need imprinted in my brain. You, my always crying precious little nana. My cupcake. You gave me life. I lived when I met you. So please let's not fuss and fight over this. Let's just salvage what's left of our time together", he kisses the ring on my finger.

I help him into bed. I'm hurting and he's hurting but we are a team. As he delves into my depths, passionate and hungry and needy, like it's the last time, because maybe it's the last time. I cling on to him. He can't leave me. He's wrong. I am nothing without him. His kisses are deep and wet and his hands are grabbing and possessive. He's mine. I have to save him. Even if I lose him in the process. Even if I lose myself in the process. I have to. My love for him is bigger than me. For the first time in a long time, I have to use my brain.

Twenty-Nine

Ever thought so hard your brain short circuits and your head feels like it's going to explode? All my plans to save Elik don't look like they will work. I'm trying everything but it's hard when Elik made it crystal clear that the details of Pretoria can never be discussed outside our circle. But I won't stop. He's my life and if it means dying to save him, then so be it. I can't just save him, I need to save the whole pack and that's a lot to do. I mean it's always been them saving me not the other way round. And if I'm being honest with myself, if they can't get themselves out of this mess, how will I manage? But I'm a soldier, always been, and so I'll soldier on. And if I die then that's honourable. I mean soldiers die everytime on the frontline.

I'm jumpy and anxious and jittery. I'm on the edge and my heart stops several times every hour. Every night, I check and double check and triple check if the doors are locked and the windows are closed. I wake up in the middle of the night sometimes just to go and see if the twins are still in their beds and if Kofi is still in his room. Every slight movement makes me panic, every sound, every motion, even the very wind howling outside, makes me want to grab Elik and hide him under the bed. They can't have him. I'm sorry but they just can't.

He looks chilled though and goes through everyday like everything is normal and still drinks his Hennessy and plays with the twins. He looks fine on the outside. But I know my man and the look in his eyes these days speaks of a fear hidden in the depths of his soul. He can't show it because of me, Kofi, Peter and Paul. He's our foundation and if he falls apart he knows the whole house will come tumbling down.

The worst part is the waiting. Not knowing when exactly D-Day is. A car can't even slow down in front of our house without me assuming the worst. It's a nightmare. I'm still lecturing because 'I'm bound by a contract' as Elik put it. I try to focus in class but my mind is not there to the extent that I gave my students the Memo for their Monday exam in place of a past exam paper I wanted them to look at. Each minute I spend out of the house makes me restless, wondering if Elik will be home when I get back.

After class I collect my laptop and books and rush to the car. I finally learnt to teach because Elik said this thing of making Kofi do my work was getting out of line. I drive faster than normal, like it's a matter of life and

death. Because to me every passing hour now is a matter of life and death. I have a meeting with our wedding planner. He's extra and had I met him a month earlier, me and him would have been the best of friends. But my heart is closed off at the moment and not accepting new loves, till further notice. He's straight but has very unstraight tendencies. He describes himself as metrosexual and a lover of self.

Oh, there he is with that tamed mohawk!

"Hey Abe", I greet pulling out a chair opposite him at a table at his favourite coffee shop. He insists on being called Abe because he says his full name, Abaddon, is too heavy.

"Hey babe", he gives me his hand to shake.

"You are late by 17 minutes Miss Thing!" he says.

"There was an accident on the N2, and with the rains and all, I couldn't drive any faster" I say.

I order white coffee and we get to discussing the wedding. He has file after file and idea after idea and picture after picture on his tablet. I listen and nod and agree to everything. All I'm thinking is *'I need to get home'*.

As I bite into my second donught, he snatches it off my hand and asks a passing waiter to toss it away. How rude!

"You need to lay off sugar Fierce! We still need that waistline to fit in that dress!" he scolds.

I chuckle a little. I can't help it though because Elik junior wants sugar! Abe has everything under control and he says I'm the easiest bride he's ever dealt with. When we first met and offered him the planning gig, he complained that there wasn't enough time to prepare. But when Elik said he would double his already hefty fee, he smiled and said "We have more than enough time to have the wedding of a lifetime. Let's make Meghan and Prince Harry envious, shall we?"

