



THE ROYAL MISTRESS

BY

TAKALANI M

THE ROYAL MISTRESS

Insert 1

MULATSHAWE

Life is not really a walk in a park when you have royal blood flowing in your veins. Your life is dictated from the day you are born until you die. You live according to the standards of royalty and it really sucks. It was so easier for me when I was younger. When I was allowed to live my life the way I wanted. But now, I am expected to do the right thing for the family, get married. Come on, at 30 years, I have better dreams for my life and starting a family is not really in my personal plans.

Okay, I have been standing in this rest room for a little while now and I can't seem to calm myself from the news I just received from my father. I knew it since I was 12 years old, where I am destined to be when I turn 30, but I am failing to just go with the flow. I managed to ignore it all these years and now it is time to dance to the music.

I left Venda when I passed matric and I have started a new life for myself in Pretoria. I did medicine in Medunsa, did my practicals in Johannesburg and settled to work in Pretoria. I thought my father was going to let go of the arranged marriage, but it seems not. I dated a bit but nothing too serious because I knew my fate. For a year now, I have been avoiding to visit my parents until they showed up in my apartment unannounced.

"Is there anyone in there?" I hear a woman's voice from afar. I turn to look at the door but not respond. There is no way a woman would be coming into the men's restroom. I turn back to the mirror and glance at myself.

All five toilet doors are open and I am alone, just walking around where the basin bowls are stationed. I rested my hands on one of the basin bowls and try to control my breathing. I have been trying to be calm and I am failing to do so. I feel like walking out of this restaurant and leave my parents here, but that would be so disrespecting.

"Oh, I'm sorry Sir...I thought there was no one in here." A young lady says with hand towels in her hands.

"It's alright...I thought you were knocking somewhere else." I say, glancing at her from the mirror in front of me.

"Uhm...I came to place these clean hand towels on the hangers."

"Oh cool...do your job and don't mind me." I say and watch her walk past me to the corner of the room.

"Is she making you nervous?" She asks with a smirk on her face.

"Excuse me?"

"You seem stressed out...is your date making you nervous?"

"No...Not at all." I say with a laugh. "It's actually my father...oh and I hope that doesn't make me a weak man."

"If your father is like mine, then I truly understand." She says with a chuckle while hanging the clean towels.

"I think my father is worse." I say with a sigh.

"Get a few shots of whisky and face him like a ninja." She says while walking to the door. I do not get a chance to respond so I laugh. The laugh is actually making me feel better. She closes the door and I gaze at my reflection on the mirror before walking back to the table. I feel so much better now.

I grab my chair and sit down. My father shakes his head as I get myself to settle once again.

"You have been gone for long...are you alright?" My mother asks.

"I am fine." I lie.

"So as I was saying, the lobola process has to start as soon as possible so we are sending your uncles to Kutama's family for negotiations." My father says. This is the same statement that led me to the rest rooms.

"When are you...sending them?" I clear the lump that is in my throat.

"As soon as next week...I need to start teaching you the royal responsibilities...and getting married is the first step."

"Do I really have to?" I whisper.

"Uhm excuse me...good evening. My name is Rialivhuwa...uhm...we are currently promoting a new whisky in our shelves...pure smooth whisky...you know...so sir, please taste this and give feedback to your waitress after your dinner." The lady from the bathroom says and places a glass of whisky in front of me. I smile and she walks away as fast as she could.

"Why is she rushing off like that?" my mother asks with a chuckle and I laugh.

"Maybe she has more customers to serve the whisky." I say with a smirk on my face. I know she was just doing me a favor and didn't want my parents to ask her any questions.

"You haven't stopped drinking that poison of yours?" my father asks with a frown on his face. He doesn't drink alcohol but his younger brother, Joseph does. I first

tasted alcohol on my 18th birthday with Uncle Joseph and now I enjoy it now and then.

"Uhm...I couldn't say no to the lady...that would have been rude." I take a sip from the glass.

"I keep getting disturbed when I try to discuss this pressing matter with you."

"Can I order dessert and you guys discuss this matter later? I am dying to have this Creamy lemon raspberry dessert that I saw earlier." My mother says while paging the dessert menu. My father is annoyed but he keeps his cool for my mother. My father adores her. He never refuses her anything she wants and that is one thing I admire about him. Other than that, he is just cold and controlling. So my mother gets her dessert while I finish my drink and my father busy reading a newspaper that he got from the waitress. This is the most awkward dinner I have ever had with my parents. There is so much tension between me and my father and anybody could smell it. My mother is just here to calm us both.

"Dad, there is something I need to request from you." I say and my father folds the newspaper to give me his attention.

"What is it?"

"I am not ready to marry." I say.

"Mulatshawe, you are not a child anymore." He responds with anger in his voice.

"I know...just that I have a few projects to work on before I devote myself into a family... I wanna make money...I want to travel...so I was asking that you invite the Kutama family in December where I can meet my bride and get to know her...but I will just engage her and then get to know her maybe for two years and then we get married."

"That is not how we do things...you know at thirty you are supposed to be getting married...and you are 30 years already for God's sake."

"Come on...this is 2017 and all this arranged marriage is just crap...uhm...sorry but I mean I am still going to marry her when I am ready to get married...the last thing I want is to have any woman married to an unhappy man...just because we are pleasing the families."

"Mulatshawe, we have our own traditions and that is not how we do things." he raises his voice.

"Listen, this is my life you are trying to ruin."

"Do not talk to me like that!"

"Look...I can easily walk out of here and you will never find me...but I am trying to make things work for the both of us...I am not ready for marriage." I say and he glance at the glass of whisky which is almost finished. It would be funny if he thinks I am getting the courage to talk to him because of one glass of whisky. I am just not ready to get married to a stranger while a woman I met for a minute warmed my heart. There is hope for love out there.

"You knew this all your life."

"And I was fine with it until now...I am not ready."

"I am not going to have you embarrass my family."

"Then disown me." I say while standing from my seat.

"Sit the hell down!" he hissed. "Stop acting like a child."

"December...engagement between me and the lady...and we will take things from there...I am not marrying her now."

"Fine!" he say while standing up. "Murunwa, let's go."

My mother stands up and walks up to me to give me a hug from behind before following my father. I rest my body on the chair and let out a sigh. I am not ready for a family, God knows I am not ready.

While in my thoughts, Rialivhuwa's face flashed and I let out a smile. I walk to the reception to pay for the bill and the whisky that Rialivhuwa ordered for me, and to also see her friendly face once again.

"Excuse me...can I please pay for my bill?"

"Oh sorry Sir...didn't your waitress come to your table?" the receptionist ask while punching on her computer. "Do you remember her name?"

"I think it was Julia." I say. I am very good with names. You tell me a name now and I will keep it until I don't need it anymore.

"Oh right Sir...let me pull the invoice for you." she punched on the screen and turn it to me.

"Please add the triple shot whisky under Rialivhuwa?" I ask and she raises her eyebrows.

"Oh...there is nothing under Rialivhuwa."

"How do you know? You didn't even check."

"I know because she knocked off 15 minutes ago and she cannot walk out before settling all the bills under her name." she says and my heart sink. I was looking forward to see her again and laugh with her about the stunt she pulled.

"When does her shift start tomorrow?"

"Rolvhuwa? Today was her last day."

Insert 2

Rialivhuwa

That was awkward! Meeting a handsome man in the men's restrooms. It doesn't happen every day! This is all Tumisho's fault. Had he skipped his smoking break and go place the hand towels, I wouldn't be thinking about a guy who I only saw for less than 2 minutes. Okay, I also watched him have dinner with his parents. He seemed like a nice gentleman, but not my type. The guy was wearing a suit for just dinner with his parents. He was suited up and those kinda people intimidate the hell out of me. Imagine me dining with him, I wouldn't even know how to behave myself. I wouldn't even know what to wear when he takes me to a movie or a mere ice cream. I wouldn't even feel confident wearing my pumps with him suited up like that. So, he is beautifully handsome, but not for me. And his father is also intimidating. He was sitting in that restaurant like he was some sort of a president. Haikhona! No wonder the poor guy was panicking and sweating in the toilets. I never thought any man could be as unfriendly and intimating as my own father. My dear father makes me shake just by asking how my day was.

I shake my head from all this thoughts of a man I will obviously never meet again and rush to the taxi just outside Parkview centre. It takes me about 30 minutes to reach my flat in Sunnyside. Luckily I stay in Walker Street, where the taxi routes are at.

I get to the flat to find Zoleka already home. Zoleka is my flat mate, who became my best friend for two years now. We met on Facebook, on some accommodation group, when I was looking for a room to let. I arrived in Pretoria two years ago from a village called Zwisimani, in Venda. I came all the way here to study business management but things didn't go according to plan, financially. Like most people, I wanted to experience life away from home. I wanted to be independent. I refused to go back home after failing to register. So, I got my first job in a bar and started saving money. I now have little savings to register the next year, and my father will also help me with the study fees.

As I walk inside the flat, I am welcomed by an aroma of rosemary chicken. My favourite. My friend is already preparing supper for us. Zoleka is a student in TUT and is always home if not attending class, so she cooks most of the days.

"I had a dream." She says before I could even sit.

"Please...I don't want to hear it." I say. Zoleka always has weird dreams linked to people close to her. It is really freaky, believe me. Everyone finds her weird so she doesn't have any friends except me.

"This one is a good one." She says happily with a wooden spoon in her hand.

"I don't want to hear it Zoleka...the last time you told me your dreams, I couldn't sleep for days."

“Please Ria...you know I need to share this with someone.”

“Zoleka, No...no please!”

The dreams she has are always scary and she always feels better after sharing them with someone. Her family calls her cursed if not a witch because most of her dreams come true. She once saw her sister having a miscarriage in her dream. After telling her family, and her sister actually losing the baby, it was confirmed that she is bewitching her own family. She was confirmed to be cursed.

“The dream is about you.” She says and my heart jumped out of my chest. “Relax, it’s a good one.”

“What did you dream about?” I ask, quickly sitting on the couch. She has never dreamt about me for the whole of two years that I stayed with her. She sat on the other couch with a smile.

“In my dream, I couldn’t tell where you are but you were in this beautiful place...you are going to meet a handsome man who adores you. You will be happy with him.”

“I’m going to meet a man?”

“You already met one?” She asks as if she knows what is playing in my head.

“No...Not really.” I say with a frown. There is no way she could be talking about the man in the toilet, who I met for 2 minutes, suited up for a dinner with his intimidating and unfriendly parents. Yes, he was handsome, but it can’t be him.

“You are going to meet a man.” She says again with excitement.

“Zoleka, how is it that I am going to be meeting a man before my heart is ready to receive one?”

“Don’t tell me you are still on Joshua.” She says rolling her eyes.

“After what he did...I don’t think I am ready to...”

“He is busy humping another chick right now...and you are here bleeding tears.”

“He might be literally humping another chick right now.” I say and we laugh. Joshua lived for sex. I had to keep up with him.

“So it’s time to move on...and from now on, I advise you to look good every day you walk out of that door.”

I don’t think I am ready for love. The first time I was deeply in love, I got burnt. Joshua was my first serious boyfriend and I met him when I got here in Pretoria. I truly loved him and he crushed me down. We were together for a year when I found

out he has been cheating on me the whole of it. I found out the day I was sick at work and was given a half day. When I got to his place, he had another woman in his bed. Before that day, I never suspected anything. Mostly because he gave me the keys to his house and gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted there at any time. He gave me full attention and never gave me a reason to doubt him. He tried apologizing but I just could not carry on with the relationship. I lost all the trust on him and anyway, I am a villager, what do I know about city boys? It has been more than six months since the break-up, but I am still not open for love. Zoleka's dream will just be one of those void ones.

"Today was my last day at work." I say, trying to change the silly subject.

"What? What happened?"

"My step-mom called to tell me to come home for a few months...it is about my father."

"What is wrong with your father?" she asks with panic in her voice. I have panicked about the call from home, but Zoleka is taking the panic cup from me.

"I have no idea." I say while lying on the couch. "I tried calling him the past week without success. I hope he is well and nothing is wrong with him."

There is silence in the room and I sway my eyes to Zoleka. I watch as she moves her eyes all around the room. She doesn't look comfortable. This is the same panic look she gives me when her dreams attack her.

"Zoleka...what is wrong?" I ask and she tries to fake a smile. "What is going on? Zoleka...WHAT IS GOING ON?!!!"

"Your father...I had a dream about him last week." She whispers with tears falling down her cheeks.

"What dream?!!!"

"He passed way."

Insert 3

Mulatshawe

My parents left for Venda a week after that awkward dinner. It has been the most horrible week for me with my father on my case daily. Instead of getting my head into this, I have been thinking about Rialivhuwa the whole time. I went back to the restaurant a few times to get her numbers, but I was always unlucky. Everyone spoke about privacy policies and not been allowed to give out information about the employees. It didn't matter that she was an ex-employee. No one offered to help.

I think I am starting to make peace with it. Rialivhuwa was just an angel who was brought to me for that second just to warm my heart. I tried checking her up on all possible social networks, but there is no face of a woman I met in the restaurant's toilet.

For a week, my father lectured me about me about marriage and chieftaincy. About how I should prepare my heart and mind to marry my destined princess. I know my heart doesn't want to do this, but I don't want to disappoint my family. I don't have energy for fights.

I am the eldest of the three children my parents have. I have a sister who is studying in Tuks and a little brother who is in high school. I wish I am as rebellious as my sister, but unfortunately I am not. Rotshidzwa, my sister, lives to disappoint my father and she is always his favourite. She does what she wants and I wonder what would happen to me if I live my life like hers. They say I am soft hearted and it is because I had always wanted to be the opposite of my father. He is unnecessarily ruthless and heartless. What he cares about is his little kingdom and his legacy.

It had been a long day today, with a long queue of patients I had to attend to. I have a small medical practice with a friend of mine and I believe we are doing great. I should be thinking of expanding our practice to other cities, but here I am preparing my heart for a marriage I don't even desire.

My uncle Joseph and my little sister are at my apartment this week. It is always exciting to have them around because they are funny and care-free, unlike me. I am the boring one, so they say. Joseph is only two years older than me and we relate well. They are watching Muvhango when I get home.

"If I have to come home at this time, just for money? I rather die poor." My sister says just as I throw myself on the couch.

"Come on, I had two meetings to attend to after knocking off from work."

"Yah...still...I rather die poor."

"Don't be silly...at least you are a woman and you can be lucky and be married to a rich nigga."

"Speaking of marriage...I heard about December." She says and Joseph laughs from his seat.

"You had to tell her, didn't you?"

"Look...I can't believe you are doing this." He says.

"Do I have a choice mara Joseph...when you know your own brother can disown me and take away my little medicine practice from me?"

"Who cares?" Rotshi says and I laugh. What did I say about her being care-free?

"I could, if I had a better motivation to...like Rialivhuwa so." I mumble and Rotshi sits up straight. She heard me.

"Who is Rialivhuwa? Do you have a new girlfriend?" She says with a mischievous smile.

"Just someone I met in the toilet...in some restaurant."

"Haaaa Mula...you had sex with a woman in a toilet...in a restaurant?" she shouts.

"Stop being silly...I said I met her." I say calmly.

"You met her and she is the only person who can make you stop this arranged marriage?" Joseph curiously asks. The television is by now just making noise with no audience.

"Look...I was panicking in the rest room and she had to walk in to hang the towels...we spoke for few minutes and I liked her...she warmed my heart...she made me so calm....she made me smile and then she bought me a triple shot whisky to calm my nerves as I face your controlling brother...now I can't find her anywhere."

"She really is the only person to stop you from this arranged marriage." My uncle says.

"Why do you say that?" I curiously ask.

"Because you have never spoke about a girl with a twinkle in your eyes." Joseph rubs it in my face. It hit me. I might possibly be in love with Rialivhuwa. He is right, I never really cared this much about no woman. I casually dated but never attached my feeling to any relationship because I knew it was going to end nowhere. All these women knew I am not for commitment. Now, I met a woman, for a damn minute and I am already going up and down just to get her numbers. I might be in love.

“So if you find her, you are not going to do the engagement in December?...then I’ll help you find her.” Rotshi says with a smile. She always has my back this one and she always rebel from my father.

After the advices from my uncle Joseph, and Rotshi, I decided to try for the last time. My uncle told me if I am meant to be with her, then I will find her, if not then I should accept what the universe offers me and move on. I decided to go the restaurant for the last time today. I am just doing this to find closure. It is a Thursday evening and very quiet around this place. I had a long day at work, but I am willing to give this a last chance. The music is playing softly in the background as I grab a seat on a bar stool. I don’t have any plan but I am just here for fate to do its job. I look around to notice a few couples situated around the restaurant, cozy and love dovey. This is what I hoped for my marriage one day. I want to be in love with the woman I marry. I want her to mean the world to me. But here I am forced to get married. I don’t even know the name of a woman I am going to marry, how crazy is that?

I am disturb by a waiter who is here to take my order.

“Sir are you alright?” he asks.

“Uhm...yes I am fine...may I please have any of your beers?”

“We have a lot of that Sir?” he says with a laugh.

“Then get me any.”

He nods his head and walks to the other side of the bar. He comes with a tall glass of beer. Whatever it is, I am drinking it.

“Jack black...one of our craft on tap.” He says placing a glass in front of me.

“Thank you.” I say grabbing the glass and taking my first sip.

I am not a drunk, but sometimes you just want to numb the pain. I am in a position where I wish this arranged marriage is just a dream. I wish to get call from my father that all this is cancelled. Royalty or not, this is just ridiculous. Okay, arranged marriage worked for my parents. They love each other and my father would take a bullet for his wife any day. I don’t think my love for a stranger will be enough for me to take a bullet for her. I could watch her take her last breath and I would still live happily afterwards. How do people expect one to be deeply in love with a woman you didn’t choose yourself? I want to be attracted to someone. I want to know my woman’s flaws and love her regardless, but with arranged marriage, you have no choice but to love her with her unacceptable flaws.

“Sir, are you alright?” he asks.

“Huh? What?”

“I asked you if you love our new beer.” The waiter says with his eyebrows raised. He seems concerned.

“Oh yah.”

“I have seen you around here a few times.” He says and I raise my glass to him. I have become famous because of my search for Rialivhuwa. She is special.

“Well...I have been looking for someone...but I bet after tonight you won't be seeing me no more.” I say with a sigh.

“Who are looking for? A know a few of our regular customers.”

“She used to work here...Rialivhuwa.” I say and I watch as he looks around as if I was not allowed to mention the name.

“You are the guys who has been looking for Rialivhuwa these weeks?...she is my buddy.” He says and I pop my eyes. Finally, someone can help me.

“She resigned like three weeks ago and I have been trying to get hold of her...her number doesn't work anymore” He says and my heart sinks. I take a sip of my beer as he writes her numbers on a piece of paper.

“This is the only number she has?”

“Yes...it is not working...for two weeks now...I don't know what is wrong with her.”

He passes the paper and I quickly grab it from him. This is the breakthrough I have been waiting for. He watches as I punch the numbers on my phone. It goes straight to voicemail. I try it a few times before I finally give up.

“Where is she from?” I ask.

“Some village in Limpopo...how many villages do they have there? I don't even know.” He says with a shrug.

This is the closure I have been looking for. There are a thousand of villages in Limpopo. Her name is Venda, and I don't know a quarter of villages in my homeland. I am defeated, but at least I tried my best before letting go.

I focus on finishing my drink. If it was a Friday, I would be having a few of this Jack black, but tomorrow I have a number of patients booked to my name. I pull a wallet from my jacket and place my bill on the table.

“Keep the change.” I say as I gulp the rest of the beer in my mouth. I really am defeated. Maybe I shouldn’t have allowed my heart to fall in love with a stranger.

I walk to my car with so much disappointment. My phone rings in my pocket and I make a little prayer. I pray that it is Rialivhuwa, maybe she switched her phone on and now is returning my call. I wish it is her asking who I am.

I pick the phone from my pocket and I swipe it to answer with a frown.

“Hey Mula...we just informed your fiancée and her family about the December date and she is pleased with the news.” My father says with excitement.

“Oh...”

“You don’t sound pleased.”

“I am much pleased sir.”

“Good...now you can shop for the engagement ring...a big shining stone for a deserving princess...don’t embarrass me.”

Insert 4

Mulatshawe

The day to meet my fiancée arrived faster than it should have. It is December so I had to take an early leave and come do the engagement party. It is a sunny Saturday morning and everyone is making this engagement a big deal. I can hear the noise from outside my room. Everyone is running around to get everything ready for the day. My relatives are also invited to witness when I commit myself to this mysterious woman.

I just woke up now but I feel exhausted already. I am not looking forward at all. I have complained enough it is now unnecessary to whine. I guess I just have to man-up.

I jump out of bed and walk to the window. There is a small white tent already set in the middle of the flower garden. There are white chairs and tables already set for my parents and the in-laws. There are flowers all over the table and it looks like a mini-wedding reception for ten people. All that decor is pointless really.

I should have ran away and start over somewhere else. Okay, I thought of running away, but breaking my mother's heart was not an option. I can rebel all I want, but I cannot break my mother's heart to that extend. I might seem weak but sometimes fights and debates are not my strongest point. Had I left, my father was going to shut down the practice. I worked so hard for it I am not ready to let go of it.

Well, I guess I should just get done with this and move on. I sigh and go put on my morning gown before walking out of my bedroom.

When my aunt sees me walking down the stairs, she starts ululating and she is joined by all the women who were running around the house with things in their hands. Joseph is laughing at me at the end of the room. He has been waiting for this day for a while now, just to tease me.

"Aunty, why are you making this a big deal?" I ask while giving her a hug.

"This is a big deal my son. This is the first step of marriage." She says and it starts to click how important this day should be to me. I am starting to feel uncertain about this.

"Are you starting to panic?" Joseph asks with a smirk on his face. I shake my head and walk out of the kitchen. My parents are having breakfast in the dining room so I walk up to them.

"Oh, the man of the day. How are you my son?" My mom asks after taking a sip of her tea.

"I am alright...I'm just uncertain about all this."

"Don't be ridiculous...you have lived all your life preparing for all this." My father says like I am about to graduate in school. This is real life. I am just worried. What if I won't be able to fall in love with this woman? What does she look like? What if we don't connect?

My other uncles and the elders are sitting in the lounge with drinks in the hands. The elderly women are sitting on our traditional mats. Everyone is eating and drinking happily. I am the only one who is not excited today.

"You are allowed to panic as much as you want sweetie. This is your life." My mother says and I smile. I am a man but there are just some things that can make one panic, like marrying a stranger, you know. My father looks at me and shakes his head.

"You are so lucky you are meeting your fiancée before marriage...and you are just engaging her today. Some of us didn't have a choice but to meet just a day before marriage. Now you can't tell me you are panicking."

"But what if I don't want..."

"Don't tick me Mulatshawe...don't annoy me...You are not a child anymore...stop this nonsense" My father raises his voice in annoyance.

"Relax. I'll do it...I am just not as excited as everybody."

"That's your own problem." My father is that heartless. My mother looks at me with a smile. I know she has my back but can never disrespect her husband in anyway.

I decide to go have my breakfast in the bedroom. I only have three hours before the future in-laws' meeting. I have my muesli and coffee while playing my hip hop music.

Oh God, what am I getting myself into?

Just an hour before the arrival of the in-laws, I shower. I pick my favorite tailored royal blue suit and a white shirt with no tie. I have to look impressive at the end of the day. I fix my hair cut and put my cologne. There is ululations going on outside so I walk to the window to the view of the driveway. They are here in a Red Range Rover. The old women are dancing around the car with excitement. I watch as my future wife steps out from the back in torn jeans, white blouse and some stilettos. Daaammnn! She is hot!

My aunt walks to the car to invite our guests in the house. I watch them until I could not see them anymore. I stand by the window, trying to imagine my life with her. She is too different from all the women I have ever dated or attempted to date. This is going to be interesting!!

"Hey Mula. The guests are here." My aunt shouts from outside my door. I walk to the door and open for her.

"She is beautiful, isn't she?" I ask. My aunt is really overjoyed today.

"She is like a goddess," She says. "She just went to freshen up and lunch will be served in the flower garden later."

"Alright, I'll go to the garden once I am done here."

"You should cheer up...your fiancée is beautiful."

The woman I saw from the window did look more like a goddess. I don't know if I should be overjoyed or worried. Maybe I should just be as excited as my aunt and everyone. I just pray she is not ready for marriage so we can delay this whole thing.

After a little while, I walked to the garden where my parents were sitting with her parents, my future parents-in-law.

"And here is our groom...my son...Mulatshawe." My father introduced me just when I reach the table.

"It is nice to finally meet you Mr and Mrs Kutama." I shake their hands with the greetings.

"Seems like you have a gentleman here." Mr Kutama says.

"Indeed...I taught him well." My father announce proudly.

"Luvhengo will be here in a minute...you know women and dressing up." Mrs Kutama says.