"You ok? You keep zoning out and checking your watch", he says. "It's just, ummm, one of my twins is not feeling well today and I'm agitated. I need to get home and take care of him", I lie.

"Oh no! Why didn't you say? Alright, tell you what, you go home and make sweet angel some soup and I will take care of everything".

He was sent straight from heaven!

I pull out three R100 notes and slide them to him to settle the bill when he's done. I rush home, almost colliding with a taxi as I change lanes without checking my blind spot. I leave the car in the driveway and don't

even close the driver's side door. I rush towards the house, passing Lizzy chatting up the man manicuring the trees. I kick my shoes off as soon as I walk through the door and run to the bedroom. It's my routine now, making sure Elik is still with us and most importantly, is still alive. I don't find him in the bedroom or in the bathroom or anywhere else for that matter. I check every room, nothing. I'm losing my mind as I check under the bed, in the closet, outside in the garden, in the pool house.

"Liz, did you see Elik?" I ask, out of breath.

"He left earlier", she says.

"How?"

His car is in the garage and Kofi left with his car this morning and said he'll only be back home later.

"He left with two big men", she says.

I think I'm going to have my first asthma attack today. This surely can't be happening.

"Two guys you say? Do you know them? Describe them".

"No madam, I've never seen them before. They looked rough, with tattoos and one had a gun in his belt. I saw it when he bent over to pick up something he had dropped", she says.

No. I refuse. This cannot happen to me right now. I have a plan to save them but it needed time to mature and will be ready on Thursday. I'm working hard on it.

"Did he say where they were going when they left?"

"No madam".

"Did he say anything at all?"

"No madam".

I go back into the house and although the lump growing in my throat wants me to scream and shout and call down all the angels and saints in heaven, I remain silent. I dial 10111 but hang up at the first ring. Elik made it very clear that no police. I want my man. I need my husband. We filed our marriage at Home Affairs yesterday. It wasn't an affair at all, just Elik and I with Kofi and one of his friends as witnesses. It was beautiful looking at my surname in black and white written as Nkomo-Nkrumah. I remember blinking back a little wayward tear that was threatening to escape. I don't cry these days, I have to be strong.

Elik's phone goes straight to voicemail. I call Lumka and his phone goes to voicemail as well. That makes me even more afraid. I call Kofi next and

he says he's in the middle of something but the panic in my voice has him saying "Calm down Sunshine, what's wrong?"

"Elik Kofi, they took Elik".

"Calm down. What do you mean they took him? When?" he says, sounding panicky too.

I break it down to him and tell him I found him gone.

"I just spoke to him 30 minutes ago, he said his battery was dying but he was fine", he says. I won't get comforted just yet. This is my husband we are talking about and I'm too young to be a widow. I don't even have a nice black dress to wear to his funeral, that's assuming we ever find his body. "Sunshine, you still there?" Kofi says.

"I'm here boo", I respond, sounding like a dying cat.

"Have you checked with Lemon? I think he mentioned something about meeting him sometime today".

I try Lemon's phone and it's off. I think I'm going to faint. Nothing Kofi said re-assured me. I'm a Thomas and I only believe when I see. I run to the car and drive all the way to Long Street, park illegally over a loading bay and run up to Lemon's club. I'm breathless and almost in tears by the time I make it to the door of his office. Some people tried stopping me but they soon realised I wasn't here to play with anyone today.

I look like a clean hobo. I might have looked cute and proper this morning with my high heels, my weave in a nice French braid, my high waist skirt hugging my curves with the blouse nicely tucked in and a watch on my wrist. Now my blouse is half tucked in and the top buttons are open because I was getting hot flashes earlier. I'm barefoot and the glass of the watch on my wrist shattered when I banged my hand on the kitchen counter. I also kept pulling my hair as I sat on the floor playing out the worst of the worst of scenarios in my head and now it looks like a bird's nest. I won't even mention the mascara running down my face and the smudged lipstick.

I budge into the office without knocking and they all turn and look at me. It's like my heart drops from my throat and settles back into my chest. I ignore everyone else in the room and run into Elik's arms. He's sitting so I half climb him. It's pretty hard with this tight skirt on.

"Don't ever do that to me again Elik. You hear me? Don't ever disappear like that!" I yell at him yet the way I'm holding him is obvious that I'm afraid of losing him.