I take a seat next to my father with a fake smile. In no time, Luvhengo walks out of the house. I watch as she parades to the garden in a long white dress that hugs her body, with her hair neatly tied up in a bun. She looks nothing like the jeaned girl I saw earlier on. She is more gorgeous. I quickly stand and grab a chair for her. She gives me a weak smile before settling on her chair.

"Vha ha Ratshali...please meet my princess, Luvhengo." Mr Kutama says with a twinkle in his eyes. She shakes hands with my parents. "We are very delighted to be here to witness this engagement."

"Both you and us...we are truly happy about this day." my father says.

"These flowers are for you...We heard you love white roses." My mother hands a bouquet to Luvhengo. I watch as Luvhengo smells the flower with a smile.

"Thank you."

"Why don't we have our lunch and give our lovely couple some time to themselves?" My mother suggests and everyone agrees with her.

My mother and Mrs Kutama dish for themselves and their husbands. Luvhengo dishes for herself and I. That brought smiles to our parents. I wonder why we don't have a maid doing all this serving of food.

We have lunch over a light conversation about almost everything. I just learnt that Mr Kutama and my father are friends from the royal boarding school. He gave up his chieftaincy to his brother after rivals and death threats. That's what I hate about this chieftaincy things. Mr Kutama then moved from Venda to Midrand with his wife and started a new life there.

After the feast, the parents left me and Luvhengo alone.

"You are beautiful." I compliment her. She really looks so beautiful, jealous down man.

"Thank you...you are not bad yourself." She says and I giggle.

"So what do you do?"

"I have a beauty salon in Midrand and two boutiques as well."

"Wow...that's huge."

"Oh, you thought they are marrying me off because I can't take care of myself?" she asks with a cold laugh.

"No...Not at all...I am just impressed...very impressed."

"I see...so what do you do?"

"I am a doctor and I share a medicine practice in Pretoria East with a friend." I say and she nods her head. "Are you ready for this marriage thing?"

"Nope...but do I have any choice?" she asks.

"Why don't we refuse to do this thing?"

"Why? You are not attracted to me?"

"Not that...I am just not ready for marriage you know...and I don't want to punish myself into doing something that I don't want....I still have to work hard you know...I want to take international projects before I settle down?"

"You don't have to change anything...take your projects...I also have my own projects to work on."

"Then let's drop this engagement to another two years or so."

"This is not for me to decide." she says.

I glance at her and she is not showing any emotions. I wonder why she is so keen to sacrifice her happiness by doing all this. She is so independent and she deserves a man who would love her, really. She is probably more successful than I am. I can't even afford this woman. Luvhengo is attractive but I didn't connect with her the way I wished.

I have been convincing this woman to refuse to do this. It is just after an hour when I see the parents walking to the garden. They are accompanied by my aunt, the other family members and Luvhengo's parents. My heart starts to pump so hard. This is it! This is the moment.

They stand at the end of the table. I glance at my father and he is busy communicating with his eyes. I know what he means with each stare he gives me. I stand from my chair and kneel in front of Luvhengo. I reach for a ring from my pocket. All this time I am praying for her to refuse my proposal.

"Uhm...Luvhengo Kutama...I am pleased to meet you...my ordained princess...do you want to be my wife?"

INSERT 5

Rialivhuwa

It is scorching hot around here in December. I am home in Venda and I am praying that I will be going back to Pretoria in January for school. My father died unexpectedly and it changed everything in my life. I am hoping that my step-mother comes through for me. I doubt though, I am not her favourite person. I am choosing to go to Pretoria because I have started my life there. I have a few friends and I won't struggle to get by. I could also choose to go to Polokwane. I just want to be far from home.

My mother passed away when I was ten and my father married after two years. My step-mother doesn't abuse me but she just doesn't love me like she does my brothers. Her and my father has twins and they are now about eight years. I have a step-brother who is doing his matric. He should be panicking by now, the grade 12 results are coming out in a few weeks.

I am sited outside under the avocado tree with a magazine. I have done my chores already and I am just waiting for ten o'clock so that I go out. When I am home I wake up very early and do my chores before it gets hot. I also avoid being yelled at when I am still sleeping at 7 o'clock. That is some sort of abomination around here. It seems like everybody is immune to sleep. People finish sweeping their yards by six o'clock. Even worse, some cook lunch and supper after that. Hilarious I know. So by nine o'clock, I am done with my daily chores, breakfast and bathing. I spend the rest of my day watching TV or visiting friends. Now that I am older, there is nothing much for me to do around here. At least the kids go down the river for a swim or play around the dusty streets.

I am busy reading my old Drum magazine when I see the kitchen door opening. My step-mother walks out of the house with a purse in her hand. She is probably going to Thohoyandou and I need to speak to her before she leaves.

"Mma...are you going to town?" I ask, walking towards her.

"Yes."

"Okay Mma...I was hoping that you withdraw that money for me today...I need to go back to Pretoria in two weeks."

"What money?" she asks while hanging her purse on her shoulder.

"The money I gave you to help with the funeral."

“We buried your father and now you want me to refund you the money you gave me to help out?” she folds her arms to her chest.

“Haowa Mma...you said I should lend you money, you will repay me when the policies pay out.” I say.

“And what if I tell you that we do not have any policy money?”

“No...no...I worked so hard for that money Mma...please withdraw the money for me.” I say with panic. This cannot be happening. I arrived home from Pretoria and the family was in some crisis for money. My step-mother and her sister promised to give me back my twenty thousand once the policies pay out. They both told me they were waiting for the death certificate and all other documents to claim. Where is the policy money now?”

“Rialivhuwa ni kho mmbaisa...you are hurting me.” She says with a breaking voice. She throws the purse on the ground and puts her hands on her head. Oh No!

“Haowa Mma...you promised me...you took all my money...every cent I had.”

“Yowwwweeee!!” she starts screaming. She is now walking around the yard with her hands on the head. Okay I didn’t see this one coming.

“Mma...please.” I say to her. People are starting to gather around the yard because she is crying loudly with her hands on the head. What am I supposed to do now?

“I do not work Rialivhuwa...your father has millions of debts that I am still struggling to pay...now you even want the money that we buried him with? God help me...God please help me...God why did you let my husband leave me with this burden?” She cries loudly.

“Look Mma...calm down.” This is too embarrassing but I need the money.

“I am a widow...I have children...how do I repay you the money that I buried your father with? Tell me how do I repay you the money I buried your father with?”

She is really turning this into something else. I am standing where she left me. She is busy crying still walking around the yard attracting the crowd outside the yard. Vho Masindi, our neighbor, is rushing to us while fixing her towel. She is old but is now forced to jog. My step-mom is dramatic.

“Mulandu?” Vho Masindi asks as she reaches my mother.

“Vho Masindi, this child wants to kill me...she wants me dead...she wants me to follow my husband and leave my children. She helped me bury her father but now she wants her money back...I don’t work...her father left so many debts they are heavy on me.” She is screaming and by now I am walking to them. Vho Masindi is trying to calm her.

"This is not true...I gave her and Aunt Joyce my school money because they told me they will give me back once the policies pays out...it has been more than three months...and I need to go to school."

"Okay if Mma didn't promise to give you back the money...we were not going to bury him?" My brother Thuso says while rushing to us. He is as dramatic as his mother because he is raising his voice while people are watching from outside.

"We were going to have a small funeral Thuso...Mma picked unnecessary things for the funeral...those unnecessary white chairs and white tents...those expensive cars hire...she has money."

"And you claim to have loved your father?" Thuso shouts.

These people do not understand. I worked my butt for two years to put this money together. It is all I had. I worked in clubs and slaved for two years. I loved my father dearly, I still do, but he would understand me right now. My step-mom's family was in our house for weeks if not a month after the funeral. We had to buy groceries after groceries. How much money did we spend there? They shouldn't have used my money. I also don't believe this debts story. My father was careful with his money. He didn't freely give us money because he always had a plan for it. They can't tell me about debts. He build his house before I was even born. He has never bought new furniture since I was in primary. His Toyota Twin cab is so old he can't be owing anyone for it. What debts is she talking about? What about the life policies? The family society stokvels? What about the payout from his job? He worked in some huge welding company in Louis Trichardt and there is no way the company didn't give our family something. I don't want his money, I only want my money. The money I gave my step-mother and her sister.

"Mma...please...I just need the R20 000 for my school." I am now begging.

"Where should I dig this money from?" she shouts. Who Masindi is trying her best to calm her.

"No...please make a plan for me Mma...please...I slaved for two years just to go to school...what do you want me to do around here...I need to go to school."

"Didn't you see us bury your own father?"

"I know you have my money somewhere...please." I say with hands in my waist.

I watch as she quickly walks to where she threw her purse. She picks it up and fumbles inside it until she gets her phone. I know who she is calling. She is calling her feared sister. I wait to hear what she is going to say. She walks around with the phone on her ear. This is going to be bad.

"Hello...my sister. Rialivhuwa wants to kill me right now. I have tried being the best mother for her but now that my husband is no more, she wants to kill me too. She

wants the money she used to bury her father. Where do I get the money from now? You know my husband had debts and while I am still balancing things she is forcing me to give her money...what should I do?" she says. I don't want to laugh. I know she is going to give me the phone so that her sister attacks me.

Just as I thought, I am handed the phone.

"Hello aunty Joyce."

"Don't Aunty Joyce me...What is this I hear?" she screams.

"Relax...all I said is that you and Mma asked me to help because you were waiting for the policy money. So I was humbly asking for my money back as I need to go to school in two weeks."

"You are an idiot...aren't you?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you should have picked it up that no policy paid out...your damn father died of some unknown illness that was not covered by the policy."

"I will be an idiot if I believe that."

"What did you say?"

"I heard you and Mma talking about the ceiling and paving you did in your house...is it a coincidence that you did it after my father's death? You knew my father was sick and you ran around taking policies in his name...both you and Ma."

"Excuse me?"

"I don't want to seem disrespecting to you and Mma...please just help me with my money and I will be out of your case."

"I curse the day my sister was married to your father." she says and hangs up. I give my step-mom the phone and watch as she breathe heavily. I am going to get my money, I know I am.

I have been the sweetest girl to my step-mom since she arrived here, only because my father gave me no other choice. I was pleasing my father just the same way my step-mom was pleasing him by pretending to like me in his presence. I tolerated the hatred but my father is no longer here. Both my step-mom and I have no longer have my father to delight.

I walk to my bedroom to change into a floral knee length dress that I planned to wear to a meeting. I put on my gladiator sandals and fix my afro. I pick my leather-backpack and threw my empty wallet and a diary. All this I am doing with so much anger in me.

My mother is still shouting outside with Vho Masindi trying her best to calm her. Thuso has left the yard with the kids. It doesn't sit well with me that they had to see all that drama. I pull a piece of paper from a book and write some numbers down. I hang my bag and walk to my step-mom.

"Take this." I try to give her the piece of paper but she refuse to take. I give Vho Masindi who receives it with pity. The poor old woman is tired of standing by now.

"What is that?" she coldly ask.

"That is my account number. I am going down to the community hall and you are going to Thohoyandou just like you were before this mess. By the time we both come back home, I want money in my account or else I will be going down to the police station. They will help me sniff yours and Aunt Anna's accounts and believe you me, you don't want that. You have money Mma and all I want is my savings. The exact money I gave you." I say and walk out of the yard without turning back.

INSERT 6

MULATSHAWE

I know I should be joining Luvhengo for breakfast. I am just not delighted. She is already sitting in the garden so I walk to her with my cup of coffee. She is wearing a short white dress that makes her look younger than she is. She turns to me and then back to her phone without saying a word. Today she has let her hair down. I grab a chair and sit opposite her so that we can have a proper conversation.

"How did you sleep?" I ask. "You look so beautiful."

"Thanks...I slept well." She responds putting her phone on the table. I glance at the ring on her finger. She said yes to the proposal and that did not sit well with me, but life goes on. She just agreed to help my family complicate my life.

"Any plans for the day? I was going to take you out for lunch or something but I have a community meeting down in one of the villages to attend with Joseph." I say and she smiles. She is warmer than she was yesterday.

"You don't look like a guy who does those."

"Well, I have to learn...by the time I marry you...I will be a master of these things." I respond to her and she chuckles.

"So are you going to take me out for dinner when you come back?" she asked with a seducing smile.

"Yes...most definitely."

We eat our breakfast getting to know each other more. She is trying her best to laugh at my stupid jokes and this is really taking me by surprise. I might happen to love her after all. Her phone rings and she picks it up with a smile.

"Hi bubu...yes...I really miss you guys, really...Yes honey!...so when I get back I will host you guys with that wine, sushi and spa date...Yes girl...You won't believe I am being watched, every move I take is observed and now I have to pretend that I like this dude...no, no, no he is hooottt, dark, tall and all sorts of chocolaty, but you know?...alright bubu, I will call you later."

Now it all makes sense. The act is because she is cautioned by her parents to show affection. Believe me, I understand.

Joseph raises his hand from the drive-way so I excused myself to go to him. It was time to drive down to the valley so he drives us out of the Palace. It will take us a good 30 minutes to get there.

“Do you like her?” Joseph asks with his eyes fixed on the road.

“I don’t know...she is beautiful but we don’t really connect.” I say and shrug my shoulders.

“It’s too soon...Once you get to spend time together, you will probably get connected to her.” he says and I laugh.

“Since when do you know anything about love?”

“I know a thing or two.”

“Are you seeing someone Joseph?”

“Don’t be silly...I am not committing now...I am still searching and having a little fun while at it.”

He drives into a small dusty community hall. It was packed already so we walk in together and decide to sit at the back. There is no way I am going to walk all the way to the front with all eyes on me.

The small hall is filled with angry community members who are swearing and shouting at any chance they get. I truly understand their misery, these people are promised bread and butter but never gets to taste it. Joseph is part of the committee to represent my father. I have no interest whatsoever, to do this things. I can volunteer to do the medical work for the public but don’t put me in no committee. The long unproductive meetings and dealing with corrupt leaders is not really my interest. But do I have a choice? My future is destined for me to do such.

“Look, we are here because we want to get to know of your needs so that we can deliver on...” the speaker in front tries to say but the people are shouting and swearing at him.

This is the first time I attend such a meeting and it feels like I am in Parliament. People are uncivilized about the discussed matters.

“Everyone will get a chance to raise their concerns...but right now...let us address you with the progress report of...” the speaker tries again to raise his voice to address the people but everyone is shouting again.

“Vha a penga...you municipal people are crazy...Progress report for what when there is no progress?” one old man shouts.

“Go back to where you come from...we are not fools.” Another one shouts.

I look at Joseph and laugh. It is not funny but these people are not going to be fooled no more.

Everyone is still shouting when this lady stands from her seat. She is in the fourth row from the front. She doesn't say anything but just stand with her arms folded to her chest. Joseph and I look at each other. This is going to be interesting. The room became silent and she clears her throat before speaking.

“Our Leaders are failing us in delivering the services that they promised us years after years...and I get that you see how furious everyone is. We want clean water, we need better roads, we are in need of better sanitation...we need a lot of things but can I please address the issue of our clinic?” she says in her loud voice but still sounding as humble as you can imagine. She commanded the room under her spell. The room is still silent and she turns around to see the view of everyone who is inside the room. I could not believe my eyes. The woman I have been searching for months and months is standing in front of me. I gasp and look at Joseph.

“She is too pretty huh, for a villager?” Joseph says with a smirk.

“That's her... Rialivhuwa.” I say to him.

“Huh... the toilet lady?”

“The toilet lady.”

“What is she doing here?”

“I didn't know she is from around here.”

The old man sitting in front of us turned to give us a peculiar stare. We turn our attention back to Rialivhuwa.

“You great people of Mountain Villa and every fancy place you come from...you are sorted with everything...but we are still struggling down here in the valley. There are so many cases where people die in that dirty clinic...it takes hours for ambulances to come pick the sick to the hospital and infants are dying on the way...people are returned home when they go to consult...we have no resources but yet you always come back here and want to give us progress report...progress report for what?” she says in a breaking voice and the people starts shouting at the committee in support of what she is addressing. She waits for the room to be silent before she continues addressing her issues. “Please, delay the fancy roads and all things fancy but please give us a best clinic...bring us doctors to specialize or to attend to the patients...get us consultation rooms and emergency units. Please.”

She takes a seat and the room is filled with applause. The speaker is saying something to the crowd but I do not care anymore. I am too excited to see the woman I couldn't stop thinking about for months. I cannot wait for this meeting to be over so I meet her.

After what seems like a decade, people are now standing from their seats and making their way out of the hot hall.

"I didn't know I was only going to thank you after months." I say to her ear. I had allowed her to pass me so I could walk behind her. She turns to me and raise her eyebrows.

"Excuse me?"

"The triple shot that you gave me the other day?" I say and she gives me a warmest smile. I bet she remembers me.

"What are you doing here?" she asks while following the crowd out of the hall. Joseph went to the front for a brief discussion with the committee and I have enough time to mingle with Rialivhuwa.

"I am from around here...I didn't know you were from around here."

"Around here where?" she glance at me from my sneaker to my head. "Most probably from the precious Mountain Villa."

"Why do you say that?"

"Do you know how dusty it is around here...we don't wear white sneakers here?" She says with a laugh. I laugh with her. This place is really dusty.

"I never got a chance to thank you for the other day...and refund you for the drink."

"Forget about it...you were having a bad day and I thought I should just cheer you up." She says with a smile. Rialivhuwa is beautiful. She has the natural beauty, with natural hair and no make-up. The total opposite of my fiancée.

"You did cheer me up...you did."

"I am happy I did."

"Let me buy you lunch...or just a drink."

"Uhm...There is no need, really."

"My name is Mulatshawe." I put my hand out to shake hers. She shakes it with her soft warm hand. Hey, I am over the moon right now.

"It was nice meeting you again...but right now, I have to go." she says and starts walking.

"Hey...hey...wait." I say rushing to her. She stops and stare at me with her beautiful brown eyes. "Since the day we met, I have been thinking about you daily...please just give me a chance to thank you for what you did...no one has ever done anything like that for me."

"It was just a drink."

"It was not just a drink...you don't understand." I say with a smile.

She stares at me and shakes her head and say, "Oh...I am sorry I don't mean to be rude...I am just in a bad space and right now I have to rush home. There is something I need to deal with before the end of this day."

"Okay give me your new number...I found your numbers but it takes me straight to voice mail."

"I lost my phone...haven't gotten a chance to get a new one." She says.

"Allow me get you a phone then...please Rialivhuwa"

"You know my name?" she is shocked.

"Remember you introduced yourself when you brought the drink...I kept the name." I say and she smiles, showing off her beautiful white teeth.

"I remember." She says. "Please can I go, I really have something to deal with when I get home?"

She does look like she needs to be somewhere right now. She in anxious and restless. She looks disturbed by something and it is starting to worry me.

"Can I drive you home so I know where I can find you?"

"Haowa...no please." She poops her eyes as if I asked her to sin.

"Okay, please take my card...please call me when you get a chance for that drink...I am going back to Pretoria in a week's time...before I go maybe I can see you?" I hand her my business card.

"Alright, thank you." She says before walking away and leaving me staring at her until she disappeared. She is a little short, with curves and a tiny waist.

Wow! I just saw Rialivhuwa.

INSERT 7

RIALIVHUWA

I am walking away from the hall as fast as I could, but trying to be as elegant as I can be. I know he is watching me from behind. I ensure I do not turn back to meet his eyes on me. My heart is still pumping fast. Wow! What a day! I am blushing alone while striding home.

Today is just full of mixed emotions. I was angered by my step-mother and her sister. I was reminded and saddened by the loss of my father and that community meeting made me raise what I had in my heart. I truly blame our stupid clinic for my father's death. He had been coughing for months and I heard they kept returning him home because there was nothing they could do. And then from being angered and saddened, I was then smitten. The suit guy remembered my name for months. Who does that? I stated my name once and he still got it? That is new to me. He is such a handsome guy though. Dark and tall with nicely trimmed hair. He looks like those guys who lives in gym. Atleast he was not suited for the community meeting like he did for the supper with his parents. He looked good on his golf shirt and shorts. Simple and casual.

Could this be Zoleka's dream coming true? I mean how can I meet a guy twice in different parts of the world? Even with my heart guarded to fall in love, I made sure I listened to my friend's advice. I make sure I look good whenever I go out and today was just a perfect day for my favorite dress.

I look at his business card.

"Mulatshawe Ratshali, the general practitioner." I softly say to myself with a smile. It suits him well to be a doctor. He is one of those neat doctors.

But why do I have to be dealing with my step-mom and her sister? I could be dining with a handsome man right now. I could have chosen to go out with him, but I have to get my school money first.

Why am I thinking about this guy when I know my heart is not ready for love? I am fairly scared to be in love right now. I am terrified of giving my heart to someone again. The whole of it and he breaks it. I am only frightened of that. And this suit guy, how come he is beautifully handsome and still single? Haikhona, a doctor who looks that yummy cannot be single. Giving my heart to such a guy would just be like throwing it into a lion's den.

I am trying to stop imagining myself with this Mulatshawe guy. Maybe him and I taking walks after a long day. Us taking a jog together so that I keep fit. Me and him chilling in a park. I am imagining him and I in the kitchen, making meals.

A sad thought creeps my mind. All these things I am imagining is what I used to do with Joshua. I really thought he was the one for me. We did everything together and it was so sweet. I don't know if he really loved me, but he made me feel loved. It took me a short period of time to fall deeply in love until the cheating episode. I remember I was so hurt I would cry until I could vomit. With that, do I now want to be with a new man?

Mulatshawe does look like a nice guy, but that is what I thought of Joshua. Isn't it better to just focus in school and leave this love things for other people? If only one's mind could cooperate with the heart. Reality is the heart and the mind is always in a battle.

A blue Mazda car immediately stops in front of me and I am startled. Was I deep in my thoughts and walked in the road? Could this be Mulatshawe following me?

I quickly walk past the car without showing curiosity.

"Heeeyyyy Ria." A loud voice shouts from inside the car. I know the voice very well. I stop walking and wait for the owner of the voice to appear from inside. I watch as a guy in an orange golf shirt jumsp out of the driver's seat.

"Hey Tshilidzi...is that you?" I ask with a laugh. He is an old friend of mine from high school. Well, he also had a huge crush on me for the whole of High school.

"How have you been? Look at you Ria...you look so beautiful." He says walking to me. We hug.

"Thanks...you look good too." I lie. He has gained so much weight and his cheeks are so chubby now.

"I am so happy to see you. I saw you at your father's funeral and couldn't reach you. My condolences."

"Thanks...I am over it now."

"I thought no humela makhuwani...I really thought you went back to Joburg."

"No...I will go soon."

"Let me take you out for lunch before you leave...there is a nice restaurant in Thavhani Mall."

"Alright...I will let you know when." I lie. I don't want to go for lunch with him. I never liked Tshifhiwa but I don't want to say it straight in his face. He adores me dearly and he could be devastated.

"You look so beautiful I can't believe it is you."

"It is me." I clear my throat. This is getting awkward.

“Do you want a lift home? I can drop you there fast.”

“No...thanks...I just need some time to clear my head and a walk is what I need.” I say.

“Okay, can I have your numbers?” he asks and I tell him I do not have a phone. Thank God I really do not have a phone. He rushes to the car and comes back with a piece of paper with his numbers written on it.

“I will call you.” I say.

“I will be glad...please keep well for me.” He says with huge smile. Tshilidzi’s crush on me hasn’t subside a bit. He looks like a love-sick puppy. After a little while, he walks to his car and drives off.

Well, I just met another man. He is really a nice guy, but Tshilidzi, noooooo. But what if I am keeping my heart from a man who will adore me? They say the one you dislike the most can turn to be the one you deeply love. Also, Zoleka did say the man will love me dearly. I know for sure Tshilidzi is capable of that. But she also said we met in a beautiful place. This can’t be the beautiful place. I am in the middle of a dusty and rocky road. I met Mula in a collapsing dusty hall. You see now Zoleka’s dream is confusing me! Maybe I am still to meet this man she dreamt of.

I get home to find Thuso sitting outside. He is having lunch with the twins, Mashudu and Tshudufhadzo. My little brothers looks exactly like my father. I watch them for a little while. I am worried about this battle I am having with my step-mom. I am worried that I might need to leave them and start over. I am scared that I will be kicked out of my father’s house. My step-mom can’t stand me. I disgust her. She managed all this years with my father alive to pretend. It is now harder for her. Since the funeral I have watched her spit saliva when I appear to her. I cannot live like that. I deserve better than that. So if I decide to leave, how am I going to see my brothers grow? I bet they will just choose to be in my life when they are older.

“Ria, vhagai Mma?” Tshudu asks.

“Why are you asking where Mom is? You miss her?” I ask with a smile. I walk closer to sit next to them.

“She was crying.” He says and my heart sinks.

“Uhm...she was not feeling well.” I say.

“Is it not that you were attacking her?” Thuso coldly says.

"Thuso not in front of the kids."

"Why do you care now...didn't you attack my mother in front of them and the whole street? Now I can't even go play soccer without people asking me what money are you fighting for? Now people say my mother is wasting your father's policy money with her new man." he says while fuming. This is breaking my heart.