"I'm sorry baby. My battery died", he says.

“I was worried Elik. I thought, you know. I got married yesterday and I can’t lose my husband today. I can’t”, now I start crying and messing up the shoulder of his T-shirt.

I wonder what these other two big men I don’t know are thinking. And Lizzy was right, they look rough! I know Lumka and Lemon are probably just rolling their eyes and thinking, *‘There she goes crying again!’* .

“Let’s go home beautiful. I’m sorry about this”, Elik says rubbing my back up and down.

I pull myself together then only then do I greet Lumka, Lemon and the two unknowns. Lemon says “Awe” and keeps polishing his gun. He says that gun is an extension of him and he can’t go anywhere without it. I’m happy to see Lumka here.

“Congratulations Mrs Nkrumah!” he says and I give him a hug. I pull back and we have a moment.

“Any luck?” I ask in a whisper. He shakes his head slowly and my heart sinks. All my heart does is sink and stop these days then resume and struggle to beat on.

I know it will be going down in Lemon’s club tonight. It’s Elik’s bachelor party after all. This is his second marriage but he says it feels like his first because this time he’s marrying his soulmate .

“Wear a black T-shirt”, I say to him.

I just think he looks ravishing in all black and tonight is his bachelor’s party so he needs to dress to the nines. As I watch him toss off the grey tee and pick out a black one, I bite my lower lip, inappropriate thoughts running through my head. How did I get so lucky?

I walk him out and Lumka is already standing next to the car with the engine running. I don’t get what the rush is, they have all night. Lumka says they are running late although it’s just 10 pm!

“I probably won’t see you tomorrow. You might be so hungover you won’t be able to wake up”, I say, swinging on my man’s arm. He just laughs at that because he knows it’s true.

“Have fun you guys and don’t allow Kofi to get with older women there!”

“You know we will. As for Kofi, he’s a grown man and we have no say in what he does”, Lumka says, looking ever so slick and fresh.

Kofi is already sitting in the back seat and is glued to his phone.

“Baby”.

“Yes my love”, Elik says turning towards me.

“Take these”, I hand him a packet I stole from Kofi’s room.

The box falls as I try to put it in his hands and Lumka sees it and picks it up before I can. He studies the box and I’m now standing here looking guilty.

“Fierce...”, Lumka starts to say but Elik lifts a hand.

“Give us a minute bro”, he says and Lumka gives me back my box and walks around the car and jumps into the driver’s seat. I know what Elik’s going to say so I speak first to stop him from ruining it.

“I know what a bachelor party is and I know there’ll be strippers and sexy girls there dancing for you. So I want you to enjoy but I need you to be safe, for us and for our unborn baby”, I rub my stomach. I just found out I’m pregnant, not so long ago.

“But baby...”, he says.

“But nothing my love. I’m your wife and I’m telling you to go out there and enjoy! I’m giving you a once off guilt free pass here. Take it before I change my mind”, I say. He looks at me with those eyes and gives me a kiss and an “I love you”, as he puts the box in his back pocket. I watch as they drive off in my Jeep and I find my way back into the house. The twins are already sleeping so it’s as good as I’m home alone.

I’m pregnant. Two weeks to be exact and I will take care of this one like it’s an egg. I need this baby to live. When Elik is taken from me, this baby will be the only true gift he will have left me. I settle back on the couch and put on Supernatural. It’s me time tonight without anyone to bother me and Fierce this Fierce that me! I won’t be having a bachelorette party or anything like that because of the absence of females in my life. And I don’t mind really. This to me is a special evening, just me, the T.V and donughts. That’s all the bachelorette party I need .

My family is coming down tomorrow for the wedding. We decided they will all stay in the lodge on the farm. I need my house and its space just for me and my men and my boys. Our wedding is this Tuesday on a farm in Stellenbosch. Tuesday is good and like I always said, those who need to make it will make it, those who don’t will wake and go to work as usual. We had to fast track our wedding for every day we waste is a day wasted. D-Day is fast approaching and Elik needed to give me this one last gift. A

wedding. I don't have to do much really because our wedding planner, Abe, has all hands on deck. So everything is almost set for Tuesday and tonight everyone is happy. I gave Elik those condoms because I know my man.