"No Thuso...I am sorry it turned out that."

"Don't tell me you are sorry when you have ruined my mother's name." he shouts with tears in his eyes. Why do Thuso and his mother like yelling so much?

"Why are you guys fighting?" Mashudu asks while standing.

"No no..we are not fighting Mashudu...we are not fighting" I say and he disappears to the house with Tshudu behind him. You see now, my step-mother's reaction has turned everything sour for the family now.

I decide to leave to my bedroom. God help me on this one.

I change back to the clothes I was wearing earlier in the morning. I thereafter throw myself on the bed and curl myself with my pillow. I sway my eyes to the business card from Mula. I had placed it on the bed since it was in my hand the whole trip from the hall. I pick it up and smile. Could I be falling in love with a stranger? With all this uncertainty in my heart, a thought of him warms my heart. I am thrilled by the excitement I saw in his eyes when he spoke to me earlier. His smile seemed genuine. He can possibly be this man who adores me. Why I am I being so hard on myself? Is it that he is too perfect that I cannot see us working? A doctor and I?

"Mulatshawe Ratshali." I softly say. I like his unique name. I like the sound of it.

I wake up and carefully place the business card and Tshilidzi's paper inside my diary. I walk to the kitchen so that I start preparing supper. I am peeling the potatoes when my step-mother walks in with her sister Joyce.

"What are you doing in my kitchen you witch? Get out." My step-mom yells.

"I was starting with supper so you could rest."

"So that you kill me nicely with your poisons?" she shouts.

"What poison now?"

"Leave my kitchen." She yells and I place the potatoes back in the rack. Aunty Joyce is not saying anything but is disgusted by me in her sight. I wash my hands.

"Oh Mma...Mr Nduna, the sergeant...he says I should give him report tomorrow. Report of whether I received the money before they issue the warrant to invade and audit your bank accounts. So please do give me feedback before the end of the day

so I can also update them tomorrow morning.” I say and wait for the response. I can see panic in both of them. After not getting any response, I walk out of the kitchen to the living room.

I pick the remote and tune to Sabc 2. I really saw panic in both my mother and her sister. By the way, I did not go to no police station. I was just making up the story. If they really don't have money then they will accept the audit. If it is otherwise, my money will be in my account.

My step-mother walks into the living room and throw me a piece of paper. I pick it up from the floor while she furiously walks back to the kitchen.

A deposit receipt from Standard bank.

“Pretoria, here I coommmeee!!!!!!!!!!!!”

INSERT 8

MULATSHAWE

I waited for Ria's phone call for a week and now I am returning to Pretoria. I blame myself for not secretly following her to see where she stays. Even so, it is not a train smash, I can get Joseph to go around the village and look for her. I just wish she had called to show she would like to meet up with me. She doesn't have a phone but I bet someone from her family does have. There are public phones aswell. I feel sick about this. I was so excited to see her and she seems not to feel the same. This feeling sucks. The feeling of rejection by someone you adore. I have never felt like this since I never proposed a woman I adored with my whole heart.

Maybe I should take this a blessing in disguise. Maybe meeting up with her was going to complicate things with my family. Maybe she has a boyfriend and telling it to my face was going to leave me broken. Whatever it is, I have got to accept.

I am going to be driving back to Pretoria. Luvhengo's parents left her at the palace so I am driving her to her house. We spent Christmas with her and my family loves her already. She even convinced my mother to change her wardrobe to something fancy suitable for a wife of a chief. My mother was super excited and my father is highly pleased. He is sure that she will make a good queen for me. I watched her help my mother bake and cook. She might make a good wife. I should just give this a change. It is just too difficult to do something that your heart doesn't want.

We are now having breakfast with my parents. The last breakfast with them until I come visit them again during Easter. That is if I manage to forget about Ria. If I cannot get her out of my mind, I might have to come back here and hunt her. It is my new hobby anyway.

"I want you guys to make us proud. And I don't understand why you need years to know each other. You can just marry already and you will know each other for the rest of your lives." My father says. Oh please, not this lectures again.

"Let them be, khotsi a Mulatshawe." My mother rescues me. She has picked it that I do not like to entertain this things.

"You should make sure you spend much time together...that way you will know each other very fast." He continues.

"Yah." I say.

"What is on that phone? You have been staring at that phone for the whole week." He raises his voice. I realise I was not paying attention to him. All my attention is on

the phone that I have placed in front of me. I still have that little hope that Ria will call before I drive out of this place.

“Uhm...yah I am waiting for a business call...for some business I am working on.” I say.

“Oh, that is interesting...what business?” he asks and I choke on my food. “What business is it that you are working on?”

“Oh well...we...me and my friend wants to...uhm...to bring a new specialist to work with us.” I manage to make up a lie.

“Is that a good idea? Are you guys stable enough to bring a third partner?”

“Well...we are just looking at different options.” Can we move to another topic already?

“So for a week they haven’t called you back? Maybe they are not interested in whatever you are proposing...whoever it is.” He says and it hit me. Possibly Ria is not interested. She would have made means to call me by now.

“You are right.” I say, pick my phone from the table and shove it in my pocket.

“So as I was saying...you guys should make time for each other. We will come and visit soon.” My father says.

“We will be delighted to have you visit us.”

“And that house of your Mulatshawe needs a woman’s touch.”

Really now? Why does it seem like I am now married? I need no woman touch in my apartment.

After the longest breakfast ever, Luvhengo and I drove out of the palace. I am only excited to be going back to my apartment. The only place where I can be myself. I am going to the surgery tomorrow. My partner Vuyo has been working alone from the beginning of December. I will be taking this last week and cover for him when he goes on leave until mid- January. If it wasn’t for making money, I would be driving down to Mpumalanga or anywhere else just to unwind.

“Are you good?” Luvhengo asks as I focus on the road.

“Yes...why?”

“You seem to be distant...for a week now...even now.”

“No I am alright...it was just that business I was waiting for.”

“Where you dating someone before the engagement?” she coldly asks.

"No, why?" I turn to her with curiosity.

"Because I don't have energy to be dealing with your Exes who are still in love with you."

"Won't I be dealing with your Exes?" I ask and she doesn't respond. I take it I will be dealing with her old flames here.

"You know I didn't think I would do this...but here I am...engaged to the prince of Thavhakhulu." She says while glancing at the ring.

"Are you happy?" I ask her because I am not.

"Does it matter Mula? I am doing what I am destined to do." She says.

Destiny right?

We drive for hours to reach Gauteng. Luvhengo directs me to Rooderport.

Are we in her parents' house or hers? I am asking myself as we turn to Ruimsig Country Estate. I have been here for a friend's braai a while ago.

"Do your parents live here?" I ask as I drive through the gates.

"My house."

I do not show her the shock I have in my face. What does this woman do?

I park on the driveway and help her with the luggage. She opens the door and punch the pin on the alarm behind the door. She walks in and I follow behind her. I am welcomed by a beautifully modern furnished home. Everything is neatly set around the house. Hey, I can't even afford to buy this house. If only my parents knew what pressure they have put me in.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"No, thank you...I really have to run back Pretoria and prepare for tomorrow." I say. I am really not in the mood right now. We have travelled for hours and hours together and now I just need my space.

"You just got to my house and now you want to leave?"

"Come on...I will see you sometime this week."

"Alright, suit yourself." She mumbles.

"Beautiful house by the way." I say as I walk to the door.

"Thank you."

Okay my parents has put me under the bus here. How do I maintain such a rich woman? And what does she want getting married to chief's son when she can get any man she desires?

It shows everywhere that it is the festive season. The malls and the streets are empty. I have been in the practice for hours now and things are going slow. I have seen four patient since the morning and only three to go. I thought I would be slaving myself this week. Atleast I have more time to myself. I wish it was a Friday already so I could host a braai with my boys.

I hear a soft knock on the door.

"Come in, please." I say.

"Hey I wanted to ask if you are going to eat roast chicken or beef stew." Rossie, our receptionist asks while standing by the door.

"Don't they have braai meat nyana?" I ask and she laughs.

"I doubt the cafeteria has that doc."

"Alright get me anything to eat." I say. "How many patients are at the waiting area?"

"We have only three."

"Okay send me the next patient so long."

She closes the door behind her and I get my table ready for the next patient. After a little while, a woman enters with a baby.

"Oh please take a sit." I say and she does. She hands me the patient's card and put the baby on the lap.

"Baby Lindelwa."

"Yes doctor."

"What could be the problem today?" I ask, making the first note on the card.

"Well, on Friday I took my child to the clinic for his 18 months vaccine and since then he has been heating up. I don't know if it is just a fever or if it is a reaction from the injection they gave her."

"I bet you it is the reaction to the vaccine."

“You think so?”

“See the vaccines are made to protect your babies from bacteria and virus? A part of the same bacteria or virus they are preventing is used to create these vaccines. That way the virus becomes weak because of the modified virus and won't attack your kids. So sometimes the kids react to that. The baby would start to heat up and gets a hectic fever.”

“Oh...and sometimes when she sleeps, she would have mini seizures so...why is that?”

“Those are fever seizures...they happen when the baby's body temperature is too high...don't worry I will give him something to stop the fever and the anti-biotics”

“Yoh I am so relieved you know.”

“Please put her on the bed and help me with her little thigh...unfortunately I will be giving her the injection to fight the fever.” I say walking towards the bed. See this is what I enjoy doing. Not those chieftaincy things they want me to handle.

I gave the baby the injection. I am so used to the babies scream it doesn't break my heart no more. After getting the baby dress up, I gave her a sweet and I handed the prescription of the medication to the mother.

“Thank you Dr Ratshali.”

“My pleasure...please let me know after a few days if she does not get better...but I assure you she will sleep well tonight.”

She leaves the room. I attend to the other patients and finally get a chance to have my lunch. For the first time I was able to not think about Ria. She didn't call me and it is time to move on now.

There is soft knock on the door while I am packing things into my briefcase. It is time to go home.

“Come in.”

“Sir, there is a lady who is here to see you.” Rossie says from the door.

“A patient? Did you book another patient?”

“No Sir...she says she is a friend.”

“Alright, please bring her in.”

Rossie leaves my office and I carry on with packing the rest of my stuff in the briefcase. I raise my eyes to the door when I hear a soft knock once again. This time

the door is open so I see her walk slowly inside. My eyes poops out and my jaw drops.

“Hi Mula.” She says with a soft voice.

“Rialivhuwa?”

INSERT 9

RIALIVHUWA

I am standing in his office with one bag hanging heavily on my shoulder. Mula cannot hide the shock that is on his face. I don't know what to do and what to say. He glance at me and then close the briefcase that is on the table.

At this point I am regretting coming here. He is standing in front of me like a statue. No words, no actions but just stares.

Only after a minutes or so he rushes to where I am standing and quickly grab the heavy bag that was hanging on my shoulder.

"Let me help you with that." he says while taking the other bags from my hands.

"Thank you." I quietly say. "I am sorry I didn't call."

I am not going to tell him why I did not call him. So much drama in my life. I did not call because I did not have a phone. Thuso does not have a phone and my step-mom would kill me if I dare touch hers. What I had thought is a deposit slip was just a transfer notification. It was a transfer notification of R20 000 to my account, from my step-mom's Notice account. I had to wait for the five working days for the money to reflect on my account. I never got a chance to go to Thohoyandou on the weekend because Vho Masindi, our neighbor, was away to a funeral. She only came back on Sunday late and gave me R50 for transport from the village to Thohoyandou. My step-mom made sure I suffered in her hands this last days in her house. I still had to pack every little things that belonged to me and make sure there is no trace of me in my own father's house. I made peace with the fact that I will not see my little brothers anytime soon.

Come today morning, I woke up and head straight to Thohoyandou, with all my bags. I started by the bank and withdraw the money enough for my trip. Look, I do not know Zoleka's numbers by heart so I could not even use a public phone to find out where she is. She also deactivated her Facebook account the time I did mine. She told me it was for moral support. I remember I deactivated it weeks after my break-up with Joshua as he was stalking me and tagging me in all his posts. I blocked him but he would create a new profile and stalk me even more. When I told Zoleka, without hesitation she deactivated hers aswell. Since then we both didn't activate our accounts. So I couldn't even ask a stranger for a phone to send her an inbox.

I went to the flat first to find her not there. She is probably home in Soweto for the festive season and only coming back before the registration time. I took another taxi to Parkview to look for Tumisho and the other waitress that I was close to. They say Tumisho took leave to visit his family in Bloemfontein since the business is slow. The

other waitress resigned before the beginning of December. All the other people I know are connected to Joshua and I am not going to risk having him back in my life.

It was already four o'clock and I was starting to get worried. I did not want to book a room in a lodge because the money I have should not be wasted. It is all I have until I get another job. After running out of ideas, I had no choice but to go back to Sunnyside to book a room for a day or two while I make other plans. When I was walking out of Parkview center, I remembered reading where Mula's practice is situated. It is in Pretoria East Hospital. I am staring at it, right in front of me. Could this be fate? He is my only hope right now.

"Hey don't worry about the call...are you alright?" he ask, pulling a chair for me to sit. I bury myself on the chair and breathe out. I am exhausted.

"I need your help." I humbly say.

"Anything."

"I had to come back today without informing my friend and she is not in her flat. I don't have the keys since I moved out of the flat when I resigned...I need help getting to her house in Soweto to get the keys." I say.

"Oh, no problem at all." He looks excited to be assisting me.

Oh flip!! I just remembered. I don't know the directions to her house. I know it is in Chiawelo. I have been there twice but I can never direct anyone there. Tears starts forming in my eyes. I am really exhausted and this is just messing me up.

"Hey what's wrong Ria?" Mula asks with so much concern. By now the tears are streaming down my eyes. I'm panicking and I hate being vulnerable.

"I don't know exactly where the house is." I suck with directions.

"That is not a problem...I have a guest room in my apartment." He says and I gaze at him with my twinkling eyes. "Okay fine...if you are not comfortable, then I will take you to my sister's flat...she is on vacation and I have a spare key. I am sure she won't mind."

That is so much better. I cannot be crushing at my crush's house. Yes, I like him.

"Dr, we need to lock up." The reception lady says from the door. She pierced me with her eyes until I feel uncomfortable.

"Okay, give us a minute." He says and she walks away without saying anything.

"Thank you...I can stay with your sister until Zoleka comes back."

"Okay...let's get you freshen up and I will let my sister know you are going to her flat." He says while standing. He grabs the briefcase from the table, the heavy bag on

the floor and walks to the door. I pick the smaller bags and follow him to the parking lot. He places everything in his boot and I jump into the passenger's seat of his beautiful car.

"I stay just around." he says as he starts the car. I am really shy I cannot even look in his eyes. He drives out and straight to his beautiful estate. It only took us less than 15 minutes to get to his apartment. Hey this is nothing like my flat Lesperance in sunnyside. I follow him inside with my smaller bag and handbag.

"Okay, this is the guest room...you can use to change...and that is the bathroom. Just take your time and I will prepare something to eat so long." He says and then leave me standing in a beautiful grey and yellow coloured bedroom. I close the door and place my bag on top of the couch which is in the corner of the room. I cannot believe I am in Mulatshawe's apartment.

Where is Zoleka when I need her the most?

I take a longest shower and change into a comfortable summer dress and sleepers. My feet are killing me. It is hot just like in Venda but at least there is a little breeze outside. I clean up the room and place my things in my bags and walk to the kitchen.

"Rosemary and garlic chicken..." I say as I walk into the kitchen. Rosemary, I can smell it anywhere and anytime. Okay I worked in restaurants so much I can easily tell what spices one is using.

"You're favourite?" he asks without turning back. He takes the roast pan from the oven, turns to me and freeze.

"Yes my favourite." I say. "Are you alright Mula?"

"Yes..uhm..yes I am fine." He quickly puts the roast pan on the kitchen counter and rub his forehead a few times. "You are so beautiful."

"Excuse me?" I am not sure if I heard him correctly.

"You are beautiful." He says again while turning his eyes on me.

"Uhm...thank you." I say and rush to the basin to wash my hands. "What else are you making...let me help?"

"Well...I am done with the roast chicken and roast veggies...so I am waiting for the rice."

"Wow you are such a good cook." I say glancing at the roast pan on the table. It really looks great prepared by a doctor.

"Oh please...I try."

“Okay...do you have any veggies and spices I can use to make savoury rice? I like it with roast chicken.”

“Check the spices in the shelf over there...Rotshi usually spices the rice and I am not sure if we still have any in the shelves.” Oh, who is Rotshi now? Could it be the girlfriend? He is not wearing a ring so maybe he is not married.

“Uhm...please get me the veggies.” I request and he walks to the fridge to pick the robot peppers.

“Are you fine?” he asks.

“Yes I am fine.” I lie. Ofcourse I am not fine. I have so many thoughts running in my head. I am trying to think who could be this Rotshi who spices the rice for him?

I try my best to not show disappointment and I am in no way going to ask him who she is. Having me in his apartment is awkward enough and asking him personal questions will just turn off the whole mood.

I get busy with the rice while he places the roast chicken and veggies in a serving bowl. He puts the serving bowl on the table with the plates and cutlery.

“Would you like some wine? I have a fine bottle of merlot...would you like some?” he asks and I shake my head aggressively. The last time I had two full glasses of merlot, I ended up talking too much. I was with Zoleka in a club after the famous breakup with Joshua. Zoleka was having her ciders and I ordered a bottle of wine. I had tasted wine a few times and liked it. She warned me not to order wine in a club but did I listen? After two glasses, I was talking too much. After finishing the bottle, I was dancing to every song. I was stubborn enough to order a second bottle. Until today I do not agree to what Zoleka tells me I was doing thereafter. She said I chatted up strangers and joined every group that was dancing on the dance floor. So, in a time like this, No thanks to wine. I might end up embarrassing myself in front of the doctor.

“Okay I will mix you a virgin cocktail...fine?”

“Yes, that’s fine.”

This right here is what I have been imagining since the day I met Mula at the hall. Us cooking together in a beautiful evening like this. I just didn’t think it would be this soon.

The rice is ready so I poured it into the serving bowl and place it on the dining table. He grabs a chair opposite the chair I chose.

“Wow...I really can’t believe you are here.”

“You can say that again.” I say blushing.

We both serve ourselves the food.

“Nice cocktail...It just needs less of the syrup and more of the lemonade.”

“Everybody says that I make horrible cocktails.”

“It’s not bad...I will teach how to.”

“That would be so cool...I won’t have Roli throwing my cocktails down the drain anymore.” He says with a laugh and I fake a smile. Who is this Rotshi?

We eat while chatting up about almost everything. He is quite a funny and interesting guy. The more he chats me up, the more I find myself liking him with every word.

“Do you like movies? I don’t remember when last I have been to a movie?” he randomly asks. I think he is asking me on simple date to the movies.

“I loveee movies...and I have been dying to try the 4Dx movies in numetro Menlyn...heard it’s massive.”

“Oh yes...Rotshi told me that and I ignored her.”

You know what, this is it! I can’t do this with this Rotshi girl in the picture.

INSERT 10

MULATSHAWE

Everything was going just fine until when she suddenly changed. The mood changed and she suddenly became quiet. This is the part I least understand about women. The next thing she is happy and super excited, but the next she just shuts you out like you committed a grim crime. I am trying to trace back our conversation to pick what I might have said that offended her. I am cracking my head and there is nothing coming up. I am going as far as tracing the events of the day. She walked in my office with a stone heavy bag hanging on her shoulder. I offered to help her with accommodation in my sister's flat. We drove to my house. She showered and we finished cooking dinner. We are now having our first meal over an easy conversation. No, I haven't said anything or done anything offending. Maybe she has her own personal problems. The same problems I want to ask about but failing to.

"Would you like some dessert? I have ice cream." I ask. The silence in this room has become deafening.

"No, thank you." She quietly says.

I have been through this with a few women, and the only difference is that this one right here I can tolerate. I don't think I have ever fallen in love with anyone before Ria. I have loved before but have never been in love. She is the first woman who has me confused. Before she arrived in my office, I was sure I am over waiting for her. All that changed just by looking in her eyes.

I pick the plates from the table and go place them in the dishwasher.

"I will help you with the pots." She says from the dining area.

"Okay...let me take a quick shower and I will drop you off in Hatfield."

"Thank you." She says and leave for my room.

I still can't believe I have Ria in my house. My only concern is the real reason she is here. Is it that she only needs my help because she is stranded but wants nothing to do with me? I wish this is more than just a looking for help.

I hurry to my room for a quick shower. Before jumping into the shower, I dial Rotshi's number and put the phone on speaker. She never misses my calls this one. Her phone is always in her hands. It rings twice before she picks up in her loud joyful voice.

"Hey Mula...I was about to call you."

"You were about to call me?"

"Yes...I need more pocket money...I want to extend this holiidday!!"

"I am not giving you no money."

"Then why are you calling me?"

"Uhm...look I need a favour...someone needs to crash in your flat for a few days."

"Who wants to crash in my flat?"

"Rialivhuwa...she is stranded."

"The famous Rialivhuwa? The toilet girl?"

"The toilet girl." This is what Rotshidza and Joseph refers to her.

"How did you find her?"

"I'll tell you when you come back."

"No stress...she can stay there...as long as you won't be having sex on my bed and my couches."

"Rotshi...sies."

"Don't sies me like you don't want to have sex with her." She says and I go blank. I have been so caught up in finding her so much that I never got a chance to think of her beyond that. This is the other reason I say I am in love.

"Look...thank you and enjoy your holiday."

"No sex on my bed and couches...I can tell a stain when I see one." She shouts before hanging up the phone. That is my sister for you. I wonder who she was sitting with.

I jump into the shower for a power shower. Afterwards, I put on shorts and a vest then walk back to the kitchen. I love what I see. Seeing Ria curled on the couch. She really is tired because she has fallen asleep with the TV on. Why can't I have this girl for myself?

"Hey Ria..." I say, waking her up softly. She startled and quickly sits up straight.

"I am sorry I fell asleep." She says while fixing her afro.

"Relax...you should be tired."

“I really am exhausted.”

“Okay go get your bags.”

We drive out of Pretoria East in silence. It feels like she is not free with me or she is just too shy. It is already late now so I stop by Pick n Pay express in Arcadia and pick a few things for the flat. I am very much sure that Rotshi has no sugar for tea, she lives on take-away. Staying alone is her excuse for living on take-aways. She says she cannot cook with small pots. What an excuse!

I park at the Fields and help Ria with the bags. Thank goodness the guards knows me because of my loud sister. She told them I am the chief and should not be disrespected. It worked just because the guards are friendly and I pick her up or drop her here at the reception almost every month.

I make sure Ria is settled before driving back to my apartment. I am pleased that she appreciates the efforts and did not fail to express her appreciation.

I had left my phone in the house and I have a lot of missed calls from Luvhengo. Seven missed calls!!! What a reminder that I have a fiancée. I hesitate to call back so I throw it back on the couch and switch on the television.

Oh Damn! I am in a dilemma now. My heart is falling deeply in love with this girl and I am engaged. It would have been a different story if I was not committed. Now I have brought two royal families together. Now I am committed to a woman I do not love. There is a lot of things to consider now.

I don't want to tell Ria that I am one with the royal blood. If she is not a fighter, she won't even think twice about walking away. Her being from Venda, she obviously know that one from royal cannot marry a commoner unless they put up a blood fight. Such fights are not for the fainted heart. She also knows the possibilities of one to be a polygamist. Even though my father doesn't practise it, she obviously knows that I might be forced to marry another wife if I make her mine. Honestly knowing the royal rules, I wouldn't date any royal blooded human if I was a commoner. You need to be a strong fighter to overcome such trials.

What do I do now? I really need advice. And who could give me the best advice other than Joseph, he is going to be my chieftaincy adviser anyway.

“Hey Doctor Ratshali.” He says and I laugh.

“What's with the formalities?”

“For control...now that you are going to get married, we should be practising to call you Vha-musanda.”

"Hai suka!"

"Whats up? I am about to go get some few drinks at Khoroni hotel."

"This late on a Monday?"

"On a Monday? You are the only one working....some of us are still having fun so I have some boys of mine booked there at Khoroni...so Im just joining them for a few drinks."

"Okay I need some advice." I sigh.

"Luvhengo is already giving you stress?" he laughs. "I can hear that sigh has to do with a woman."

"She showed up...Ria showed up in my office...she was stranded and is now crashing in Rotshi's flat."

"She just showed up...yoh Mula you are going to complicate things now."

"I can't help it man...after she didn't call me for a week, I tried forgetting her...I wanted to be angry at her for not making a simple effort to call me but when she showed up in my office...my heart was just as excited as the first day I met her." I say and I hear him sigh. This is a little complicated.

"Okay look...this is complicated because you have engaged Luvhengo."

"I know...I just don't know what to do."

"She is a commoner so leaving Luvhengo for her will create a tug of war...and knowing you...you won't have the energy to go through that..."

"What do I do if I have found someone that I truly loved?" I ask and he keeps quiet for a little while.

"Make her a royal mistress." He finally says.

"Excuse me?"

"You can't easily have her...and if your heart really needs her then make her a royal mistress."

"What on earth is that?"

"Women that secretly date in the royal family..." he says.

"Do people do that?" A mistress is a mistress, why does this one has to be specific?

"Have you ever heard any rumours of your father dating a commoner?" he asks.

“Does my father have a mistress?”

“One that is only known by the elders...the community would disrespect him if they know he is dating outside the marriage and not taking the second wife instead.” He says.

What the hell!!! This is so messed up.

“So my father has a woman he dates that the family knows about?”

“See now you are making me reveal secrets? It’s funny how you thought your father was an angel” he laughs.

“I don’t believe this.”

“This royal arranged marriages are not so easy...these elders know your heart might be somewhere so the family can organise you a royal mistress...they can even take care of her and make sure the public doesn’t know about it.”

“Does my mother know?”

“There is possibility that she knows but I am not sure.”

“Dude...this is fucked up.”

“So you can make Ria your royal mistress...if you are both serious and love each other...you can be together and love each other...but just make sure you do not have a baby with her because it becomes more complicated and you might not handle the heat.”

“I don’t even think Ria is that kind of a person who can agrees to this.”

“Dude...don’t tell her until you are both deeply in love and there is no turning back...it works, it has worked for decades.”

This conversation has left me with my jaws dropped. I don’t know how ignorant I have been. I don’t even know if I am selfish enough to do this. Cheating with a woman I don’t really love would be better and easier. What if she finds out about this whole arrangement before I tell her myself?

Why do I want to complicate my life this much? Is all this worth it?

“A royal mistress????”

INSERT 11

LUVHENGO

I push the heavy door open and stand by the entrance. I don't believe I am doing this. I take a few steps inside an empty holy house. The pews are lined neatly all over the hall. With my stilettos echoing inside the hall as I walk, I make my way to the front of the church. I haven't been in a church in such a long time and today I felt a strong edge to come in and talk to someone. I think my sins are chocking me and having someone listen to me would lift the load off my shoulders.

I was just driving past here when I saw the confessional notice outside the church hall. This could help me. I was on my way from the mall to get the food I ordered and wines for the date with my girlfriends.

There is no one in here and I am here looking like a fool. With my torn jeans and a tank top, I am feeling out of place.

"Welcome sister...good morning."

"Uhm...morning." I say hanging my handbag on my shoulder and letting out a hand to greet an old woman in front of me. She receives my hand with a warm smile.

"Are you here for the afternoon prayer?"

"I was hoping to see someone...anyone...I saw the confessional notice outside?"

"Come this way." She says.

She takes me to the corner of the hall. There are two booths and I know what this is. I have seen this on TV and it is exactly what I need. I need to speak to someone without them looking at me and judging me while I tell them all my secrets.

I jump into one and close the small red curtains. It is quiet and I take it the pastor is still not here. I quickly take my phone out of my bag and put it on vibrate. I place the phone on my lap together with my handbag.

"How can I help you child of God?" the horse voice says from across the curtains.

"Uhm...I thought I could talk to someone."

"And I am here for you."

"Well...see I have so much baggage it is weighing on me...I sinned...I mean I am sinning...I saw the invitation for confessions and I felt a strong edge to come talk to

someone." I say and sigh. I just don't like the person I have become and now it is just too worse.

"The Lord said confess all your sins and all shall be forgiven."

"But you know what I don't understand Sir...how I allowed myself to get this deep. At first, few years ago it was not a big deal but now everything is just out of control...I love my life but sometimes it bothers me what I have to go through to do all the things I do to live such a fancy life."

"What do you go through to get this life you talk about?"

"Too much compromises...too much faking...it's just too much."

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed...that is a verse from the bible." The priest says.

My phone vibrates on my lap and takes my attention. It was a number of SMSs coming in one after another. My heart jumps when I see they are all coming from AB.

"Where are you? I forgot my keys and I am waiting outside the door." One messages reads.

"I am waiting outside." Another SMS comes in.

"Where the hell are you?" the last message. I quickly stand from the chair and hang my bag on the shoulder.

"Are you there? I was still telling you that when anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned...so this is the biggest step that you are taking."

"No...I think this was a mistake...I am sorry." I say rushing out of the confessional box. I cannot stand to make AB angry. No one in the world hates waiting like AB does. What was I thinking anyway? This is the life I have chosen.

I rush out of the church hall and straight to my car. It only takes me fifteen minutes to park aside his car in our house.

"Hey babe...I am sorry my phone is on silent." I say parading to his car.

"Where the hell have you been?" he says while jumping out of his Jeep and walking straight to me. He gives me a warm hug and a kiss thereafter.

"I was picking the sushi and lunch for the girls."

"Oh, the lunch date is today?"

"It is today...I am sorry I forgot to remind you."

“Whats wrong? You seem tense.” Damn! This guy can see through me.

“No babe...I am just a little tired...I was window shopping in this heels.”

“I told you to go easy on those shoes of yours.”

He helps me with the shopping bags to the kitchen. It is just after 12 o'clock so my friends will be walking in any minute. I place the sushi platters, the wine buckets and glasses on the table outside by the pools. Everything is perfectly set so I rush to freshen up before their arrival. Abednego walks into the bedroom while I am putting on my white short dress.

“Hey sweetie...you look good already.” He says and kisses me on the neck.

“Thank you.”

“I brought you a glass of wine.” He says handing me a wine glasses. Its merlot and it smells divine.

“I am not drinking today babe.”

“You, Luvhengo, are refusing a glass of wine?” he asks with a laugh.

“Stop it AB, I have to work on the opening of the new boutique and I will be up all night...you know how wine makes me sleepy.”

“Even just one glass?” he asks taking a sip from the same glass.

“Even one glass...please go help me with the ice cubes...place them in my favorite holder.”

“Ayt...I will put your ice cubes bucket outside and I will be out to Melrose...I love you.” He kisses me on my lips before walking out of the room.

Phew! That was close!

My girls arrive when I am busy making the last salad. It is my best friend Lufuno and our two friends, Phophi and Kgomotso. I always love to have them around because they help me a lot in making decisions about the events I host for the Salon and my boutique. AB and I are opening a new boutique in Menlyn so I need their help before meeting the event planner.

Phophi and Kgomotso are watching TV and Lufuno is in the kitchen with me.

“You haven't told me anything about Prince Mulatshawe.”

“He is one handsome doctor...shockingly humble and loving” I say. He is the sweetest man I have ever met.

Mulatshwe is the prince from Venda that I am arranged to be married to. I met him and his beautiful family a week ago and we got engaged already.

"Friend, how is this going to work with Abednego in the picture?" she whispers.

"I will make it work."

Phophi is my best friend from High school and we share everything except the truth about this marriage arrangement. She doesn't know that AB is a big part of this. I cannot risk telling her the truth about it.

"So are you just going to gradually make AB fall out of love with you?" she whispers again.

"Don't worry friend...I will make it work...I will tell him when the time is right and I believe he will let me go when he knows it is my family's decision to get me married to another guy...he knows I am royalty anyway...I told him the day we met."

"You are telling me that scary boyfriend of yours who gives you eveeerrrything will let you be married by another guy?" she whispers.

"Stop whispering...he is not here."

"You never know if there are cameras all over this house...I don't trust your guy...you know that."

"Oh please..."

"So this Mulatshawe guy...does he like you?" she asks.

"I can't tell...but I think he does...but he is always distant...maybe he had to break up with his girlfriend and he is still not over her...he is always distant."

"Is he dating anyone aswell?"

"He told me No."

"And when are you breaking up with AB?"

"Friend, I told you when the time is right...don't worry about me."

"You are not being fair my friend...imagine the guy had to break up with his girlfriend for you and here you are continuing your love life with AB."

"Oh please!"

"Remind me again why you agreed to do this...this is so unlike you?"

"My fate is decided for me."

“But your Dad adores you Luvhengo, why would he let you go through with this?” she asks and I fake a laugh. She can smell a rat in this, I know she does. This whole thing is out of character for me.

“Stop stressing yourself my friend.”

“So when are you seeing Mulatshawe?”

“I have been calling him...maybe during the week.”

After making the chicken salad, Lufuno helps me place the lunch on the table outside. We sit around the table with everyone with a glass of wine except me. I haven't seen my friends in months and this is really fun.

“Are you not having sushi today?” Kgomotso asks as she dips her salmon rose in the sushi sauce.

“I feel like a salad today.” I say while dishing myself a chicken salad.

“You, the queen of sushi?”

“Come on Kgomotso...I had half of a platter earlier on.”

“And you are not having a glass of wine...one would swear you are pregnant.” Phophi says.

“Oh please!”

We have our lunch while catching up and they also help me with the arrangements for the opening. Lufuno has a catering company so she will organize the waitresses and the food arrangements. Phophi and Kgomotso will just help me with the small errands.

My friends left before it was dark. Abednego walks in the kitchen just when I was finishing washing the dishes. Our helper only comes three times a week and only when we are hosting events in our house.

“They are gone already?” he asks and I laugh.

“Phophi is driving them today...she is a new driver so she claims that she doesn't see properly at night.”

“I don't blame her...you used to be like that also.”

“You lie.” I laugh out loud.

Abednego walks to the fridge to pick a bottle of beer. His mood has changed. He looks tense so I ignore him and carry on drying the dishes.

“When are you getting an abortion?” he asks and I choke on my own saliva.

“AB, what are you talking about?”

“I know you are pregnant...so when are you getting an abortion?”

“How did you know?” I whisper. He found out too soon before I could find a perfect plan. He doesn't want a baby and I have been ready for one for two years now.

“I am not stupid...I see you touch your belly every second of the day...you sleep too often and you never want to drink wine anymore.”

“Babe, please let me keep this baby...we will make great parents.”

“What about the engagement to that idiot of a prince?”

“I will make a plan...I can seduce him to sleep with me and...”

“YOU ARE NOT SLEEPING WITH HIM!” he shouts and I startle. “You are not sleeping with that guy.”

“Please babe...let me disappear for a few months and I will give someone the baby until all is back to normal.”

“We are so close to the big goal here and that pregnancy is going to disturb everything I have worked my arse off for.” He says angrily and it pierce me straight to my heart. I have been secretly trying to fall pregnant for two years. I can let go of everything just to keep this baby.

“You are going to make an appointment to abort that baby...and you are going to continue playing the happy princess to that idiot.” He says and walks out of the kitchen.

INSERT 12

MULATSHAWE

I should thank the stars for bringing Ria in my life. I have never been happier and free spirited like I have been this past week. I know it is too early to get too excited but she is a darling. You know that moment when you know your heart belongs to someone? Mine belongs to Rialivhuwa. She doesn't know yet, but my heart belongs to her.

I have been spending time with her for a week since her arrival and I am pleased to have her around. I hope her friend doesn't come back soon because I know she will be leaving the moment her friend comes back from Soweto.

For the past week we were able to go out for walks and for ice cream. She has turned me into a worst softie. I asked her for a date and she agreed only if I take her to the Zoo. She is shy. She said she would rather walk miles with me than to sit across me for hours. I am just waiting for the day I could dine with her.

I have been trying my best to ignore Joseph's royal mistress rubbish. I don't have a solution yet but I know I could give my heart to Ria any day.

The day she agreed to go on a date with me, we ended up at Pretoria Zoo. She insisted on it because it made her more comfortable. I got an opportunity to know a lot about her and to get a feel of how she views royal marriages. I still remember the time we were buying ice cream when I asked her about what she knows about royal marriages.

"I wonder how those royal people deal with the pressure they get from family?" she said after licking her sugar cone ice cream. I had asked her what she feels about being married by a prince or anyone from royalty.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Are you from our region? You know what they do there?"

"Tell me?"

"You know where I come from, they look for the bride for kings and princes and make sure they marry from the perfect family...imagine in this day and age, they still practice arrange marriages...so they would search high and low for a perfect family to marry from."

"Perfect family? What makes a perfect family?" I asked.

“Either one is a princess, born from royalty or she is a commoner but a well-mannered virgin chosen for the king or the prince.” She said.

“That’s interesting...so would you survive such a marriage?”

“Royal marriage? Hell no! I am no virgin and I am no royalty...and such is for the strong hearted...imagine me Rialivhuwa fighting all my life to fit in...I have fought enough in my life I am not willing to fight some more.”

“So you don’t think you are strong enough...say you strongly fall in love with a prince...won’t you fight for your love?” I asked and she shook her head aggressively.

“Why are you so interested in this? Are you from royalty?”

“Who? Me? No ways... I am just fascinated about all this...considering we are from the villages...and I recently read some article on a newspaper about it.” I lied and she didn’t pick it up. She doesn’t want to be married from royalty so where would I get the courage to tell her I am from one. It doesn’t matter what I am so I am going to play a normal guy to her. Forget the labeling of our relationship, all I need is her in my life. As selfish as it sounds, I need Rialivhuwa in my life. We will definitely cross the bridge when we get there.

I had a number of patients today and I just couldn’t wait to see my last one. I have been thinking a lot about my afro haired queen of my heart. So the road leads straight from Pretoria East to Hatfield.

She is watching TV when I get to the flat.

“One could swear you don’t have a life.” She says walking to the couch after opening the door for me.

“I actually do not have a life...I need some company you know.”

“I just finished my supper...want some?”

“I had a late lunch so I am still fine.”

I take my jacket off while she smiles. I know she wants to make fun of me for wearing blazers almost every day. I grew up with blazers as my escape. See I was so tall and so skinny; and I was never comfortable with leaving my skinny arms out. Slim fit shirts would make things even worse. As hot as it was in Venda all my teenage life, I made sure I wear a blazer or a casual jacket whenever I get a chance. That habit grew up with me and Ria would never understand that.

“Always keep an eye on me when I go to your house...I will steal all those blazers and we will see how you will survive without them.” She says and my heart warms up. She sees herself in my apartment again, that is a good thing.

"Then I will go shop for some more."

"Why do you need a blazer...you have a perfect body and all you do is to cover it up every day."

"Come on now..."

There is a knock on the door so I glance at Rialivhuwa. She shrugs and I stand from the couch to go open the door.

"Helllooooo everyboddyyy." Rotshi yelled as she walks pushing her luggage.

"Hee vhanna!! So you don't tell that you are coming back?" I fold my arms and watch her as she struggles to push everything inside.

"I thought I could catch you in the act...I have never seen people have sex so I thought..."

"Shut up!" I hissed and Rialivhuwa laughs.

"Ohhhh...and this should be the famous Rialivhuwa." Rotshi says and drops all her bags. She hurries to give Ria a warm hug. "Now I see why you drove him crazy...you are so beautiful."

"Uhm...thank you." She says after clearing her throat.

"Ria, that is my little sister Rotshi." I say and she raises her eyebrow.

"Rotshi is your sister?" she says and then chuckles.

"You know her?"

"No...not at all...you just don't look too much alike."

"That's because I am the pretty one." Rotshi says and then throws herself on the couch.

"Thank you so much for helping me with accommodation...I will be leaving as soon as Zoleka comes back to her flat." Ria politely says to my sister.

"My pleasure...but you can stay as long as you want...you are going to be my sister-in-law soon anyway." She says and Ria smiles. I don't know what that smile meant. Does she like the idea of being my wife? Or is she just speechless? I would be pleased with the former.

Rotshi is telling us about her trip to Cape Town and Zanzibar and she is having Ria rolling on the floor with laughter. Okay, Rotshi likes to exaggerate a little when she tells her stories, always. But all these stories about how she saved people from drowning while swimming and how all her friends refused to sky dive but her, sounds too good to be true. She always plays the heroin. Ria doesn't know Rotshi

well so she is truly laughing at her jokes. She is adorable when she is drunk with laughter. She is one of those who cry tears with each genuine laughter. I am laughing, but not at the jokes, I am laughing at how Ria is laughing her lungs out. This two will get along just fine.

“Hey Mula...Sunday is your birthday...what is your plan?” Rotshi says.

“I haven’t thought of any plans.”

“Cool...I will invite your friends, my friends and Ria will invite her friends and we will all have a goooooood time.”

“I don’t have no friends except Zoleka.” Ria says. I can’t wait to meet this Zoleka friend she speaks highly of.

“Then I will invite a few of my friends and we will have a braai at your house Mula.”

Where do I get the guts to say No to a birthday celebrations with friends and my Ria? Every year is the same, braai with family and friends. At least this year I will share it with a woman I would like to spend my life with.

We have been watching TV for hours I ended up ordering two boxes of pizza. I am sitting on a couch with Ria resting her head on my lap. I don’t know how we got here but I love it. I am only disturbed by a phone call. It is a private number so I answer. It could be a patient or the hospital admitting one of my patients.

“Hello.” I say while walking to the kitchen.

“Hi Mula.” The voice at the end of the line says. I should have ignored this call.

“Hey Luvhengo...how are you?” I ask and she breaks into a heart piercing cry.
“What is wrong?”

“I need you...I need you right now Mula.”

“What is going on?”

“I am having cramps and I have been vomiting all day...I don’t know what is wrong with me.”

“What did you have for supper?” I ask.

“I haven’t eaten anything...I cannot take anything in...please help me Mula.”

“Uhm...I was busy with something right now.” I say, hoping she would understand. I stand in the middle of the kitchen with my hand on my forehead. I can hear she is truly in pain but I rather be here with my woman resting her head on my lap than rushing to nurse my so-called fiancée.

“So you rather be busy for your own fiancée?” she raises her voice. I can just imagine her sitting straight to address me.

“No...no...I am just in a middle of something and I can't just leave.”

“Mulatshawe...don't let me remind you that you knelt in front of my family and yours and asked me to marry you...don't treat me like some piece of rubbish...I am your fiancée...and I won't be calling you if I wasn't sick.”

“Uhm...come on Luvhengo...well...take some pain killers so long and I will see what I can do.”

“See what you can do? You better be here or else I will be calling your father to come take care of me instead.”

Okay she just messed it up. I do not do well with threats from anyone who doesn't pay my bills. My father has me on his leash because of my practice but anyone else's threat is just a waste of time.

“Take some painkillers and rest.” I say before hanging up.

I rather be here than nursing my father's princess. I am making progress with Ria and I will not be messing the opportunity for anything.

INSERT 13

RIALIVHUWA

It is just so humiliating to have thought Rotshi is Mula's girlfriend. Even though it was eating me up, it's a good thing I kept it to myself because I would have looked like a jealous type. I understand why she is always in his mouth. She is one funny human being. Since the day she arrived, she has introduced me to all her friends as her sister-in-law to be. I pretty like the idea.

Before Rotshi came back, I have been spending time with Mula and I am truly falling in love with him. He is just so humbly and sweet it even scares me. He took me out a few times but I am not willing to go to a fancy restaurant with him. I don't want to be stressed about what to do and what to wear.

I managed to register a course in Business Management. I was so excited until some guy asked whose business I want to manage. I told him I am preparing myself for the businesses I will own soon. It did bother me but not so much because I know I am destined for greater things.

My friend Zoleka is back from home. Rotshi drove me to her flat but insisted I move back only after Mula's birthday braai. I am super excited that she didn't let the room to anyone else so I have my room back.

"Do you think this is tight?" Rotshi asks, bringing me back from my thoughts.

"Just a little...why not get one size up?"

"Whaaattt? And wear size 36?" she shouts while observing herself on the mirror. "It's either 34 or no dress."

We are shopping for clothes to wear on her brother's birthday, a braai with friends, imagine! She insisted Mula gives us money to get clothes. I bought myself just a simple light blue skinny high waist jean and a pink blouse. I love the back of my blouse. Rotshi says it is flirtatious and Mula would love it. It's a good thing Mula would like it, but I just fell in love with it. It has nothing to do with flirting or seducing him.

"Okay then get a t-shirt dress that won't hug your body." I say while she tries to stretch the dress.

"Then I will have to wear a sneaker? I have to be on my sandal or something a little sexy...there is this Mula's friend that I like a lot...and he can't see me on sneakers yet." she says and I roll my eyes. This is what I meant when I say I am not ready to go on a formal date with Mula. This pressure right here is what I am not looking forward to.

“Okay let’s go shop around for the perfect dress then.” I say and she goes back to the fitting room.

We walked the whole of Menlyn mall and Woodlands Boulevard until she got herself a beautiful dress that shows off her perfect body. We also bought all things for the braai excluding the meat. I don’t know how much we spent, but Rotshi insisted that we get everything we need for the party.

Mula is in shorts when we got to his apartment. He is watching soccer with some guy so I greet and hurry to the kitchen while Rotshi goes to put our bags and clothes away. After a little while Mula walks into the kitchen with some of the grocery shopping bags.

“Hey...how’s you.” He says and I smile. He looks so handsome in shorts and a vest.

“I am good.”

“Did you get something to wear for later?”

“Ofcourse.”

“Okay Joseph and I are going to get the meat and drinks...what are you drinking tonight?”

“I am not...uhm drinking anything...I will have juice.”

“Okay, but if you need wine I have this perfect bottle for you...Saronsberg Shiraz...best thing ever.” He says pulling a bottle from the cupboard.

“Okay, I will have a glass if I ever need it.” I say and he places the bottle back in the cupboard.

He leaves and Rotshi comes to join me in the kitchen. We have about four hours to get everything ready and ourselves ready aswell.

“How many salads are we making?” I ask while taking things out of the shopping bags. We are hosting fifteen to twenty guests.

“Let’s just make three...the chakalaka...one of those fancy potato salads and a greek salad...that’s enough. Phela this is not a restaurant.”

“Should we cook pap?” I ask and she raises her eyebrow. “Can you cook pap for twenty people...haaa never! Mula ordered pap from some tshisa nyama.”

“Well...I was going to cook two pots.”

“You will make a good makoti.”

We did all the salads and place the garlic buttered bread on the baking tray. We will bake for ten minutes before we start serving.

Mula and his friend are back with the meat. It's a good thing it is already marinated so they just need to get the fire started.

"Let's go get ready before the guests arrive." Rotshi pulls my hand and I follow her to the guest bedroom. "Go shower in Mula's room so we don't take too much time."

"No Rotshi...you go to his room."

"Why? You guys haven't? You know?" she folds her arms. She really jumped into conclusion. Mula and I are not yet dating. She has told the whole world I am his wife-to-be. We got ready as fast as we could. I don't know what happened to the four hours we had earlier. People are already walking in and we haven't prepared the welcome drinks.

I put on my cute little blouse, my jean and silver sandals. Good thing my afro doesn't need much work now since I washed and combed it in the morning. I put a little make-up and then sit on the bed.

"The guests are walking in...please go help Mula so long." She says and my heart skips a beat. I can't believe she is throwing me into the lion's den just like that. She is not close to be done because she invested her time on curling her weave.

I can hear people talking from afar. I open the door and hurry to the kitchen. There are three ladies sitting by the kitchen counter.

"Good evening." I greet and walk to the corner of the room to work on the drinks. I know I am late with the drinks, but I can still give those who are not drinking anything yet.

I place all the champagne glasses I could find in the cupboard. I think it is just eight. That is enough because the focus is on the ladies.

"You know this Mulatshawe name sounds soooo familiar..." A lady with a long straight weave says to her friends.

"Familiar? He is the only Mulatshawe I know...and I know quite a lot of people." The other one says with a laugh.

"What is it you said he does?"

"He is a doctor...he owns the practise with my husband." She says.

"I know this name yazi...but I can't recall from where?"

"Maybe from magazines and all...him and Vuyo do get featured in articles now and then."

"Well...maybe I will remember...but his name rings a bell." The long haired one says and sips from her glass of wine.

I pour the champagne on the glasses and throws in some strawberries. I place them all on a tray I could find from the drawer. The girl with the long weave is keeping her eyes on me. She is fascinated by what I am doing.

"I bet you guys are sorted with the drinks?" I ask and they all raise their glasses of whatever they are drinking. I leave the kitchen to the garden where everyone is seated. I spot four ladies without drinks and I walk to them to give them each a glass. Mula has his eyes on me the whole time I am in the garden. He is busy conversing with his friends but his eyes are on me. I blame it on this shirt. After handing the drinks out, I hurry to the kitchen to hide. I am a little shy and Rotshi is taking her time getting ready.

"Excuse me...what do you do?" the lady with the long straight weave asks the moment I walk in the kitchen.

"Uhm...me? I am part-time student."

"But how did you learn to carry drinks like that?"

"Oh...I am a waitress...well, used to be a waitress coz I don't have a job now."

"Interesting...my name is Lufuno and I own a catering company that tenders for events...I am looking for a few ladies to waitress for me in two weeks' time."

"What is happening in two weeks' time?"

"A friend of mine is opening a boutique in Menlyn and my company will be serving there...if you are interested I can put you in."

"Sure...please I would love to."

"Take my card and call me tomorrow...I can even score you other events during the weekend...you can make pretty good money." She says while handing me a business card.

"Thank you." I glance at the business card. Her business is Lufuno Love Caters. I think this could be better than working in a restaurant because I will work mostly on weekends and study during the week.

Rotshi only shows up now that I am done serving the drinks. I have one glass on me and one waiting for her.