I have to make a quick phone call to an old IT friend of mine before I binge on Supernatural.

"How far?" I ask when he says hello.

"We should be set for Thursday. It's the best I could do", Tindo says on the other side of the line.

"Cool. I hope we make it to Thursday with them still alive".

"We can only hope", Tindo responds.

"Thanks again friend, let me if I need to do anything on my side".

"I sure will. Take care Fierce and try to stay alive", he says before hanging up.

Thirty

I can't believe Elik and I made it this far. We've been through it all but at the end, we came out winning. I've been nervous all morning and my aunt thinks it's little Elik in my stomach making me jittery. I'm excited and I want everything to be perfect. Cape Town winter lasts half of the year and so a winter wedding it is. But like Abe and Google predicted, it's a warmish, clear skies day with just a slight winter breeze that's not going anywhere. It's a beautiful day to become Mrs Nkrumah.

I stand in my dressing room in my snow white gown and a veil crowning my head. This gown further slims my upper body while leaving enough cleavage to remind Elik of another reason why he's marrying me. It then puffs up from below the waist down and drops all the way to the floor. I feel elegant, timeless and sexy as a goddess. And the sparkle of the crystal beading just screams 'All Hail Princess Fierce'.

"Don't cry Fifi. This is your day and you look dazzling. Ghana man will fall in love with you all over again when he sees you", my aunt says.

She holds a mirror to my face and boy did this makeup artist outdo himself! He kept the makeup 'natural' and today I'm rocking eyebrows. He made me fall in love with my face and think '*Wow, I'm actually very beautiful*'. I look at myself in the wall mirror and keep turning and turning to admire myself.

"Come Fifi, surely the wedding is over now without you! People have been waiting for hours. Let's go", she says.

I'm running only an hour late, no need to be dramatic now!

"Five more minutes please". I just need to breathe some more.

"Come on now, Ghana man has been waiting at the end of the aisle for a long time now! He's just as nervous as you".

I forget to consider that Elik might panic and think I don't want to marry him anymore.

"Alright then, I'm ready".

"Good, because I know plenty of girls that will marry him if you don't", she hands me my flowers.

"What's taking so long? I thought she would be out 30 minutes ago! And don't you dare tell me you getting cold feet Missy! Do you know how much it took to put all this together?" Abe says.

He's so extra shame. I smile at him.

"I'm ready now".

His chest drops down in relief and he fans his face dramatically.

"Thank goodness! You look amazing Fierce. Wow", he says, fixing the train of my dress. I keep smiling because I'm in love with myself in this dress .

My aunt leaves and returns with my father. She tells him briefly how the walking down the aisle works because it's a borrowed tradition. Father joins Abe in complimenting and admiring me.

"You look stunning my child. I'm so proud of you", he kisses my hand.

"Thank you, baba", I smile too much.

He takes my hand and we leave the room and make the walk on the white leaves spread out to carpet my path till we reach the area with the chairs. People stand and there's abrupt silence as all eyes fall on me making me a little shy. I'm thankful to this veil hiding my face. The attention is a tad bit too much and the aisle suddenly looks longer than it was earlier.

As we walk down the aisle, a carefully put together bouquet in my hands and rows of white chairs on either side, I smile under my veil. Warm winter sunshine dances on my face and the scent of jasmine fills the air. *Akon's - Jumping The Broom* plays in the background and I walk slower, allowing every word to sink into my heart. Elik picked the song because he said it expressed exactly how he felt.

*A part of me knows, a part of me knows
A part of me don't want nothing you're not a part of
No way that I, would wish to die
That's right there with your perfect love by my side
Look at your perfect face, there is no time to waste
Baby I'd go as far for you

As jumping the broom, jumping the broom
You'd jump for me and I'd jump for you
Jumping the broom, jumping the broom
Nothing my love wouldn't do for you

Baby, wanna see you shine, shine
And I don't want nothing else but this dream of mine
I want all the sea, your sky and I don't wanna see doves cry*

Baby this kind of love was made by design

Hey love, promise I'll never let you go

Hey love, hey love

Jumping the broom

You'd jump for me and I'd jump for you

I scan the crowd and I see Abe rub tears from his eyes with an overjoyed look on his face. When did he make it over there? I left him over there! I look up at Elik standing frozen and staring our direction. He's standing taller and looks somewhere between mesmerised and scared. My chocolate Capricorn, looking dashing handsome and giving me ideas for later on when it's just us two. We made it. Who would have thought?