"Come...lets go sit outside." She says while picking the drink from the kitchen counter. The other ladies also follows us to the garden. There are a few empty camp chairs outside.

The music is playing inside the house so we can only hear it softly from outside. Blame it on staying in estates. Everyone is laughing at the jokes that Mula is sharing is with his friends. I didn't know he was this loud.

“Mula when are you going to introduce Ria to your friends?” Rotshi shouts from her seat.

“Oh my God, Rotshi!” I whisper to her.

“Oh yes...Ria...come please.” He says and I cover my eyes. I was not ready for this. He walks to my seat and helps me stand.

“Please let me sit?” I whisper and he ignores me.

“Okay guys...please meet the woman who stole my heart...Rialivhuwa...you guys know it well...I have never loved a woman enough to introduce her to you guys...so guys, meet the woman who will steal me from you guys.”

“HMMMMMMMM...” that is all I could hear from the crowd. Some guys are saying somethings but I cannot hear them properly. I don't believe he is doing this.

“Also tell them you met in the toilet.” Rotshi says and everybody laughs.

“Yes we met in the toilet of a restaurant where she worked...and from that day I knew I needed her in my life.” He says and I smile.

“Speech...speech...speech from madam.” The guys scream.

“Uhm...well...happy birthday to him.” I shyly say and quickly sit down. What do they expect me to say after meeting them for the first time?

“Okay babe...that is Vuyo, my partner...Joseph my uncle...Thabo, Thato and James over there...those three guys by the braai stand are Dumisani, Paul and Innocent. The ladies are their partners and some are their friends.” He introduces his friends to me. I heard the names but I will forget them after five minutes. I can't believe this is happening. He just introduced me to all his friends and his uncle. When did I become his woman?

Everyone is laughing and drinking. I remember the bottle of wine that Mula showed me earlier so I disappear to the kitchen. I take one glass from the cupboard and also reach for the bottle of wine.

“Need help with that?” Mula asks while walking to where I am standing.

“Maybe opening it, yes.” I say and put the bottle on the table. I watch as Mula opens the drawers to get a cork crew. After opening it, he pours into a glass and hands the glass to me.

“Thank you.” I receive the glass and take a sip. “Hmmm...perfect wine.”

“I told you so.” He picks a wine closure from the drawer and closes the bottle.

“Why did you introduce me as your woman?” I ask and he turns to me. I take another sip as he walks closer to me.

“Are you not my woman?” he asks while getting closer. He looks into my eyes and ask the same question again.

“I am.” I whisper and he responds with a passionate kiss. I welcomed the kiss whole heartedly.

“I thought so.” He says and slowly wipes my lower lip with his thumb.

This is it! My heart is won by Mulatshawe Ratshali.

INSERT 14

MULATSHAWE

I think I am now old enough to know what I want, I mean love life wise. I am content with the thought that I will spend the rest of my life with Ria. Pity I have a controlling father who has me on his leash. He is the only person standing in the way of my happiness. If only he knew how much he is making my life so miserable. I just need a good plan to get myself out of this marriage arrangements and spend my life with the woman who stole my heart.

It feels good to know Ria is officially my woman. I can now hold her hands and hug her in public. I can steal a kiss now and then when she is not aware. I will be able to watch her sleep. I am just scared that she might walk away if she ever finds out about the royalty part. She knows very well that if I am royalty, there is a woman set aside for me.

I can't lose her.

I have never been with someone who keeps me up all night, just thinking of her. We have never been intimate but the connection I feel with her is remarkable. I just want to make her happy because she easily makes me happy. She is the only woman who has me thinking about the future. The future where I have adorable kids. She is the only woman I have introduced to my friends because I am sure of her.

The way I have neglected Luvhengo, I am so sure I will be getting a call the soonest from the royal house. A call to remind me of the duties I need to play as her fiancé. I haven't seen her since I dropped her at her gigantic house the day we came back from Venda. I haven't called her or even invite her for dinner. I am just not about that life.

I get to the medical centre and park in my designated parking lot. Vuyo and I always use the back door when we get to the office because the patients are always here before us. I get to my office, take off my jacket and hang it on the stand behind the door.

"Hello Rossie...is Dr Dube in yet?" I say just when she picks the phone.

"Yes...he is in already."

"Alright, means he hasn't logged on his landline...Rossie please call Mr Morris, set up a meeting with him for tonight at 07 o'clock and tell Dr Dube about it."

"Meeting with Mr Morris at seven o'clock...where is the venue?"

“Uhm...make it anywhere here in Parkview...make it Woolworths Cafe...it won't take long.”

“Alright noted, Sir.”

“Please bring my first patient after 10 minutes.” I say and hang-up.

Mr Morris is our Financial Manager and he has to look at some numbers for me. I am tired of living like my father's servant.

I quickly send him an email on what information I need him to prepare for us. If I want to live happily with Ria, I have to do this.

Things are back to normal around here and we have quite a lot of patients. I haven't spoken to Vuyo all day so he will just have to find out what this meeting is about when we leave here.

My last patient left my office after 5h30 so I am packing my bags while I wait for Vuyo to come by my office. He knocks on my door and walks in minutes later.

“Dude...these patients were many.”

“More sick people...more money coming in.” he says with a giggle.

“So what's up with this meeting with Morris? I was so tied up I couldn't come earlier.”

“I asked Morris to look at our books to check if we can afford to pay back my father?”

“Pay back your father? What's going on?”

“I think my father gave me the capital money so he could control me...now he wants me to do things I don't want in the name of this medical practise.”

“Dude...you can't be serious.” He rubs his forehead and I know he is starting to get frustrated from all this. My father played a huge part in getting this practise. We used his capital and if I am fighting with him, he is automatically fighting with Vuyo.

“What does he have on you?”

“Family issues man...things I can't discuss.” I say while picking my blazer from the stand and putting it on. Morris is already waiting for us so Vuyo and I rush to Parkview.

“I thought the doctors were not going to show up.” He says as we grab the chairs.

“Sorry...things are a little hectic at work.” I say.

We order the drinks while Morris send us the reports on our emails. I am so anxious to hear how things are looking.

"How are things looking?" I ask while browsing the report from my iPad.

"Well if I may rephrase your question...you want to see if you will be able to pay back the capital ASAP, am I correct?"

"Yes?" I say.

"Things are going well...the operations and everything...but if you are to take R800 000 from your finances right now, things won't go as smooth as they are supposed to. You might need to cut down on operations, you might need to decrease your salaries...you might have to compromise on some of your services...so it's too early to tell. We are looking at a year and half to two years to comfortably cough out that much money without interfering with your service...and remember you are stationed at one of the richest parts of Pretoria so you can't easily compromise on your services...the hospital might have to let you go." Morris says and he has me discouraged.

"What are the options...maybe move the practise to town or something...work on something."

"Hooooo...move the practise to town when we have the best clientele this side? We can't start from scratch again."

"Hold on man...let's look at all options...I need us to pay that old man his money."

"You are not in this alone and you haven't even given me a valid reason why we need to pay him back...he hasn't demanded the money back...what is wrong with you? And don't tell me it is personal because you are messing with my career." Vuyo says.

"Man...we need to pay this guy his money...he is making my life a living hell."

"Hooowwww?"

"He is dictating my life and I am tired of that." I say.

"You are not talking...your father has not called me or our banker demanding his money."

"Okay I am a prince...I have always kept it to myself...I am a prince and they have arranged a marriage with some princess...I don't want to get married...so if I pay back his money, he will be able to disown me in peace."

"You are kidding me." He laughs.

"I am dead serious."

"You are arranged to marry the girl you introduced yesterday?" he asks. Morris is pretending to be busy on his laptop. I can see he is uncomfortable to ask questions or engage in this conversation.

"Ria is the one I want to be with...I am engaged to someone else...please don't tell anyone." I say.

"So you can't wait for this two year when we are financially able?"

"I can't risk losing Ria...if I don't do this I might just mess up things with her." I say and he burst into laughter.

"So this is about a girl you just met? You have got to be kidding me...Mula, you are not going to risk losing this practise because of a girl you just met...she is just a young girl who can change her mind at any second of the day."

"You don't know her and you have no right to judge her."

"I am not judging her...I am reminding you about life." He says. "What are you going to do when she leaves you? When she sees better men and better things out there? Tell me."

The thought of Ria leaving me for a better man is making me sick. I don't want to ignore what he is saying because there are possibilities that I am not the best man in the world. What if she leaves me? I have never thought of such. She is so perfect for me.

Damn! Why must love be so complicated?

"Vuyo...I want to do this...my heart wants to do this and for the first time can I follow my heart and can you support me?"

"Support you to destroy my career because of a young girl...you have got to be joking." He says.

"Look...I need to do this."

"Hell No...I worked my butt off for this business to be the way it is...we will pay back the capital money after two years if we can afford...if you can't wait for that two years then it is your problem. Your father gave us 10 years to get ourselves on the feet so I am not going to have you mess up everything because of your messed up love life." He stands from the seat. "Dare take any financial decisions without me and I will sue you for wasting my time...excuse me, I have a family to get home to."

I watch as Vuyo storms out of the restaurant.

"Can I personally afford to pay out the R800 000?" I ask Morris who is resting his back on the chair.

“With the mortgage bond of the current house and the one you are building in Olympus and your X6 and the risk of running a business? You might be putting yourself in some dangerous pressure.”

“Oh man!”

“Tell me...how long you have been dating this lady?” he ask and I raise my eyebrow.

“It’s still new.”

“Dr Dube is right. I don’t think it is wise to complicate things for someone you just met...I have been married twice, I know what I am talking about.”

“Can he really sue me if I make the decision alone?”

“Man, I respect this woman.” He laughs. “Yes he can sue you and he can easily win the case.”

Oh God, my Ria, how are we going to do this?

Morris leaves me sitting alone. I cannot believe I am at a dead end.

I am not going to lose Ria so I am going to play the commoner until I can pay back my father his money. Call it selfish but I am not going to risk losing her.

My phone beeps and I smile thinking it might be my woman. We haven’t chat since lunch. I reach for it from the table to open an SMS from my “other” woman.

“Babe I am launching a new boutique on the 20th. Save the date. Please dress accordingly. Your parents and my parents are going to be there. Mwhaaaa.” the damn SMS from my so-called fiancé.

INSERT 15

LUVHENGO

The water just turned cold and it is now piercing through my skin. This has turned into my life since the past week. I am failing to move on from this chapter. I hate myself for being in this situation.

I hear the bathroom door opening and footsteps towards the shower door. I know it is AB and I hate him with every vein in my body. He opens the shower door, turns the water off and throws a towel to me.

“I don’t know how long we are going to go through this,” he says and sighs afterwards. “The event planner has been calling you all morning...she wants to see the boutique so she knows what she is working with.”

I stand from the corner of the shower and cover myself with the towel.

“Babe I am sorry we have to go through this...the baby was just going to complicate everything...we are so close to our goal and we mustn’t allow anything to distract us.”

I am trying not to break-down in front of him. I don’t want to show him how broken this has made me. He came back one day with pills that he gave me to take. He sat with me all night and watch me weep until I took them. I knew it was the abortion pills. Hours later I was in an excruciating pain and I knew at that moment my baby was dying. I hate him right now.

He stands in front of me with no emotions. I stare at him until he moves away from the door and I step out of the shower.

“Please chin up and go see the event planner...and also go shopping with your friend...you will feel much better.” He says and walks out of the bathroom.

Abednego is so merciless. He is pitiless and it doesn’t bother him a bit. He even sleeps well at night. I met him seven years ago when I was doing fashion design in Johannesburg. I was 21 years at the time. Our college hosted a fashion show and all third year students designed and made garments. I remember I designed a long black sexy leather dress. I won first place and AB came to congratulate me after the show. He was one of the sponsors of the fashion show. We went out for drinks and after a few months of going out he started giving me the world. He had me hooked and everything was beautiful until I learnt about his illegal dealings. Now I have no

choice but to help him front the illegal business by running expensive salons and boutiques. All this is in my name and his; I am too deep there is no running away.

I have been trying to call Mula all week and it hurts me that he doesn't take me serious. He is the first guy to make me feel unwanted. I have been thinking a lot about him and that he might be my help out of this life. Maybe I can start over with him and genuinely take my position as his princess. I want to be loved and be respected.

Lufuno agreed to drive with me to Pretoria to meet the event planner. Just like AB said, I could go shopping afterwards maybe I will feel a little better.

I pick my denim jumpsuit with caramel heels and let my hair down. I drive down to Centurion to pick Lufuno and then head straight to Pretoria.

"Are you serious this place is owned by J-Something?" I ask as we grab a seat in this beautiful restaurant. It is my first time in this new part of Pretoria. This part looks more like a mini Sandton. I am not so familiar Pretoria but I think I will easily fall in love with it.

"Why would I lie to you?" Lufuno says. "He sometimes show up and greet the customers."

We have picked the seat by the balcony with the view of Menlyn Maine Central Square.

"This place is really beautiful...I love it."

"I bet you will spend your time around here after the boutique is up and running."

"I wouldn't mind."

The waiter brings our drinks and we place the order for food. The event planner girl will place hers later.

"Have you decided on the menu?" Lufuno asks with her iPad in front of her.

"I was thinking something every simple...finger lunch...yes those healthy appetizers you once made for my birthday. My guest list is of 30 people so make all sorts of those enough for forty people...and hey make sure you include the sweet potato tots and those smoked salmon cucumber cups...those were my favourite. So you will make a station for those and the other station should have all sorts of meat, right...then your waitresses will serve the drinks so make sure we have all kinds of drinks. You can engage with the planner to have a list of drinks we are going to be

serving on the food stations." I say while Lufuno takes notes. I love all things elegant and I trust her to bring the best.

My phone vibrates on the table and Lufuno glance at it. It is Abednego calling and I am not going to be talking to him right now. I take the phone and shove it into my handbag angrily.

"Hey is everything alright?" she asks and I nod my head. Okay tears are starting to form in my eyes from hearing that question. No one knows what I am going through and AB care less enough to ask me how I am doing after he made me do such an unhuman thing.

"I am alright."

"Then why are you crying? What did he do?" she asks while placing her iPad on the table.

"Nothing Lufuno...we are just fighting."

"Is it about the new guy?" she asks and I get an opportunity to lie.

"Yes...I told him and we fought about it."

"What were you expecting Luvhengo? The guy lived his life providing for you...he won't be happy to hear about the new guy."

"I know."

The planner arrives with a file on her hand. She is a new girl but from the same events company I use for my parties. She orders her drink while we finish with our lunch.

"I spoke to Mr Abednego a few days ago and he kind of highlight me about how the boutique kinda looks like. So I worked around with the space," she says while placing a file in front on me. "You can page through the sketches and we can work around which one is best."

"Okay...what is going around here?" I ask showing her one of her sketches.

"There I was thinking that we place some fancy clothes rail in each corner of the room displaying each of the attires from your four ranges. When the clothes are at the corner of the room, there could be enough space for people to mingle and eat...and also in the middle we can have boards of professional photos of models wearing the clothes. I wanted us to work with something different and not your typical boutique opening with clothes all over the room like in a store."

“Okay I like that...and we can keep the clothes away because there is food...I don't want people staining my clothes...I love that.”

“So the guest list?”

“I will have my PA send you the names of the clients I want to invite...”

“Alright and anyone from the family members?”

“First is Mulatshawe...my fiancé.” I say and Lufuno chokes on her drink.

“Are you alright?”

“Mulatshawe? What does he do again?” she asks.

“I told you he is a doctor...he owns some medical practise with a friend.” I say and she taps the planner girl and ask her to excuse us.

“I met him on Sunday...there was a braai at his house...it was his birthday and he introduced some chick as his girlfriend.”

“Whaattt?”

“Yes...I swear it is him...it is not every day that there are two Mulatshawes who own a medical practise.”

“Pay for my bill.” I say while standing from my seat. “Take an Uber home.”

I do not do well with being made a fool. I know it is rich coming from me but I am not going to let any woman mess with my fiancé.

I get to the parking lot and dig for my phone to search for his name on google and where I could get his practise. It is 14h50 so I am quite sure he is at work. I punch the location of the medical practise on my Maps app and drive there. It is only 10 minutes away from the Times Square.

“Good afternoon...can I help you?” the reception girl asks. “Are you here to see Dr Dube or Dr Ratshali?”

“Dr Ratshali.” I say.

“Is it your first time here ma'am?”

“Look...this is personal. I am not here for consultation.”

“Can I get your name? I can go ask him if he is free to see you.”

"I am his damn fiancé so he is damn free to see me." I hiss so that the patients do not hear me.

She picks her phone and tries to dial his office.

"Uhm...his phone is off for now. Can you wait while I go ask him?" she says while standing up from her seat. She walks to the passage and I follow her.

"Doc your fiancé is at the reception..."

"I am here." I walk past her and inside the office. Mulatshawe is standing from his chair.

"Rossie its okay...thanks." He says and the Rossie girl walks away, closing the door behind her.

"What are you doing here?" he asks while folding his formal white shirt.

"So you host your birthday party and not invite your fiancée?"

"Uhm...who told you?"

"Oh so you thought I wouldn't find out about it and that you introduced some girl as your girlfriend?" by now I am shouting. I feel like a fool right now.

"Stop yelling in my office." He gives me an unfriendly look.

"You thought I wouldn't find out? Why are you disrespecting me and my family like this?" I try to lower my voice but I am struggling.

"It is not what you think." He says. What a lame excuse.

"Then what is it?"

"She...she is just someone I was dating before the engagement and...and I am yet to break up with her." He says and I feel better. I have Abednego on the side and I kinda understand now. I thought she is a new girl in his life. I was going to show her hell.

"But why didn't you invite me? I don't even know where you stay...I feel like you don't care about me...plus I have been calling you all week."

"Well...I didn't want to complicate things." He says and there is a twinkle in his eye. It seems like he really likes this girl. I think she is going to be a problem.

“Here is a phone...call her now and break-up with her before this gets to my and your family.” I pick his phone from the table and hand it to him while I grab a seat in front of him.

INSERT 16

MULATSHAWE

She does it again. She is throwing threats at me like I would jump. This is the woman my family wants me to marry? The woman who disrespects someone she doesn't even know? This is not going to work.

I grab a chair and work on my laptop as she continues to fume in front of me.

"I don't take threats too well...I thought you got that the day you threatened me to drop everything because you were sick." I say after a little while. She is waiting my time while I have patients to see.

"How are we going to do this because I am not going to allow you to disrespect my family?"

"Didn't you know that it was not going to be a walk in the park? Getting engaged to someone who doesn't love you?"

"You shouldn't have made my family a fool if you were going to toy with my feelings."

"I am not toying with your feelings...I am just going through somethings with someone I love...someone I didn't force to be in my life." I say and watch as she starts to tremble and then let out an agony cry.

Oh Lord, so much drama.

"You are so heartless Mula...you led me and my family on...and now you are able to hurt me with such words?" she is saying with her make-up melting on her face from all the tears. This woman!

"Come on...I am at work here and I don't need this drama right now."

I am starting to feel cruel just like my father. I have never had a woman weep in front of me. She is weeping in front of me and I do not know what else to do. I don't want to embarrass myself in my workplace. My patients are waiting for me in the other room and I am pretty sure they can hear a bit of her cries.

"Please man...I don't need this right now." I say and she weep some more. "Okay look...let me take you to my house and we will have a chat after I finish with my patients."

She nods her head and start cleaning her face with a wet wipe. I can literally see her make-up on a piece of wipe. God what did I do to deserve this?

I let Rossie know I will be back in 20 minutes tops. I use the back door to lead Luvhengo out of my office. I had her follow me with her car to my place.

"I will be back around six...we will have a chat and you can then go home." I say and she nods. I left her in the house and hurry back to work.

I am observing all my patients with so much shame. I don't even know if they heard anything that was happening here in my office. I am not going to even ask Rossie if she heard anything, she might end up disrespecting me.

My last patient leaves my office just minutes after 6 and I couldn't wait to get home. I rush home to be invited by an aroma of food.

"I thought I should cook supper." she says while standing in the corner of the kitchen with a bottle of water in her hand. She is wearing my boxers, my white casual shirt and sleepers. She looks pretty sexy but she has got to be kidding me.

"What are you doing in my clothes?" I ask and she walks to me. She has washed her face and there is no trace of make-up. She can't be serious.

"I wanted to be comfortable so I took a shower." She says. "Come sit, let's have supper."

"No I am fine. I had a late lunch."

"You think I will poison you?" she chuckles.

You know I had a long day and I am not up for drama. My woman could be waiting for my phone call right now.

"I have to go somewhere...can we talk so that you can be on your way home?" I say.

"I decided to stay for the weekend. I have a meeting tomorrow evening here in Pretoria so I will just leave on Sunday morning."

"You have got to be kidding me." I say and laugh. How does she decide to stay in my house without my invitation? Her cell phone rings from the kitchen counter so she hurries there and pick it up with a smile on her face.

"Good evening Baba...oh we are alright...we just had a little hiccup but we resolved it...he is standing right in front of me, he just came back from work...yes I am visiting his house this weekend...Yes your invitation for the opening is ready and I

have a perfect dress for Mma for the day...no worries...please send my regards to my mother-in-law...alright good night."

Did she just have a conversation with my father?

I pick my bag and leave for my bedroom. I have no energy to entertain her. My phone beeps and it is an inbox.

"I am so glad you are doing the right thing Mulatshawe Ratshali. Make her happy and things will just go smooth. I am very proud of you son." an SMS from my father.

I take off my clothes and walk into a shower. I have no plan right now. I have never been so stuck in my life. A year ago my life was just perfect.

After shower I put on my PJs and throw myself on the bed and dial my woman.

"Hey love...I was just thinking about you." she says happily.

"What were you thinking about?" this woman makes me happy.

"How I can't wait for tomorrow night...the moonlight romantic spa with my one and only."

Oh flip! I forgot I booked a moonlight spa for us at Mangwanani in Hartees. I was going to pick her up tomorrow afternoon after work. But how am I going to do this with an intruder?

"Uhm babe...we will have to reschedule."

"Huh? Whhhhyyy?"

"Well something came up...I am so sorry and I will make it up to you."

"Really Mula? When were you going to tell me? I was so super excited." She sadly says.

"Something just came up and I have to attend to it. I will postpone it to next weekend."

"I told you I scored a job at Lufuno Love Catering...they are catering for some event on Saturday."

"Okay then I'll try to knock off early one day during the week."

"Alright you will let me know." She says. I could hear disappointment in her voice. After the call I throw my phone on the side and rest my head on the pillow. I am so exhausted.

“Hey Mula.” Luvhengo says and jumps on the bed next to me. I smell her expensive perfume first before she landed beside me.

“What are you doing here?” I say jumping out of bed.

“You don’t trust yourself with me?” she says while sitting straight. I could not help but glance at her cleavage that is showing. She has taken off the shirt and she only has a sexy black bra on.

“Please...uhm put on a shirt.”

“Oh yes...I came to pick a new shirt...that other one is wet.”

I walk to the closet and then throw a shirt to her. Oh God, I can’t help but glance at her smooth dark body. I haven’t been in bed with a woman for months and she is right here tempting me.

“Relax Mula...I am not here to seduce you. You know we can only make love after the wedding...unless we decide otherwise down the line.”

“Uhm...I will be in the living room.” I say and walk out before betraying Ria even more.

The TV is playing in front of me but I am not focusing. Luvhengo is messing with my head right now and I don’t want to fall in this trap. If I sleep with this woman I will just complicate everything.

No, I can’t stand this.

I quickly rush to my bedroom, change into shorts and a vest. I pick my car keys and pace out of the house. My road leads to Sunnyside to see Ria. Damn that woman woken up something in me.

“Babe I am outside.” I say to Ria.

“Outside? My flat?”

“Yes. I am here” I say and she hangs up.

Minutes later I see her walking to the car in track pants and a tank top. She has her hair tightly tied into a thick bun. She looks sexier.

“Mula...what are you doing here?” she says while receiving my hug.

“I thought I could see you...I missed you.” I say.

“Okay come on in.” she says and lead the way to her flat. Her friend is not in the flat so I stride freely to her room. I could tell I disturbed her from watching a movie. The bed is not made and there is a laptop on top of it. She closes the door and I walk up to her. I attack her with a kiss and she kisses me back. She only stops me now that I am unable to let go of her.

“Mula, what is wrong with you?” she ask with her eyes popped out. I had promised not to rush her into doing something she doesn’t want but right now I need her. I promised to wait for her and I know I look like a jerk right now.

“Uhm...babe I am struggling to...uhm...please.” I plead.

“We spoke about it...I am not ready yet.” she quietly says.

“Please babe...I want you.”

“But we spoke about this.” she says and my phone starts vibrating and ringing in my pocket. “Your phone is ringing.”

“Don’t worry about it.” I say trying to kiss her again.

“Your phone is ringing Mula.” She repeats. I don’t want to take it out because if it is Luvhengo I will not be able to answer. I will raise doubts when I ignore the call after seeing the caller-ID.