I make it to the altar and my father shakes my hand profusely before presenting me to his *mkhwenyana*. My dearest Nkrumah looks so amazed he can't take his eyes off me. The way he's looking at me like he wants to eat me has me blushing pink and red.

"Son, she's all we have and we are giving her to you for keeps. Take care of her for us and keep loving her like you have", my father says patting Elik on the shoulder.

"I promise, I will", Elik says.

He really loves making promises he can't keep. I let his hand go as I step back to allow Father Francis to come between us. Elik looks super polished in that black suit and his eyes, those penetrating eyes my lord. His eyelashes sweep up and as he blinks, I die.

I'm having a matriarchal wedding. On my side I have my four groomsmen. Zibulo, Inflation, Butholezwe and Nqobizitha. And Elik has his four, Lumka, Kofi, Clive and Lemon. It's me and my white dress surrounded by nine men in black suits. Two mini men in black suits, Peter and Paul, are our ring bearers and they look so precious as they struggle to stay quiet. I went with the whole black and white theme of all women wear white dresses and all men wear black suits. I'm so glad I did because it looks uniform and oh so perfect.

It took a bit to convince Father Francis to drape on a black robe for this occasion. He said something about black being the colour of demons but then he said since it's my wedding then maybe it's fitting. He looks at me and smiles and I smile back. I wonder if he can see through this veil.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to celebrate the union of

Lastborn Fierce Nkomo and Elikplim Ma... Nkrumah”, he stumbles hard on pronouncing Elik’s names.

“I have known Dr Fierce for a while now and I have listened to her describe her love for Elik in a way I have never heard love described before. It sounds agonising yet so beautiful and tailor made just for them. I know these two have been through everything the devil can possibly throw one’s way. But they never gave up on each other for they knew that as long as they had each other, nothing else mattered. There’s no set definition of love. It is what you make it and if it feels right for two people then that’s what love is to them”, he says.

He then gives a whole beautiful love story until I realise he’s probably mocking me.

He says, “Even King Solomon had 300 concubines and his 700 wives were happy. I’m sure Fierce can survive a couple hundred of concubines”.

Father Francis ne! I see you, your holiness .

“Customarily, this is the time I would ask anyone who objects to this union to come forward. But I have become pretty fond of Fierce and I do not wish to see her have a heart attack on her wedding day”, he says.

I see Elik shoot him an eye and I hear Elik’s guys chuckling at that. Father Francis! Then it’s time to exchange our vows. Elik goes down on one knee and me and everyone else, judging by the *haaas* , are confused. He can’t propose at his wedding! But he isn’t kneeling for me. He takes Paul’s hand in one hand and Peter’s in the other.

“Ok guys, so I would like to marry your aunt Fierce and make her your new mummy. I love her and I want to spend the rest of my life with her. Can I marry her, please? Do you want her to be your mummy?” he asks.

There’s dead silence and I’m just watching with a hand under my veil, over my mouth. Like why Elik! My heart is in my throat because what if they say no. What then? Couldn’t he have asked them yesterday or this morning or anytime that’s not now?

“Yes”, they both say.

“You can marry her, please marry her”, Paul says.

“We want aunt Fierce to be our mummy”, Peter says over his brother. My heart settles and I realise I’ve been holding my breath so I let it out.

“I love you guys, do you know that? I love you more than life itself”, Elik says.

“We love you too daddy”, they both say and walk into his open arms.

They stay there a moment and I see him wipe off a tear when he stands back up. Now my tears are coming too. Damn!

“You may now exchange the vows you prepared. Keep it clean please and save the rest of your language for your honeymoon in the Maldives”, Father Francis says. This priest though! I laugh remembering all the things I tell him through that barrier in the confession box. Is this really happening? Am I really becoming a Nkrumah? As Elik gives his speech, tears fill my eyes.

“Lastborn Fierce Nkomo-Nkrumah, my love, I have so much to say it would take me a lifetime just to get through it. Thank you for teaching me how to love and for making me the man I am today. Thank you my love for doing me the honour of being my wife and for being a mother to my boys. Within you I found a place to bare my soul, a healer to heal my wounds, a lover to wipe my tears. It hasn’t been easy, but you my cupcake, are the strongest woman I know. This ring represents my heart and you are my heart Fierce. I may not always be there but whenever you see this ring on your finger, remember this promise of love I’m making to you today. Remember that I’m yours and always will be. I can’t wait to take you home after this and show you exactly how much I love you”, he says with a smirk on that last line. He slides the ring onto my finger.

Now I wish I had gone first because my speech suddenly feels weak.

“Love arrives and it comes with joy, pleasure, pain, ecstasies and bliss. Yet if we are bold, love strikes away the chains of fear from our souls. You have given me that kind of love. Elikplim, my love, with this ring I promise to love you and respect you, to hold you and to put you first in everything I do. I promise to be the wife you deserve and I promise you loyalty and unconditional love. I’m a ride or die kind of chic, you know that, and I will ride or die with you, till death do us apart”.

I slide the ring on his finger. He keeps my hands in his and holds on as I try to pull back.

“By the power invested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride”, Father Francis says.

Elik steps to me and ever so slowly lifts the veil off my face. I feel chills as his fingers brush against my face.

“You are so beautiful and all mine. How did I ever get so lucky?”

I look up at him and his eyes tell a story only me and him knows. A journey of pain and sadness that we took hand in hand as we walked on

hope and through faith until we arrived at this altar today in love and honour. I close my eyes as his lips touch mine and his hand goes around my waist pulling me closer. He kisses me gently and he doesn't stop there. He just kisses me and loves me like no one is watching. I'm sure all the elders are looking down now because this is no longer kissing, this is foreplay. I kiss him back though, he's my husband now and this which we are doing is legal.

Then I hear a gunshot and another and another, so loud and deafening and unmistakable. Elik pushes me back so hard I fall on my brother and we pile on the ground. *'The kids. I need to protect the kids'*, that's all I'm thinking. I get onto my knees and drag myself forwards.

"Paul, over here", I call out but he just stands there looking frozen.

I can't see Peter anywhere and it's chaos all over the place. I crawl forwards and grab Paul.

"It's alright big guy. Get on the ground", I whisper pulling him down.

"Peter", he murmurs.

"It's alright. He'll be alright. Lie down for me sweetheart", I beg him.

He wants his brother but I really need him to work with me here.

"Lie down for me baby. I will find Peter, ok?" I plead.

He nods and I pull him down. We lie flat on our stomachs, my hand wrapped protectively around him. I'm whimpering softly and a million thoughts are racing through my brain. Why today? I can hear people screaming and fleeing the scene but I remain lying down, protecting one of my children and hoping the other is still alive wherever he is.

"Please, Father in heaven, don't let them harm me. I'm pregnant", I pray softly.

"Please protect my family. Please Father", I plead in prayer.

It quietens down and I should be relieved but I'm not. I have to find my family. I have eight groomsmen and a groom. I should start counting. I hear someone calling for me and I quickly get up. I feel dizzy but I ignore that and ask Paul to stay on the ground. I need to find Peter. It takes a minute to register. The deco on the altar is all over the ground, the programs are scattered all over, chairs are toppled, my bouquet is lying trampled on the ground. There's a lingering stench of blood and gun fire in the air and blood everywhere. I turn towards the altar and there are two bodies lying in pools of blood. I shriek as I lay my eyes on him, a bullet went right through

his head. I can't look. My heart is shattering as I see his face with the open eyes staring back at me like they can actually see me. I rush to the other body. No, no, no not him. What did I ever do to suffer this?

"Wake up! Please wake up. You can't die, please", I wail and shake him. I know I'm just building sand castles. There's no way he would have survived that much blood loss!

"Fierce", I hear many voices calling for me and I'm dragged away from the body. I kick and scream and shout, begging them to let me go. They can't be dead. My brain replays my entrance song. Thinking back at it, it sounded more on the sad side. Was it taunting me? Was it? The song is ended but the melody lingers on.

One wedding and two funerals.

The End

*Every new beginning comes from some other
beginning's end .*