Did I scare her? She is standing far from me with her arms crossed and I am standing here with a phone ringing loudly in my pocket.

INSERT 17

RIALIVHUWA

It is the first time I see Mula looking helpless. He is standing in front of me with his phone yet ringing in his pocket. It seems like he is avoiding to answer it and that is disturbing me. What could he be hiding? I don't want to judge him too quick but it is the little signs that can save one from a heartache. I am not ready to be hurt once again. I don't have the strength, really.

Whoever is calling really needs his attention and Mula is not giving them any. The phone stops ringing and Mula is still standing in the same spot.

"I am not going to ask you who was calling you." I calmly say. I mean, it could be anyone calling him and I am not ready to know who it is. Yes I am damn curious, but I am going to let this pass.

"Well...its...not really important." He says.

"Do you want to tell me what is going on?"

"I have nothing to tell...why?"

"Because you are acting weird and you just ignored your phone which rang five times." I say. He is lucky this is new love because I am not yet comfortable to pull a girlfriend stunt.

"Uhm, sorry about earlier...I don't know what got into me." He says and moves to sit on the bed. I am still standing at the corner of the room with my arms folded to my chest.

"Mula...I am asking for a favour."

"Anything, babe."

"If you are making me a side chick...please just let me out of this relationship because I don't think I am strong enough to compete with anyone. Just don't crush the little confidence I have left in me."

"Babe...how can you say that?"

"Don't ask me how can I say this...you are the one who is acting weird here. First you cancel a date with me which we were super excited about...for what excuse? For soommeethiinngg you can't even explain...and the next thing you are standing here in front of me ignoring your phone. You never ignore your phone Mula because that

could be the hospital calling you...you have never ignored your phone in front of me." I say with my trembling voice.

"Babe please...calm down."

"You don't understand what I went through...I am not strong enough to be fooled around with...it has happened once and I don't wish for it to happen."

"Uhm babe...how can you think of such?"

"You are a damn doctor Mulatshawe...and you are well off...why were you single anyway because you are supposed to be married?"

"Because I was waiting for someone like you."

"I want to believe that...I really want to believe you because my heart fell for you...I deeply fell in love with you but I can't help to think I might be your toy girl...I am just a waitress...a student...what do you want from me?" I say.

"I wouldn't have introduced you to my sister, my uncle and my friends."

"That really means nothing."

"My love...please let go of these thoughts...I am in love with you."

"I know, I see it in your eyes...I am just scared."

"Babe, I won't intentionally hurt you."

"Please just love me enough to respect me...that is all I am asking for."

"Yes...yes babe...I know." He responds and walks to me to give me a warmest hug. He gives the warmest hugs and sweetest kisses.

"I was about to have supper...do you want to join me?"

"I can never say no to your food."

I lead the way to the kitchen and dish the pap and beef I prepared earlier. It is just enough for two so Mula will just have to buy Zoleka a chicken licken meal from downstairs.

He joins me on the two seater couch and dig in his plate. He is really not himself today and I wish he could talk to me. Maybe he is embarrassed about being horny and wanting to sleep with me earlier.

This is really awkward.

"Babe...I am starting with school next week." I say to try bring a new topic.

"That is great. I hope you are excited." He says.

"I am excited things are going well already for me this year...I mean I am also starting with the new job as well."

"So this time you are not waitressing for a restaurant?"

"No...it is going to be events and I am starting with a hot one." I say and he gives me a look that says tell me more. "We are going to be waitressing for a Boutique launch...and our boss already told us to look extra gorgeous because the owner of the boutique is just some goddess who likes everything elegant."

"You say a boutique launch?" he ask and rest his back on the couch. "Where?"

"I think it's called LVN Boutique in Menlyn." I say and I see his face change. "What's wrong?"

"Uhm...nothing I am happy for you." He tries to fake a smile. I don't know him too well yet but he has always been giving me genuine smiles for me to pick this one right here is fake.

"I was thinking...why don't you just stop this waitressing thing and focus on your studies?"

"Why? How am I going to pay rent and pay for the fees if I don't do this?"

"I will take care of you...yes...I will take care of you and all you do is focus on your school."

"No Mula I don't want you to take care of me."

"Why not? You are my woman and I should take care of you."

"Are you embarrassed to let people know that you are dating a waitress?"

"Whaaattt? No. I wouldn't have met you if you were not a waitress...I thought I should just help you out so you can focus on your degree."

"You can spoil me rotten at any day...but let me do this...I don't want to depend on you and let people think I am with you for your money."

"I don't care what people say."

"Then let me do what I have got to do...I promise I will always ask for help when my things don't come together."

“Rialivhuwa, I don’t want you to take this job.”

“Why not? And why do you care so much now? You were happy with me a few days when I told you about the job.” I say and he stands from the couch. He hasn’t finished his food but it seems he is ready to leave.

“Babe I have got to go.” He quietly say.

That was not even our first fight but he looks drained and defeated. He walks around the room and then give me a hug before leaving me sitting on the couch.

I had forgotten that relationships need nurturing. I still have to know and understand his moods. I don’t know why he is worked up about me taking this job. He is my boyfriend but I am not going to depend on him. It’s wrong to think negatively but what if he walks away from my life?

Zoleka walks in minutes later with a box of pizza. Thank God she brought something for herself to eat. She changes into her PJ’s and then joins me in the living room.

“I thought you will be with the new boyfriend.”

“He just left.” I say and sigh.

“Then why are you not glowing or something...you look disappointed.” She says and takes a bite of her pizza.

“He is acting all weird today and I don’t know what to think anymore.” I say.

“Ok, what did he do that is so weird?”

“Remember the moonlight spa I told you we were going to tomorrow evening? He cancelled and he can’t really give me a perfect explanation...and earlier when he was here, his phone rang a thousand times and he never picked it up...he never ignores his phone calls Zoleka.”

“Maybe it was some debt collectors or something.” She says.

“Debt collectors on a Friday night? Please.”

“I think you are scared of being cheated on because of what Joshua did to you and now you calculate every little thing, you know?”

“What could be the explanation of the phone calls?”

“Maybe it was his ex-girlfriend, you know how exes can sniff new relationships! They always want to come back when you are happy. The can sniff happiness.

Joshua will be calling you soon when he smells that you are loved." She says and I laugh.

She might be right. Maybe one of his ex-girlfriends is bothering him. Joshua was in my case for months and months after our break-up so I should just give my man the benefit of the doubt.

"So you were just worried about the phone calls?" she laughs.

"He also wants me to stop waitressing...he says he will take care of me."

"And you find that weird? If Joshua didn't take care of you, it doesn't mean other man won't...the guy is a doctor for God's sake...he can probably afford himself, you and some more people."

"I don't have back-up money Zoleka...what if he leaves me or something and i can't find another job?"

"If he leaves you...your bad." She says and laughs. "But it is not shocking or weird that he wants to take care of you, maybe he is used to doing that so you guys just need to adjust and everything will be fine."

"Don't you have a follow-up dream that can tell me if this going to work or not?" I say and cover my face with a cushion. This is so confusing.

"Nope...but you were so happy in the dream I told you about...just open your heart and allow the poor guy to love you."

Okay, I think I need to relax and stop comparing Mula to Joshua. All I need to do is to open my heart and allow love to take control.

Alright, I will do everything to do this work but I am not quitting my job. Saturday the 20th,I am going to that opening looking all glamorous and sexy for my new job! Maybe I will impress the goddess owner of the Boutique and score a better job there.

INSERT 18

MULATSHAWE

From Ria's flat, I drive straight to the Union building just to clear my head. I park the car and sit on one of those benches they have next to the parking lot.

I have messed up big time.

My heart felt heavy when she told me all the things she said. How do I make things right with her? How can I be the best man for her without hurting her?

Since she came into my life, I am a renewed man. I now have great dreams and wishes for the future. I feel content. And now, I cannot imagine how I am going to continue without her. If ever I lose her, how am I going to move on?

The missed call are indeed from Luvhengo. She was looking for me high and low. She is already acting like a nagging wife.

I am sitting here thinking of a way to resolve this. I have got to stop the selfishness and just tell Ria the truth. Either the truth about the royalty or about Luvhengo, or even both. I think I have got to love her enough to let her go if she cannot stay with me.

Hopefully she stays with me. I have tried paying back my father and it seems impossible. I have tried hiding Luvhengo from Ria but it seems like I will end up hurting the woman I love.

The security personnel are walking around. I guess it time for them to close up the main gate. I get to my car and drive straight home. I am so damn sure I will be welcomed by drama and all the shouting. It is about 21:30 when I arrive home. Luvhengo is curled on the couch but I don't find it remarkable like I did when it was Ria.

"Luvhengo...you can go to bed." I softly shake her.

"Where are you from?" she asks while sitting straight.

"I had to take care of something."

"You went to see her, right?" she insist on talking about this and I am not in the mood.

“Please use the guest room.” I say.

“I am your God-damn fiancée.” She says while standing up.

“Okay use my bedroom then.” I say and leave to the guest room.

I am from the royal family and all my life I have been taught the royal life and I am so aware of it. I am fully aware of my duties and I was just distracted by Rialivhuwa. The same woman has turned my world upside down. I now appreciate the little things in the world. I never thought I would fall in love so bad that I will turn to be so selfish and dishonest.

Luvhengo is angry about me leaving her and going to see Ria. Her eyes were red with anger and right now she could do anything to destroy Ria. Looks like she wants this marriage so bad it concerns me.

If only Ria could stay away from the Boutique launch because I foresee havoc and it is all my fault. If it wasn't for her going, I was going to get a way to dodge it. Now I have to be there to watch over her. Whoever told Luvhengo about Ria can easily point her out from the million people. If Luvhengo's friend is there, then everything is just going to turn bad.

I have been tossing and turning on this bed with no sleep. How did I get here, huh? What happened to the Mula that doesn't care much about no woman?

“Ria, you have turned my world upside down.”

Before coming here to work, I called Ria and told her that our date is still on. I don't care what Luvhengo thinks. I don't like her anyway.

I only have a few patients and by 13h00 I will be out of here.

Vuyo knocks on my door. I sway my eyes to the clock on the wall and it is already 12h30.

“Come in.” I say.

“Oh you still have a patient? I will come back later.”

“Alright no problem.” I say and he closes the door.

"Can't you prescribe something that I can drink and also have my glass of wine?" Mrs Maseko, my patient asks and I laugh.

"That is not very wise ma'am, you cannot mix the two," I say while writing her prescription. "You should finish the course...I am sure by the end of the week you will be done."

"Thank you Doctor, I hope I won't be seeing you anytime soon." She says while standing up.

"If you put down wine and take your antibiotics then you won't be seeing me anytime soon."

After a few minutes, Vuyo knocks on my door once and comes in.

"Hey I have to see you before I leave."

"What's up?" We haven't sat down again since the meeting with Morris. We are both just ignoring it like it never happened. It is better that way.

"Dude, my wife got an invitation to some Boutique launch on the 20th." He says and I sigh. "I heard it is your fiancée's."

"Who invited her?" This is just a small world, isn't it?

"Her cousin Lufuno is friends with your fiancée."

"The cousin who was in my party." This woman was introduced to me by Vuyo's wife.

"Yes she was there," he says. "So, vele, you are getting married soon and you have a chick on the side?"

"Stay out of my business Vuyo."

"My wife was just making noise about it so I thought I should inform you...people know." He says.

"This is just so complicated." I say rubbing my forehead.

"The fiancée and the side chick?"

"Don't call her that."

"But that is what you are making her." This doesn't sit well on me. I am degrading the poor girl.

"Well...thanks for warning me my guy."

I no longer have a choice but to tell Rialivhuwa about this. The next thing this will get to the social media and everywhere.

I pick Ria from her flat and drive us to Hartbeespoort. We start by French Toast to grab lunch and chill while we wait to go to the spa in the evening. The waiter takes our orders and brings the food minutes later.

Ria is wearing a maxi summer dress and she look beautiful with her afro bun.

“Do you think we should lock our love and throw away the key?” she says while pointing at the love bridge with all the million padlocks attached to it.

“Babe we need to talk.” I say.

“Are you leaving me?” she asks.

“Whaaatt? Ria. No”

“Then it can wait.” She says and takes a sip of her juice. “I just want to enjoy this day with you. No stress...no arguments...just fun. Then we can talk when you drop me home.” She says and I agree with her. This right here is perfect for me. Just a simple life with my woman.

“So when are we driving to Venda to visit? It will be our first long trip together.” I ask.

“Not anytime soon,” she says. “I fought with my step-mom and she doesn’t want me to set a foot in her house anymore.”

“Babe you never told me...what happened?”

“The time my father passed away, she borrowed some money from me to help with the funeral...so when I wanted it back, we fought...I mean, we foouuggghhhh!”

“Then who is helping you with school and everything?”

“Myself.”

“Ria...and you never mentioned this because?”

“Because it is not important...oh please, I am so used to taking care of myself anyway.”

“But I can always help...always.”

“And I appreciate it.”

“Let me start by paying your fees.”

"No, you don't have to."

"I insist...you know I used to spend money on useless things...let me do something better for someone...not because you are my woman but you are a student who needs help."

"Why are you with me?"

"What? Why?"

"No...it's like you are a God-sent. You know I am so happy since the day I walked into your office...and you know I don't have anyone except you and Zoleka."

"You are also a God-sent...believe me when I say that." I reach for her hand. "I had never loved a woman like I do you...and it even freaks me out sometimes. It is normal, right?"

"I bet it is."

"Now before you make me forget...log on myunisa and screenshot the prescribed books"

"Come on...we are eating."

"And we still have 4 hours before our spa date." I say after getting the evidence from my wrist watch.

"I will send you."

"I know you are going to make me forget...log on myunisa Ria."

"Log on myunisa you say?" she say and I laugh. I know how this things work. I did some short course there a few years ago. She sends me the screenshot and also her student number. I spend so much money on wrist watches and clothes I can help her a little.

We drive to the spa hours later. It is both our first time and this is so beautiful. I should give them the cup for being the best African spa ever.

"The spa was amazing...thank you again for today." She says. We are now parked outside her flat.

"It was a beautiful day." I say.

"I think I love you Mulatshawe?" she shyly say and my heart melts. "I know it is too soon but I fall for you every second I spend with you."

"Come here." I reach for her to give her a kiss. Maybe this will calm me because my heart is pounding. I am supposed to tell her everything, or just something.

"Why is your heart raising? Did I just scare you?"

"No..no..no."

"Then what?"

"I am going to be at the Boutique opening on Saturday."

"What? You are invited?" she asks shockingly.

"Yes...uhm...family." I can't tell her about Luvhengo yet. I will find a way to stop her from going. Let me just do this gradually.

"Small world right?" she says with a laugh.

"Very small."

"Is Rotshi going to be there?"

"I think so."

"Wow...it's really a small world."

"Babe, I am a prince." I throw the bomb and she smiles.

"Of course you are my prince."

"I am a prince prince."

"What is a prince prince?"

"I am from a royal family."

INSERT 19

RIALIVHUWA

He is from the royal family? What a joke.

"You are a prince?" I ask. I laugh but he doesn't. "You are serious?"

"I should have told you in the beginning."

This feels like a dream. It can't be. I stare at him and he doesn't tell me it is a joke. He is dead serious.

"Don't follow me." I finally say opening the door.

"Babe...please wait." He opens the door and steps out of the car faster than me.

"Don't you dare follow me."

"Please...wait."

"You kept the truth from me Mula and I am so disappointed in you right now." I say with a breaking voice and tears threatening to fall from my eyes. I hang my cross-body bag on my shoulder and walk away from the car.

"Ria...please." He pleads following me.

"I said, don't follow me." I hiss at him but he keeps following me.

"Babe please don't leave like this."

"STAY AWAY FROM ME!" I raise my voice.

"Please let me explain."

"Just stay away from me."

What a disappointment. He knew how I feel about royal feuds. I was not made for such a life. I rush to the elevator and thank God there is no one inside. My tears decide to flood my face. I don't want Zoleka to see that I am crying so I wait by the door until I manage to stop the tears.

The TV is still on and Zoleka is lying on the couch. She quickly sits up straight when I close the door.

"Are you okay?" she asks with panic. The lights are off. How could she tell that I am not fine?

"What did you see in your dreams?" I ask. I know she saw something. I put on the light and walk to sit on the couch.

"You were crying." She whispers.

"What did you see in your dreams Zoleka?"

"You and Mula were taking a walk...and the next thing there were heavy winds pushing you guys around." She says.

"And then what happened next?"

"I don't remember." She whispers. "I never forget dreams but...this one...I don't remember how you ended."

"He lied to me." I say.

"About what?"

"He is from a royal family." I say.

"Is that not a beautiful thing?"

"Not when you come from my region...it is not an easy road...and it is a road I am not willing to take."

"Don't you love him enough to go through this with him?"

"He might have a family in Venda as we speak. A wife and kids. If not, they are going to pick a wife for him from another royal family."

"But what if he loves you?"

"That is not how it works...you don't pick your own wife when you are going to be chief one day. The first born should be with royal blood."

"So what are you going to do?" she asks and I shake my head.

"I don't think I can do this." I say. My palms are sweating and this is because I am freaking out.

"Maybe this is just a storm that will pass."

“Or a storm that is just here to destroy all this.” I stand from the couch and pick my bag. “Good night.”

I get to my room, take off my shoes and throw myself on the bed.

It means Mula is the prince of Thavhakhulu. If I met him in my village and he told me he is from around there? Then he is the son of the feared Musanda Ratshali. Oh, hell No. I am not going to fight a losing battle.

Why I am I feeling betrayed like this?

But who else do I blame if not myself? I knew I was not ready for a relationship but I opened my heart to him. I allowed him into my life and opened my whole heart for him. Not so smart, right?

Why do I always get these portions in life? Cheating boyfriends, cruel step-mothers and lying boyfriends? Am I ever going to be happy?

It’s funny how I thought Mula was a God-sent just hours ago. He was just sent to destroy me even further.

I wake up to a hundred missed calls and SMSs from Mula. He wants to see me but I am not ready to. I don’t want to lose my temper and yell at him. He betrayed me. Whatever his reasons are, he was just wrong for keeping the truth from me. Why didn’t he tell me on the first day and allow me to decide for myself. He led me on and allowed me to get in too deep.

I dozed off last night because I am still wearing the same dress I had the previous night. I bet Zoleka came and covered me with a blanket.

I jump out of the bed and change into a t-shirt nighty. Zoleka is already making breakfast.

“Please add some more eggs...and lots of cheddar cheese.”

“These things will make you sick...you eat eggs and cheese every day.” Zoleka says while beating the eggs.

“And I no longer have a doctor boyfriend to treat me.” I sigh.

“What do you mean...are you leaving him?” she asks.

“I am not going to fight a losing battle.” I say.

“Come on...”

“I have heard stories about his father...that man banish people from the villages. I am already kicked out from home I cannot afford to be banished from the village...I still want to see my little brothers.”

“He sounds ruthless.”

“Plus Mula is obviously groomed to be the next Musanda, marrying and taking care of many wives won't be new to him...nne I am not about that life...I can't stand that.”

“Well, my parents are going to KZN today so they called me to come home...apparently people are breaking in when they know there is no one in the house.”

“Can I come with you? I will come back on Saturday morning”

“What if Mula comes looking for you. You still need to talk.”

“I don't want to see him now.”

After breakfast I take a shower and pack a small bag with few clothes. This is just a best opportunity to forget about my little heartache.

I have been in love before but this pain is different. I am hurt and disappointed because I wished for a great thing with Mula. I have never met such a humble and respectful man. He is just selfish. When Joshua cheated on me, I was just hurt, not disappointed but brutally hurt.

We catch a taxi to Bosman station, another one to Johannesburg to catch the last one to Chiawelo. I love it here. Kids are always playing in the streets just like back at home. It is just so vibey and alive. This will just be my haven for a few days away from Mula.

“Zoleka, have you seen my phone?” I ask while digging in my bag. We are sitting in the bedroom.

“Did you take it from the bathroom window?” she says while packing her clothes in her closet.

“Oh man...I left it there.” I say. I am sad. Even when I don't want to see Mula, his SMS kinda comfort me and I was eventually going to answer one of his calls.

“Sorry...I thought you were going to take it.”

“Well, I guess it's a good thing that I clear my head for a few days.”

I am failing to stop thinking about Mula. I have been missing him these past days. I always think about him and I miss his voice.

Am I crazy? How am I going to survive in this kind of a relationship? What if he is already married? So many questions and I don't even know the answers to any of them. All I know is that I fell in love. I fell deeply in love with him. We were going to be a beautiful thing, that I know for sure. I am reminded about the way he looks at me with so much love. He might mean it that he really loves me and want to be with me.

I owe myself closure and maybe he will be able to give it to me. Maybe he has a solution to this and I am not giving him a chance to share it with me.

I woke up feeling much better today.

"You are in a good mood today." Zoleka says when she walks into the bedroom. I am sitting on the bed cuddling one of her teddy bears. My bag is already packed for me to return to Pretoria.

"I think I was unfair to Mula...maybe I should just listen to him and hear him out."

"I like that. I am sure he misses you." She says and I smile.

"I think I miss him too...but I am going to see him tomorrow at the launch."

"The boutique launch? Are you not going there to work?"

"Yes and he is invited...apparently he is related to the owner."

"Such a small world."

"Say that again, please."

"It is a small world." She says and we laugh.

I think coming here and leaving my phone was the greatest thing ever. It is best that I feel better now to talk to him.

"So you are going to forgive him?"

"I think so...for closure...and maybe he is not married yet and we could still be together and make this work."

"So tomorrow you are getting yourself some kisses."

“I might get some sweet kisses tomorrow.”

NOTE: I AM PREPONING THE BOUTIQUE LAUNCH TO TOMORROW. SO
TOMORROW'S INSERT IS THE LAUNCH. I have engagements on the weekend
and do not want to disappoint ya'll.

INSERT 20 - THE FAMOUS BOUTIQUE LAUNCH

MULATSHAWE

If there is a time I wish I lived in a bachelor flat is now. Hosting my father in my house is not so fun. We are not best of friends. He raised me the tough way and he is heartless. My parents arrived yesterday so they could attend their future daughter-in-law's launch. My father is delighted and my mother is thrilled by the dress Luvhengo delivered last night.

I have been looking for Ria for the whole week. Her phone was on for a few days and then ended up not working. At first I thought I was blocked but I tried calling her phone with a thousand other numbers. I am truly worried about her as I don't know where she is. I don't know how many times I have been knocking in her flat, even Rotshi tried to look for her.

It really bothers me that we never got a chance to talk. That I never got an opportunity to explain myself and tell her I did not want to lose her. It was too selfish of me but I did not want her to leave me.

My parents are getting dressed and so am I. All this time I am kinda happy that Ria might not show up and she won't have to see my family and Luvhengo. But what if she shows up? I have never been this stressed in my life. Had I known that love will make me this sick, I wouldn't have allowed my heart to fall deeply in love.

We drive to Menlyn with my parents. My father's assistant is driving us. He is more of a body guard than just an assistant.

The boutique is elegant and extravagant. My father spots Luvhengo's father standing with his wife and we walk up to them.

"Hey...mukololo u kho ri ita vhathu...the princess is making us proud, huh." My father says happily to Luvhengo's father.

"I am so delighted. I am so proud." He says with a drink on his hand.

I am trying to look around for Ria and she is nowhere around the room. I can see the waitresses walking around with trays of drinks and I do not see Rialivhuwa. I am getting calmer.

"Are you just not proud of your fiancée?" my father asks and I fake a smile. "I am talking to you man."

“Yes I am.”

“You two are going to do great things together.” My father comments.

Oh No! I spot Ria laughing with a group of ladies at the other corner of the room. She has a booklet in her hand and busy writing down the orders. Damn! Damn! Damn!

“Are you alright?” my mother asks and I nod.

“Please excuse me.” I say and quickly find my way to Ria before she disappears.
“Ria, where have you been?”

“Oh hi...” she says with a weak smile.

“You shouldn’t be here Ria. You have to go.” I say and she frown.

“Hey it’s not the time to mingle, people are waiting for their drinks.” A woman in a long black dress says as she walk past us.

“I’ll see you after the launch...I have got to go back to work.” she says and hurries to the back.

I am defeated. I can’t walk out of here because I have to protect her. I just don’t know how this is going to turn out. I glance at my parents’ direction and my father is gazing at me. He likes to communicate with his head and eyes when I embarrass him. I walk back to them.

“Where did you disappear to?” My father asks angrily. “I wanted to introduce you to Mrs Molefe...she is your mother’s friend.”

I think my family bewitched me with overdose of reverence. I can never talk back to an elder and it has always been like that since I was a kid.

The room is filled up and people seem impressed by the clothes in the corners of the room and the pictures of models flashed all over the room. I am also impressed by how professional the setup is. The music is playing softly and people are mingling with mini-plates of food on their hands and others with drinks.

“Ladies and gentleman, please turn your heads to the door because the woman of the moment is here and she is looking amazing.” The DJ says and everyone turn their heads to the door.

Heee vhanna! Are we here for a launch or a wedding? This woman is wearing a peach lace dress with a longest train that looks like a wedding gown. No, she is actually wearing a wedding gown. Luvhengo is too dramatic for me.

“Doesn’t she look amazing?” my father asks while clapping. The room is filled with applause. I see Ria and she is standing with the other waitresses looking mesmerised just like everyone else. I feel even more sick now.

Luvhengo walks around greeting her guests until she comes to where we are standing.

“You look amazing my child.” Her mother says while hugging her.

“I have the most beautiful daughter in law.” My mother says next while hugging her. “Thank you so much for this dress, I feel like a million dollar.”

“I am happy you like it.” she says.

She hugs my father and hers; then turn to me and fake a smile. My father pokes me with his elbow and I know what he is trying to say.

“You look beautiful.” I say and give her a quick hug.

I try to be part of the conversation with everyone but my mind is on Ria. She keeps glancing at me now and then and flashes a smile at me when she can. I feel like puking right now.

Ria and two other waitresses walk out of the door and disappear. Luvhengo walks to a mini-stage and by now I am praying sooo hard that Ria doesn’t come back to the room.

“Thank you so much for honouring my invitation. It means a lot to me. We wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for you my clients and my family. When I opened my first boutique, it was just a dream. But today is a dream come-true. With the help of my parent and business partners, I now have my own brand and my own fashion collection. My wish is for every woman to feel elegant, confident and sexy. That is where all this started. I am pleased to announce that we have broaden our collection to weddings and exclusive events. Also, today is not just another launch day and I am not wearing this extravagant dress for nothing...it is a day I want to introduce my fiancé to you. Mulatshawe Ratshali, thank you for taking a broader step to make me your princess...your wife.”

People keep applauding with each word she says. I am sweating right now. My father poke me to wave. I give a quick wave with a frown on my face and pray again for Ria to stay wherever she is.

“Thank you everyone and enjoy the evening. The food and drinks are for you so let’s eat, drink and be marry...and don’t forget to place an order for any clothing item you like.” She says before parading back to us.

I have never seen my father so proud of anyone like he is of Luvhengo. I have never made him this proud. These people are having a great time and my head is pounding from stress.

“Mr Ratshali...there is someone I will like to introduce to you tonight.” She says.

“Who? A business associate?” my father asks and she fakes a laugh.

A while later Ria walks back into the room with the other waitresses carrying platters of food. I glance at her and Luvhengo gives me a fake smile.

“Good evening...is the family alright?” the lady in a long black dress asks. I remember her. She is Luvhengo’s friend.

“We are very well my daughter...and your food is so delicious.” Mr Kutama says and she smiles.

I watch as Luvhengo whispers something to her. I don’t like this. I don’t like this at all.

“Please do enjoy the rest of your evening.” she says before walking away.

“Uhm, please go get me a glass of champagne from the table?” she asks and everyone glance at me.

“Can’t we call a waitress to...”

“Just got get the damn drink.” My father angrily say. If I was someone else, I would be embarrassing him right now.

I walk to the table at the end of the room. I am looking for Ria all over the room.

Hell no!

Ria is walking to where we were standing. I pick the drink and hurry there.

“Good evening...I was asked to come here by Miss Lufuno.” I hear her say just when I approach them.

“Uhm...what the hell Luvhengo...what the hell?” I raise my voice.

“That is not how you speak to your fiancée...do you hear me?” my father raises his voice at me. The other guests are minding their own business with music playing a little louder than before in the background.

“Mr Ratshali this is the woman I wanted you to meet.” She says and I shake my head aggressively.

"No...no...no...damn you Luvhengo."

My father turns to me and grab me with my clothes. He pushes me to his assistant who is now holding me tight away from my father. People are starting to stare. The champagne glass fell on the floor and now the attention is on us.

"That is not how you speak to your woman." My father says to my face. I sway my eyes and Ria is standing there with her eyes popped. Her eyes are glowing with tears. I can literally see her heart jumping out of her chest.

"Please, excuse me." Ria says and tries to walk away.

"Hey...come back here." My father says and she startle. He has an intimidating scary voice. Ria turns and walks back to stand where she was. I am helpless in the guard's hands.

"Please just let her go...Ria please go...leave now." I plead. "RIA, LEAVE NOW!"

"Girl...you are not going anywhere....Luvhengo you were saying?" my father says and hold Ria's wrist.

"This is the girl that Mula is cheating on me with. I have tried to talk to him so many times but he keeps hurting me and leaving me for her." She says with a little fake sad face.

"What nonsense is this?" my father asks.

"I love her." I say. "I am in love with her."

"That is ridiculous...That is just absurd...where are you going to take this girl? A mere girl? A mere girl Mulatshawe?" he asks and Ria's tears start gushing out of her eyes.

"She is..."

"Shut up! Shut up when I speak to you." he roars. "You have disrespected my empire. You have disrespected ME! Where do you think I am going to take this girl? That is just nonsense."

"Maybe if..."

"Shut up!" he roars. "Apologise to your wife-to-be."

"Not when..."

"Shut the hell up and apologise." He shouts and I refuse to apologise. They should all be apologising to Ria right now.

"My love...please calm down." My mother tries to plead.

"You have spoil him so much Murunwa." He says and turns to me. "I said apologise."

"Khotsi a Mula...please my love." My mother tries again.

"You know what young girl...I know destructive little pathetic girls like you who are always after money...from today I want you to play far away from this man...do you hear me? I don't have time to waste on useless people like you."

"No, you can't..." I try to say.

"Shut up."

Ria is now sobbing while gasping for air. My heart is pierced to see her like that. She is choking while crying and my father is still holding on her wrist.

"This one right here is a prince and you cannot be associated with him...maybe you thought he was your ticket to a good life...not anymore..." my father says to Ria's face.

"Please man...stop that." I am still trying to fight out of the guard's hands.

"I should never, ever, hear that you were near him...I don't have time to waste on people like you."

Oh Lord! Her shirt is wet with tears and her face is just a mess.

Lord, what have I done?

INSERT 21

MULATSHAWE

Lufuno walks to us and give Ria her handbag. My father lets go of her wrist. Ria takes the bag from Lufuno and wipes her tears. The music is still playing but people are staring at us.

"My love, I'm sorry." I say to her.

"Sorry my foot!" My father says. "Now, go!"

Ria glance at me with pity eyes and then hurries out of the boutique. All eyes are on her as she paces out while wiping her tears.

"You shouldn't have done that." I say.

"Don't tell me what I should or shouldn't have done." He says.

"You are such a hypocrite." I hiss.

"Excuse me?"

"You are such a damn hypocrite. I am telling you I love her but you are attacking her while your mistresses are well taken care off by your elders." I say and he shakes his head. My mother covers her mouth with sadness in her eyes. I wonder if she knew or if I am the first to break the news to her. I know if it was not because of all these people standing here, he would have punched me on my face. The guard lets go of me and I hurry out to look for Ria. I have no idea where to turn to get to the taxi rank. I can easily get an Uber but I wish to find Ria before she gets home. I used to come to Menlyn mall often with a taxi when I was a student but this place has dramatically changed that I don't even know where to go. I finally get to the taxis just outside the mall after getting assisted by some ladies. I look around for Ria but she is nowhere to be found. She is obviously gone.

I hoop into the next taxi and head to Sunnyside. My phone is ringing endlessly in my pocket. It is my mother calling me. I put it on silence and slid in into my pocket. I know I might have hurt her by disrespecting my father, but I have more important things to take care of right now.

"After the next robot, please." I shout from the back seat and the taxi stops after the robot. I jump off and hurry to the flat. Thank goodness it is just a minute from the taxi route. I feel uncomfortable running in the streets of Sunnyside with my attire, I

am turning heads. I am wearing a formal suit and formal shoes and I am literally jogging to the flat.

I get to the flat and wait for someone to tag in so I could follow behind them. I am lucky enough to have someone tag in just after 10 minutes.

The door is closed but the burglar door is not locked. I knock a few times and there is no response. I try to open the door and it is unlocked. I open it slowly and walk in.

"Hellllooo?" I say and there is no response. I walk to Ria's room and knock softly on the door. She doesn't respond so I slowly open the door and walk in.

"Ria, Babe?" I say to her and she turns to me. She is standing by the windows with tears in her face.

"What do you want?" she asks softly and I walk towards her.

"Babe I am so sorry." I say and she breaks into a cry. I hurry to her and burry her into my arms. She doesn't push me away so I hug her tightly and allow her to cry all the pain out. I can hear her heart beating fast and her tense body.

We stand in the middle of the room with her in my arms for so long. I didn't want to break away from her. I can have her in my arms all night.

"I need to sleep." she softly says and I let her out of my embrace. She picks a towel and clean up her face.

"Okay, come." I say walking to the bed. She is already wearing a t-shirt so I move the duvets and prepare the pillows for her.

"Please leave?" She asks softly. This worries me. I thought she would be throwing punches and yelling at me. She looks drained.

"I will leave when you fall asleep." I say and walk to the kitchen to get a glass of water. I come back to her room and she is inside her duvets. I give her the water and she drinks it in one go. I switch off the lights and close her bedroom door. I notice the keys behind the main door so I lock it.

I have no idea where her friend is but I will be invading their space tonight. There is no way I am leaving Ria alone before we talk. I take off my jacket, kick my shoes off, throw myself on a couch and switch on the TV with the remotes from the coffee table.

The TV is playing softly and I have so many thoughts in my head. How stupid I have been. I have been so blinded by love I got things even worse. I was so scared of losing her and by that I ended up getting her hurt deeply. I can't stop thinking about how cruel and selfish I have been.

I can't drag Ria into my twisted family. This is just the beginning of everything and I should just accept Ria is not made for such a life. If I don't let her go, they will go for her blood.

I have been tossing and turning on this couch until I open my eyes and a light blinds me. The TV is still playing softly. I sit up straight and stare at Ria who is standing with her hands folded on her chest.

"What the hell are you still doing here?" she asks coldly.

"I wanted to make sure you are alright."

"Aren't you too late for that?"

"I know...I am truly sorry."

"Get out!" she says walking to me. "Get the hell out of my flat."

"Please calm down."

"You have a nerve Mulatshawe...you are telling me to calm down after what you made me go through? The humiliation...you are now telling me to calm down?" she is blaring now.

"I didn't tell you because I didn't want to lose you...I love you so much...I love you so much Ria I just didn't want to lose you." I also raise my voice.

"Your father humiliated me Mula...you and your family made me a fool...you allowed them to pierce my heart...why didn't you tell me I am going to be your wife's servant? I served at your wife's party and you were there to even watch me." she shouts.

"I tried to tell you to leave."

"Did you try harder? Did you try harder Mula?" she yells.

"Calm down Ria."

"Don't tell me to calm down...you must be crazy to tell me to calm down!" she shouts. I bet we are waking the neighbours up. It seems like I am getting her worked up with every word that comes out of my mouth.

"Ria that woman is not my wife...she is arranged to be married to me...we are just engaged."

"Get out of my flat...get out!" She is walking towards me with a cushion from the couch. She throws it at me and I block it with my arm.

"I am not going until we talk...just let me explain."

"There is nothing for you to explain...we didn't meet yesterday...we have known each other for a little while Mula. Why didn't you tell me everything last week?"

"I know but I didn't want to lose you. You are the first woman I fell in love with and I wanted to protect you from the truth so that you stay with me...I just didn't know it would get to this, I didn't know it would turn to you getting hurt so badly like today."

"You had so many opportunities to tell me the truth...I asked you if you were not making me a toy girl and you lied to me."

"You were not my toy-girl...never Ria."

"It would be funny if you think I will ever believe anything that comes out of your mouth...I told you I have been toyed with before and you go again and do the same thing...bravo!" She says with her hands on her waist and her voice is breaking.

"I don't love that woman, I don't want to be with her...I want to be with you."

"You want to be with me? A mere girl, huh?" she asks and laughs sarcastically.

"You are not a mere girl."

"Did you tell that to your father or you just watched as he attacked me? Did you tell him I am not a mere girl or a pathetic little girl who is after your stupid money? Did you tell him that?"

"I never got a chance to."

"Listen here...I need a man who will be stronger than I am...you are too weak for me...I can fight my own battles on my own since you can't fight none for me." she says and walks to unlock the door.

"Please come with me...run away with me." I say.

"That's what you want to do? Run away?" She asks and laugh.

"Please Ria, come with me...let's get away from all this mess together and start all over again." I make a request to her. I am willing to leave everything behind if I am given a chance to start a new life with her, only her.

"You must be crazy." She says and clicks her tongue.

Why am I expected to be as ruthless as my father? I take the blame for not protecting her enough the way I am expected to, but why am I expected to be

something that I am not. I apologise for not punching my father and hold him with his neck to protect the woman I love. I apologise for being trapped in a man twice my size to fight my father's hand off Ria's wrist.

"Okay look...I take it I am weak and that is not what you are looking for and I respect that...please just forgive me for hurting you and allowing everyone to hurt you even more...I tried to do things my way and I flopped, I flopped big time and it is my fault. I just wish that you forgive me for being too selfish and trying to protect you." I say and walk to her. "I wish I was stronger the way my father is, but I just learnt I can never be that. What is to be strong anyway? Had I known that a stronger man is needed to love you, I wouldn't have dared come to you and complicate your life."

"You just complicated my life and I hate you for that."

"I have never been in love...as old as I am, I have never loved anyone the way I love you. I have no idea what to do with all these feelings in my heart and I feel like every time I try to show you how much I love you, I mess up."

"Just leave." She says softly and I put my shoes on. I grab my jacket from the couch and put it on.

It is 01:20 am and I have no choice but to leave.

This love game is far from me.

"Can I get a hug? I want to leave in peace and know that you forgive me for being childish and selfish." I ask while opening my arms for her.

"Don't touch me." she shoves my arms away from her. "Don't you dare touch me!"

INSERT 22

RIALIVHUWA

I can't wait for Zoleka to get home today. It is Sunday and I know she will only arrive in the afternoon. I haven't manage to sleep since 01:30 when I kicked Mula out. It is already 10:30am and I am struggling to get out of bed. My head is pounding from a migrane.

I have never been humiliated like that in my life. That man is far worse than my step-mom and her sister combined. The hatred he showed me in his eyes? The rumours about him are all true. Lord knows I would have stayed away from his son if I knew Mula is his.

I refuse to think about Mula and to think if whether I should forgive him or not. I thought he is all I need, but no, I deserve something better. Anyway royal life is not nothing I fancy. I would be bringing unnecessary stress into my life. I don't need that right now.

I jump out of bed and settle for a long warm bath. Afterwards I decide to cook a storm to take my mind off things.

My phone beeps and it is an SMS from Rotshi.

"Count me in when you cook lunch, I am coming over now. I need some help with something." The SMS reads and I click my tongue. She has been making me a fool all this time. She knew her brother is engaged but she kept it behind me. She introduced me to everyone as her sister-in-law knowing very well that I am nothing but a side-chick.

Zoleka walks in when I am washing the rice. I am done with the rest of the food. I made chicken stew and all sorts of salads.

"Right on time, huh?" she says while closing the door.

"Yeah, I just put the rice back on the stove...we will be eating soon." I say.

"What's wrong?" That's how much she knows me. She picks up my moods at a word-go.

"It's Mula...we are over." I say while following her to her bedroom. She drops the bags on the floor and sit on the bed so she could take off her shoes.

"What happened?"

"Yesterday's launch. It was his fiancée's launch." I say and Zoleka gasp.

I tell her the story from the moment I walk into the boutique. How beautiful and elegant that place was. The high-class food we were serving the guests. I told her how magnificent Mula's woman looked in her overflowing peach lace dress. I told her everything that took place and the words Mula's father told me to pierce my heart.

"He is as brutal as you said you heard about him." She says.

"Just as I heard...imagine!"

"And you are leaving Mula because of his father or the other woman?"

"Both."

"You lie...it is not both because you know Mula deeply loves you... the other woman is not really a threat and you know it. I have seen the way he looks and speaks to you. It only took me two days to see how much he adores you." She says it and I keep quiet. I used to think so but everything has changed now.

"Why didn't he fight for me?"

"Okay why did you allow his father to tell such hurtful words? Didn't you listen with your own two ears?" she asks and I nod. "Why didn't you walk away from the whole scene?"

"I didn't want to...to like disrespect...him...you know he is chief."

"You didn't want to disrespect a stranger but you expect Mula to disrespect his own father? The same father that is a chief to some kingdom in Venda?"

"Whose side are you on?"

"No one's...I just want you to stop whining when you could have done something yourself."

"You don't understand how hurt and humiliated I am."

"I think you are doing well by leaving him."

"Excuse me?"

"Yes...you need a man like Joshua who would knock everyone's knees...everyone who messes with you, you need your man to break their knees akere...then leave Mula alone...he is not that type. If it wasn't that my dreams scare man away, I was going to beg you to fix him to me." She says. "I have seen how respectful that man is

with you and I can't expect him to be violent with anyone else so if you don't see it in that way, then leave the poor man to marry the rich elegant woman."

"You are making things worse."

"Why, because you know I am right?" She asks. "Why are you even comparing Mula with your ex?"

"I am not comparing him to anyone." I say.

It is hurtful to even think I should let go of Mula. I was starting to think that he is a great man but I can never be with him.

I leave Zoleka in her room to the kitchen to check on the rice. There is a knock and I know for a fact it is Rotshi, I really do not have any energy for her. I ignore the door until Zoleka goes to open.

"Hey Zo...is Ria home?" I hear her say with her energetic voice.

"Of course come in."

They walk to the kitchen while laughing. Rotshi drops her overnight bag and walks to me. She forces a hug and I let in.

"I heard what happened." She says. I am so disgusted right now. She lets go of me and walks to pick her handbag.

"What are you doing here?" I ask.

"I brought some shots." She says while taking out the tequila coffee bottle. She bought the same bottle when I was still staying with her in Hatfield.

"Exactly what she needs." Zoleka says and I frown at her. I don't want Rotshi here.

"Rotshi, what do you want here?" I ask again.

"I need a place to crush...I lost my keys you know? I had a rough weekend with my friends and I couldn't get my keys when I got to my flat earlier." She says and I frown. I know she is lying.

"You betrayed me Rotshi and I don't understand how you want us to carry on like nothing happened."

"I didn't betray you. Mula loves you and that's all I know. I don't care about the rest." She says.

"The rest includes your brother engaged to some woman. She is wearing his ring while you introduce me to every person you meet."

"I don't care about that, what is important is where his heart is." She says and I decide to keep the response to myself. It is not enough that his heart belongs to me. I want him to act like it does.

"I see the bag...are you staying?" Zoleka asks.

"Yes...hopefully for a few days."

"Few days? Why don't you get the spare keys from Mula?" I ask.

"Only Mula knows where he hides my spare keys...he is nowhere to be found." She says.

"What do you mean he is...nowhere...to be found?"

"My mother last saw him at the launch. He left running after you and he hasn't been home since then," she says, "I just hope he is fine wherever he is."

"Can't you track his car? I am sure he registered you as the emergency person to contact." I ask. Mula and Rotshi are that close.

"His car is safely at his apartment, he drove with my parents to the launch and that was the last they saw or heard from him." She says and I start to panic.

Maybe he is angry and doesn't want to talk anyone. But what if something happened to him? I threw him out to the streets at 02:00 in the morning. What if something happened to him? This is Sunnyside after all.

"So after the launch he came here?" Zoleka asks and I nod.

"He came to apologise."

"This is unlike him...but I hope he is fine. Come let's take the shots." Rotshi says as if she didn't care much. I rush to my bedroom to try him on his cell. I call and it goes to voicemail. I tried a few times before giving up.

Why do I even care anyway? What if he headed straight to his fiancée to apologise the same way he did to me last night. I am disgusted by the thought so I throw my phone on my bed and walk back to the kitchen. I pick a glass from the kitchen cupboard and grab a bottle from Rotshi and pour some into a glass.

"Hey easy on that, you are supposed to have a bit of that...it will get you drunk." She says and I refuse to listen. I just need a little something to numb the pain.

I pour a quarter of a glass and shove it into my throat. The taste is sweet and bitter, but I manage to handle it. I pour the next glass and shove it into my throat once again.

"Hey go easy on this." Rotshi shouts from her seat and I did not listen. I pour the third quarter into a glass and throw myself into a couch. The coffee shots taste better than any other tequila. It is as sweet as a cold iced-coffee.

"You know why I love your brother?" I ask Rotshi and she smiles at me. "He is just adorable."

"I agree." She says.

"Don't agree when you don't even know what I am talking about." I say and they laugh. I know I am not yet drunk but I don't know why they are laughing.

"Okay tell me what you are talking about?"

"I don't know. I just think he is adorable." I say.

"Did she have lunch before this heavy shots?" Rotshi asks as if I am not in the room and Zoleka shakes her head.

"Oh, the rice is still on the stove." I say and try to hurry to the kitchen but I miss a step.

"Ria, relax!" Rotshi rushes to me and helps me to sit back on the couch. She walks to the kitchen and comes back after a little while. I don't know what I am feeling but I start crying. I just have mixed emotions about everything rightnow.

"Hey...what's wrong?" Zoleka asks.

"What if they mugged him here in Sunnyside? I kicked him out in the early hours of the morning because I was angry...what if he is dead or hurt...or even kidnapped?"

"If he is dead then he is dead." Rotshi says and I cry even more.

"He can't die now. Please Mula can't die now...Rotshi please tell me that you are lying...tell me he is home and he asked you to lie to me." I plead with her.

"Calm down Ria." She says with pity in her eyes. "They really don't know where he is."

"He is with his fiancée...yes obvious...he is with his fiancée." I say. I rather have him with his fiancée than to have him dead because I kicked him out. I will never forgive myself if he is hurt.

"She is with them." Rotshi says and I start to panic some more.

"What if I got him killed?" I cry. I will not forgive myself for that.

"No, he should be fine. Maybe he booked into a hotel and overslept." Zoleka says. That could make sense but my gut feeling doesn't allow me to let this go.

I hurry to get my phone in the bedroom to try his number again. His phone is off.

"Relax Ria," Zoleka says, "Please, relax...I bet he is fine."

"They mug people around here...they mug people in Sunnyside." I say.

"But the police would have let his family know." Zoleka says.

"Mula, where the hell are you?" I ask myself while trying his phone again and again and again.

INSERT 23

RIALIVHUWA

I am woken up by the noise outside. A taxi is hooting non-stop. This is what you get for staying next to the taxi route. I sit on the bed with a pounding head, this time from a hang-over. I don't remember coming to bed but I am wearing my pyjamas. I just remember crying, laughing and all other sorts of things.

"Mulatshawe!" I remember I wanted us to go search for him last night. Zoleka and Rotshi refused, they ended up locking the door and hiding the key. I was just scared and worried at the same time. I am still worried sick. I try to dial his number but the phone is still off.

Rotshi is sleeping next to me so I shake her to wake her up. It is after 07:30 already. I shake her again until she opens one eye.

"Whhhattt?" she moans.

"Let's go look for Mula." I say while jumping out of bed.

Damn! My head feels heavy and I am too thirsty.

"Let me sleep." she mumbles.

"Your brother is missing and you want to sleep?" I ask while pulling the blanket away.

"Please stop!! Mula can take care of himself." She murmurs pulling the blanket from me.

"Please Rotshi, I will never ask you for another favour." I plead.

"I slept two hours ago. Mula is a man." She says and throws her head on the pillow and cover it with the blanket.

I know I cannot go to his apartment because his parents might be there. The securities won't even let me into the estate without his knowledge. But I can go check him at work.

My head can't stop pounding. What was I thinking? Taking shots like I was drinking juice. I gulp two glasses of cold water and then jump into the shower. I settle for a cold quick shower. Thereafter, I put on a summer dress and sandals; and then hurry to catch a taxi to Pretoria East.

When I get to the hospital, I hurry straight to his medical practise area.

“Morning, can I help you?” the reception lady greets. If I remember well her name is Rossie.

“Hi...is Mula in?” I ask and she raises her eyebrow.

“Dr Ratshali, you mean?”

“Yes, is he in?” I am in no mood to deal with her right now.

“Not yet.”

“Okay, I will wait.” I go seat on the couch with the three patients who are already waiting to consult. They are all reading magazines and I am here panicking and praying that Mula shows up to work. I don’t know what I will do if he doesn’t show up. I check the time and it is 08:50.

The more I panic, the more I feel sick in my stomach. I feel hot from the hang-over but I am willing to wait for him here. I can feel my body sweating from the panic.

Minutes later, I hear the door close from afar. It is coming from the direction of his office. It could be him using the back door. I rush to the passage and straight to his office.

“You can’t just go in there.” Rossie yells behind me but I ignore her. I rush to knock on his door. I open before I even get the response.

“Ria, what are you doing here?” he asks. He is obviously shocked to see me. He is standing right in the middle of the office, putting on his white coat.

I ran to him and give him a snuggest hug. My heart is beating fast and so is his.

“Oh my God Mula...I was worried sick about you.” I say with a breaking voice. I have cried enough so I am not shedding any tear anymore. He tries to let go of the hug and I hold him even tighter. He doesn’t understand how relieved I am that he is right here.

“Uhm...I am okay.” He whispers. I finally let go of him.

“I have been trying to call you all night and I thought they mugged you.” I say and he smiles widely.

“I switched off the phone to avoid my parents. I didn’t think you would call.”

“I am just, happy that nothing happened to you.”

“So you do care about me.” he asks while pulling me closer to him.

“Just a little.”

“I know you care more than just a little.” He says and pulls me closer to kiss me. Oh gosh! My body longs for his now. We are deep into a fervent kiss when the door opens.

“What on earth is going on here?” an angry voice shakes me and I move away from Mula.

“Oh it is prince Mula and the mistress.” Mula’s fiancée says behind Mula’s father. She walks slowly with her stilettos digging into the tiles; with her hands on her waist.

The drama! Why do I always have drama in my life? It’s like there is someone, somewhere appointed just to throw drama into my life.

“So you get your mother worried sick about you while you are busy here with your stupid mistress?” his father roars.

A mistress? I am disgusted by the word.

“You are disrespecting my work place...I have patients sitting outside there...Leave, please.”

“Excuse me?” his father shouts. I have never seen such an intimidating man in my life. I see hatred and anger in his eyes.

I am standing behind Mula, scared as shiiii. What did I get myself into? We are in a closed room and I might not survive if his father and his fiancée starts throwing fists. This is the same man who is rumoured to terminate people.

“Ria, please use the back door. Wait for me at Antonnio’s.” he softly says to me while his father is making noise.

This is such an embarrassment and I wonder what the patients are thinking. I am now supposed to use the back door like I am caught cheating with a married man.

Thank God the door is far from the father. I open it and hurry to Parkview Shopping Centre. It is just across the gate.

What am I doing here? I am being stubborn and I am calling for myself to be extremely hurt.

I get to Antonnio's Italian Ktchen and grab a seat. I check if I have my wallet before calling the waitress. I order coke with lots of ice and a burger with chips. I am thirsty and hungry.

I am playing with my phone when Mula grabs a sit across me.

"Large coke with ice this early?" he asks with a raised eyebrow.

"Rough night." I say and place my phone on the table. He stares into my eyes until I shy away. This is the same man I was shouting at the other night. Same guy who is weak for me.

"I am sorry about earlier...my father lives to embarrass me." He fakes a laugh.

"Where are they now?" I ask.

"They left. My mother apparently sent him to search for me."

"Where were you?" I have to ask. This guy had me in tears all night.

"I walked to Sunny Park and booked a room there." Zoleka was right.

"I am so sorry for kicking you out...I was just so angry." I shyly say.

"It's alright...I totally understand." He says and stares at me. It is a little awkward.

"Are you going back to work?" I ask to break the silence.

"Not really. I think I need to take some time off." He says. "Ria...I have been thinking a lot since the time I was walking from your flat."

"What were you thinking about?"

"I want to be with you but you are going to get hurt day-in-day-out and I don't know if I can allow myself to let you go through the pain. If you love me enough, we can just leave this place and start over...and again, I might be selfish to expect you to pack away your life and start afresh with me when we just recently met...so I don't know what to do." He says and rubs his forehead. He does that a lot when he panics. "My father will not rest when he doesn't get what he wants. You are from Zwisimani valley, you know how people talk about him. I am not the type that likes to fight and battle so I might be too weak because of that. Since I might fail to protect you from them hurting you, why don't we just leave?"

"I don't know Mula." I say. This is just so confusing. I know how deadly the royal feuds can get. I have heard a lot about the things that happened in the Thavhakhulu royal house before. I know what his father is capable of doing. It could be rumours but I can't just hand myself to the enemy on a platter.

"I understand. You are such a wonderful woman and I don't want to drag you into this things...see my father cares about his empire more than he does me and he will not rest until I do things by the book. He knows by now how much I love you and he will make sure to get me through you. You know, I was fine with the arranged marriage and everything; and I let people's hopes high until I met you...and I don't trust my father to just let it go. I don't want to lose you but I have decided to let you decide for yourself. It is not going to be an easy road, but I will love you whole heartedly."

"Uhm...I know about your family. How strict they are and how deadly your father is rumoured to be...so honestly speaking, I am afraid I will be fighting a losing battle here. I don't want to die young." I say. "I know how brutal and bloody things can get...and honestly speaking, I don't know if I am strong enough for that. I can't."

He nods his head repeatedly.

"It will be easy to forget about me...it's a good thing you didn't allow me to sleep with you that day because you would have thought I was after your honeypot." He says and I laugh. But I honestly agree with him. It will be easy to let go of him.

"I will always be there be when you need someone to talk to." I say with a lump on my throat. This is really hard. I thought I was ready to let go of him but it is hurting me now.

"Thanks." I can see disappointment in his face.

I think this is best for the both of us. We haven't even shagged but we are facing problems worse than those married for years. Sometimes it is better to accept when the battle is too impossible for you to fight. I am not ready to watch my back when I walk around the streets. I don't want to disappear into thin air.

"Rotshi lost her keys to her flat. I think she will need the spare." I say, just to change the subject.

"Where is she?"

"She slept at my place."

"Ohh...okay I will bring her keys later." He says.

"I will let her know when I get home."

"I think I should get going before my mother dies of heart-attack." He says standing up and taking the wallet from the pocket. He drops R300 on the table for my bill.

"Thank you."

“Don’t be a stranger, alright?” he says and kisses my forehead.

I watch him go up the escalators until I see him no more. I promised myself not to cry again, but tears are now clouding my eyes.

INSERT 24

LUVHENGO

Mula's father is fuming while the assistant is driving us back to the apartment. He is exactly where I want him to be.

It is only a few minutes from the hospital to the Estate so we arrive in no time. Mr Ratshali is still complaining about Mula and the mistress. I didn't know that things are going to be easy for me. Mr Rathali already loves me and he will make my work even easier.

We get into the house and Mrs Ratshali hurries to her husband. There is panic all over her face.

"Where is my son? Did you find him?" she asks.

"We found him busy kissing that mistress girl." Mr Ratshali says angrily.

"Where did he go?" she asks.

"He walked away. You know Murunwa, I raised that boy very well but you spoilt him and now he is getting out of hand." he says and walks away from the kitchen.

"Luvhengo, tell me, what is your problem?" she asks and clicks her tongue.

"Uh, what do you mean? Mula engaged me, put a ring on my finger and then goes cheating on me. That is what's wrong."

"Why did you have to humiliate my son and that poor girl like that at your launch? Are you well in your head?" she asks while walking towards the living room. I follow her while rolling my eyes. She takes a seat and I do too.

"Mma, I have been asking him so many times to leave her but instead of listening, he continued to hurt me." I say.

"But still...you should have waited to get home so that we deal with it here. Was it necessary to humiliate that girl that? I am sure you humiliated her some more today."

"Whose side are you on?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"I am starting to think that you are very disrespectful." She says and I keep quiet.

"That girl did nothing to you. Mula is the one you had to deal with, here in the house...not in front of all your clients."

Mr Ratshali comes back from where he disappeared to. He has to come and deal with his wife. I had to do what I had to do. I had to mark my territory and now I am sure she will never show her face.

“Murunwa, pack your bags, we are heading to Venda now.”

“Can I please wait to see my son? Seems like no one cares about him.”

“He is failing to be a man because you spoil him so much?”

“Can you put yourself in his shoes?”

“What shoes?” he asks while burying himself on a couch. “Go pack and we will leave when he gets here.”

“Please let me have a cup of tea first. Please get us some lemon tea?” Mrs Ratshali says while staring at me. I walk to the kitchen and still keep my ear open to the conversation in the living room.

“Don’t you think this girl is disrespectful khotsi a Mula?” she asks softly.

“What did she do? Isn’t it the same thing you did when you find out about Maria?”

“I dealt with you and Maria alone...not in front of hundred people...your family doesn’t even know that I threw a fist at you and her both.” She whispers but I can still hear. She threw a fist on a woman cheating with her husband, it’s so unlike her.

“Luvhengo was also doing what you did...you should be glad she didn’t punch anyone.”

“You know you will regret this one day?”

“Regret what? Mula knew all his life what is expected of him. He started changing recently and I am glad that I was here to deal with that girl...she will never show her face again or else I will deal with some more.”

“This thing has already turned sour. I don’t want this girl anymore for my son. She is very disrespectful” She whispers.

This apartment is an open plan so you can’t really whisper successfully.

“I don’t find her disrespectful.” Mr Ratshali shoots back.

“Yes because you so blinded by marrying your son off. I don’t blame him for not wanting to be with her.” she says and folds her arms angrily.

I take the tea to the in-laws and take a sit.

"I hope Mula comes around...let us give him time." I say and fake a smile.

"What more time? He didn't want to marry you already because he knew it would interfere with his little affair." He says.

"I think I should get going. I still have so much work to do at the new boutique."

"I am sorry you have to go through this. I will put that boy in the right place until he does what is expected of him." Mr Ratshali says and I stand from the couch.

"It is alright. I am a big girl, and there is nothing I cannot handle." I say.

"That is why you always make us proud." He say and Mrs Ratshali is so disgusted.

"I will visit Venda, very soon. This city gets too busy sometimes."

"You are always welcomed." He says.

I am not Mrs Ratshali's favourite right now and that doesn't bother me much. I need her husband's approval, not hers.

I pass by Menlyn to check on the boutique. Everything is sailing smoothly so I drive to Midrand to see my father. I get home and park in the drive-way. My mother is a teacher so she is at work. She loves her job so my father let her work for her maintenance money.

I unlock the kitchen door and walk in.

"Dad, are you home?" I yell as I walk to the fridge for a bottle of water. I grab one and make my way to his home office.

"Aren't you digging my tiles with those shoes of yours?" he asks from the office. The door is slightly open so I walk in and grab a seat in front of him.

"It is time you renovate the house anyway." I say. "What are you working on?"

"Ways of getting rid of that stupid man of yours," he says, "He is just a ghost that wants to cling on us until the end of time. It is all your fault and now you are messing things even worse."

"Messing things even worse?" I ask with my hands on my chest. What did I do now?

"Why did you pull that stunt at your launch?" he angrily asks.

"Whhaatt?" I ask.

“Which man can deal with such drama? That boy is your only escape goat from all this rubbish and you are just pushing him away.”

“What was I supposed to do?”

“Sometimes you deal with things secretly. That act was unnecessary and you are just lucky that Ratshali has your back...that boy would have been calling off the engagement.”

“But you are...”

“Shut up Luvhengo. You don’t listen to anyone. You got us in this mess and now we want to get us out, but you are still not listening.” My father yells and I keep my head down. I have disappointed him so much and it takes a lot for him to shout at me.

I messed up by bringing AB into my life. He didn’t just complicate my life, but my whole family's. My father had a simple logistic company that transported fresh foods and meat to big retailers across the country. He was only starting up when I started dating AB. When AB found out my father was struggling with the operations of the new business he stepped in to help. My father didn’t know he was my boyfriend. AB posed as an investor who was interested in joining the business for a small portion of returns. They expanded the business from local transportation to international. The trucks would deliver to retailers across the borders. Things turned sour a year ago when the authorities found illegal diamonds being transported from Lesotho to South Africa. One truck was full of diamonds and my father knew nothing about it. AB made a deal with my father to clean his name up and make everything disappear at a cost.

“I think I should get going.” I say.

“Yes go and learn to be respectful. That man is your only way out and we are so close. If I were you I will be apologising to him and that girl you humiliated. You brought us in this mess and you are going to get us out.” He says while I slowly walk to the door.

“I am not going to apologise to her.”

“You better apologise to her.” He shouts.

Why do people care so much about that little girl? And what does Mula see in her, huh? A waitress!

I drive to the house. I haven't seen AB since the day of the launch and I was just fine with it. He is one person that I despise right now. I walk on him having breakfast with his best friend.

"Yoooh...look who is home?" he walks to me and gives me a hug. I hug him back without saying anything.

"Eyo Luu." His friend says. He carries the plate of food and walks out to the garden.

"How did everything go?" he asks. "I have been missing you."

"Everything went well." I say.

"Is your damn fiancé deeply in love with you by now?"

"No, he is in love with some girl."

"In love with some girl? Are you losing your groove?" he asks and I feel like throwing a punch between his eyes, "Do you want me to deal with her for you?"

"I will deal with her myself." I respond coldly.

"Tell me if you fail and I will break her bones for you."

"Sure!" I say and roll my eyes.

"You deserve a vacation right now."

"I don't want one."

I try to walk away but he grabs me by my waist.

"Come here babe...how long should we wait until the next deeds?" he asks pulling me closer. He plants a kiss on my mouth and I don't kiss him back. "How long do we wait?"

"I don't know."

"Call the doctor and find out."

"FIND OUT WHAT? Find out how long I should wait to sleep with you after having an abortion?" I snap. I have been trying to be calm but he is irritating me. Abednego is irritating me!

"Don't you dare talk to me like that," he lets go off me and walk to the kitchen counter. He picks the plate of food and walk back to me, "stay in your lane."

"Sure." I say and walk towards the staircase.

“Stay in the bedroom until I call you back. The boys are on their way here to weigh the cocaine.”

INSERT 25

MULATSHAWE

Two weeks have passed since the break-up with Rialivhuwa. I won't lie and say I didn't miss her all the time. I think about her daily and I wonder if she does too. She has totally shut me out of her life. I even tried calling her a few times but I get she blocked me. She was really the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I loved her dearly but I guess you cannot have everything you want in life.

I took some time off from the practise. I asked Dr Sibiya to fill in for me for a few months. He works in a private hospital and this will make him extra money.

I really need to unwind. The only perfect place to do so is in Venda. I want the peace and quiet. I want to be as far away from Ria as possible. Maybe she will stop messing with my head every minute of the day.

Joseph organised for me to volunteer in the village Clinic that Ria was complaining about. The head nurse is excited to receive me so I will be helping out for a month or so.

Luvhengo has been apologising day after day about the stunt she pulled at the launch. She is just too late to apologise. In fact, I have moved on from that. Ria doesn't want anything to do with me and my family, so it is too late for Luvhengo to apologise.

I didn't tell my parents that I will be in Venda for a month or so, but I have to get a day to visit my mother. She emphasised on how much she really needs to see me and talk to me. I wonder what it is all about but she has been nagging me to sit down with her.

My luggage is already in the boot. It is a Saturday afternoon and I am ready to go. I walk around the house switching off the plugs. Afterwards, I drive to The Fields to see Rotshi and to leave a parcel with her.

"Do you really have to go?" She asks. I am parked outside and she standing by the car.

"It is for the best, but I am only gone for a few months." I say.

"And Ria...have you tried calling her?" she asks.

"Always, she blocked me."

“She blocked my numbers too and she hangs up whenever she hears my voice.”

“She just wants to forget everything. Let her be.”

“Remind me not to fall in love...I will do well with just a Diiii, I don't want my heart pierced like this.”

“Don't be silly. Your life will not be as complicated as mine.” I say while walking to the boot to pick the shopping bag with the books inside.

“You got me a present?” she asks and I laugh. Why would I buy her a gift randomly?

“It's for Ria...give it to her friend to pass it to her. She is going to need these for school.”

“Yooh, she is one lucky girl.” She says while taking the shopping bag.

“I promised to get her the books...and she doesn't have anyone to take care of her, atleast your father buys you books that you sell for cash.”

“A girl gat to hustle. I should send him a list of books to buy this semester...including three to sell.”

“I trust you to do that.” I say. I reach to hug her and then jump inside the car.

“Don't worry I will keep an eye on Ria. No man will come close to her.”

“Stay away from her. Let her live her life in peace. We have complicated her life enough.” I say. I do hope she comes back to me but I can't force it on her. Blocking my and Rotshi's number is a message enough.

I drive out of Pretoria with the thoughts of her. This could have been our first road trip. I can just imagine her resting her feet on the dash board. Her pretty face filled with a beautiful smile. If only!

Driving a long distance is what needed. I get to Joseph's house just five hours later. He is chilling with his two friends.

“Hey Dr Ratshali.” He says when I walk to where they are seated. He stands from his seat and shows me to sit. He passes me a Heineken and I take it. I am tired but a few bottles won't hurt. It is scorching hot and something to quench the thirst is necessary.

The guys are talking about a soccer match. It always gets personal when these guys talk about the favourite teams. I am a soccer fan, but I don't let it get to me like it does my uncle here.

"Enough about soccer...my man here needs a woman." Joseph drops the bomb and they all turn to me.

"Easy, easy stuff my man...I can hook you up right now." Mpho says. He looks sleepy. He is drunk.

"Relax, I don't need no woman." I say.

"You need sex. The salt is all over your head." Joseph says and they all laugh. "No wonder they say you are weak. A man needs some fixing, my guy."

Really? Joseph, really?

"I can call some women to come, NOW!" Mpho says.

"No thanks. Guys I just got here...can I breathe a little?"

"Can I breathe a little? He is weak this one. He will just die of salt when there are generous women out there." Joseph adds.

I have turned into a laughing stock. I don't have a come-back response so I just sit and drink from the bottle. I think this guys are way too drunk for my liking.

"My man, I can organise you fast. Thick thighs...small waist...anything my man." Mpho insist. I can't help but imagine the woman he is describing. I smile. A smile is enough for him to pick his phone and starts dialling a number.

"That won't be necessary. Dude, drop that call." I say and they all laugh. I look like a fool right now.

"Hey mabebeza, are you still with Linda and Shudu? Ahhhhaaa...good...come over here at Joseph's house. We are chilling here so you can come over. Don't leave Linda behind." He says and I shake my head. He puts his phone back into the pocket and they all laugh.

Are we not too old for these? I wish I could just walk away but they will confirm my weakness and I will not hear the end of it.

"You will see what we are talking about." The other guy says. He looks younger than Joseph and Mpho.

We continue arguing about soccer until a white polo parks next to my car. I watch as the three ladies parade to where we are sitting.

"The golden girls." Mpho says.

"Hai sukha!" one girl says and give him a kiss. I take it she is the girlfriend.

“Go get more chairs in the garage.” Joseph says to the younger guy who is now smoking. He passes the smoke to Mpho and hurry to fetch the chairs. He comes back and place the chairs next to me.

He had to put the chairs next to me.

“Ladies, would you like something to drink?” Joseph asks.

“Rudzi, please bring our cooler bag from the boot.” Mpho’s girl says while handing the younger guy the car keys. He rushes to the car and comes back with a heavy cooler box.

“Look like you guys were having more fun than us.” Joseph says and they laugh.

“My guy! This is my woman Lutendo, that is Shudu and the single one is Linda over there.” He says. Linda is exactly what he was describing earlier. She is tall, with those thick thighs, curves and a tiny waist.

“The single one? Heee Mpho!” Linda says while laughing. She has dimples.

“Don’t be shy about it. That one is also single.” Mpho says and she turns to look at me. I see her smile, showing off her deep dimples.

“I am not single. I am engaged.” I say.

“Engaged by culture. By the way Linda, he is the prince.” Joseph says and I laugh.

“Oh...the prince. So he is your brother’s son?” She asks. Joseph stands from his seat and walks straight to me.

“You can have as many royal mistresses as you want.” He whispers to me and walk away laughing.

Another Royal Mistress. Joseph takes things really lightly.

I just got here people. I know my reason to be here is to forget about Ria, but not like this. I never in my wildest thoughts, thought I will arrive in Venda to be arranged to sleep with a beautiful woman. All I need right now is just a call from Ria to say she is ready to elope with me and my life will be complete.

“I asked you what your name is.” She asks, bringing me back from my thoughts. I was not paying attention.

“Mulatshawe.” I say.

“I like it.” she says.

"Thanks." I don't like small talks. I have never been a fan.

Joseph puts on the music and came back dancing. The guys are dancing and I am irritated. I had a long trip and taking a long shower sounds like a good idea right now. I gulp the rest of the beer from the bottle and walk to the house.

Damn! My things are in the car. Going outside to get my luggage will just give them room to make more noise to me.

I walk to the kitchen to grab something to eat. I hope I get something around here. Joseph hardly buys groceries.

"You disappeared." Linda says from the door.

"Oh, I need to grab something to eat." I say.

"Let me help you." she says walking towards me.

"Nah, I'm good."

"I insist. Sit down Mr Prince." She says while walking past me and straight to the fridge. She does know her way around this kitchen. She pulls the cheese, ham and butter and place them on the kitchen counter. She picks the bread from the bin and fix me a sandwich.

Shouldn't this be Ria doing this for me?

"So what do you do?" she asks while putting the plate in front of me.

"I am a doctor." I say and she gasp.

"Wow, I have always wanted to be a doctor but at least being a nurse is close, right?"

"You are a nurse?"

"Yes, I am a nurse." She shows off her dimples and it makes me smile.

"Ahhhh, this is so beautiful...you two are already bonding."

"Shut up Joseph."

Joseph passes us and walks to the pantry and comes back with packets of snacks. He picks a bowl from the cupboard and start mixing the snacks.

"So where do you work, Dr Mula?" she asks with a dimple smile. I smile. I don't mean to smile but the dimples just makes her look cute, like a baby.

"Ohh, he will be working with you guys for a little while." Joseph shoots.

“Where? Zwisimani Clinic? Hell no.” she gasp with misbelief and excitement in her face. She composes herself and smile again.

“Royal mistress number two.” Joseph whispers to my ear and walk away whistling.

INSERT 26

RIALIVHUWA

It has been two weeks since the break-up and I am not taking it too well. I want to but my heart wants Mula. If only there was another way out of this situation. Any other way than eloping. I am in love with Mula but packing my bags and running away with him? I don't think so. What if he leaves me in the middle of nowhere? What if he falls out of love with me while we are in the middle of a foreign country or something. I still needed to trust him but how do I trust a man who started off by lies.

I have been thinking a lot about him and temptations to call him were starting to overpower me. I had to block his and Rotshi's number so I keep sane. I had to delete their numbers and try to start over.

Erasing his number was the best idea because I didn't want him to think that I don't know what I want. Honestly, I am not too sure what I want exactly. I want to be with him but I don't want to elope. I don't want to complicate his family matters. He is from the royal house for crying out loud. I wish to forget about him and start over.

Today is Zoleka's birthday so I am making her pancakes for breakfast. I made sure I sneak in the kitchen without making noise and prepare the pancakes with coffee. I love eggs and bacon and she loves pancakes, so today we are having her favourite for breakfast.

She is still sleeping so I slowly and quietly push the door, walk in and sit by her bedside.

"Happy birthday my sweetie." I say and she smiles before opening her eyes. "I made you breakfast."

"Cupcakes!! Thank you Ria." She says while sitting up. "And a candle on top?"

"I promise to get you a slice of cake at McD cafe."

"Don't be silly. This is perfect."

"Okay, okay make a wish and then blow the candle."

"I wish for a man. Any man."

"Zoleka you know you are not supposed to say it out loud for it to come true."

"Oh please!"

"You will find someone who will love you dearly."

"Like Mula does you."

"You don't have to bring him up." I say standing up from the bed.

"Come back and sit down." She says. "My Dad sent me money last night so that I can take myself out for my birthday. He knows how miserable I am, sooooo me and you are going out tonight."

"Hmmm, where are we going?"

"Somewhere classy. I want to eat good food. Three course meal and then we can dance all night. Where should we go?"

"Lets go try The Times Square's Altitudes. I heard it is not bad at all."

"The Altitudes it is."

Zoleka eats her breakfast while I invade her closet. I have to get something sexy to wear. My friend here buy clothes every month. Her father spoils her with money to fill the void in her life. It is too sad that her family doesn't want her too close. They are fine with her here in Pretoria and them in Johannesburg. I just get worried when she gets her episodes when I am not home. We don't close the bedroom doors for incase she gets a nightmare and needs someone to shake her out of her sleep. Things are now better though.

I find a white top that still has a tag on. I will pair it with a skinny jean I love and a good pair of stilettos.

It is a Saturday so we are allowed to lazy around. We are watching movies when we hear a knock. I glance at Zoleka and she shrugs. We are both not expecting anyone for a visit. I rush to open the door.

"What do you want here?" I sigh.

"Oh Rotshi. Come in." Zoleka says from behind me. She shifts me and unlock the door for her.

"Happy birthday Zo." She says while hugging her.

So they are friends now.

"Thank you. Please join us later for my birthday dinner."

Is Zoleka for real? She knows I want nothing to do with Rotshidzwa and her brother.

"I am on my way to somewhere. I will be back on Monday."

"You are always galavanting wena Rotshi." Zoleka says and Rotshi sticks her tongue out while walking to sit on my favourite couch. I wish I was so care-free like her. I throw myself on the couch and focus on the TV.

"Ria, I was asked to drop this to you. Mula says you need this for school."

She hands me a shopping bag full of books and I fold my arms. I don't know if I should appreciate the gesture and take the books.

"Take the damn books Ria and stop sulking." Zoleka snaps while taking the books from Rotshi. She walks to my seat and place the shopping bag on my lap. These are all the books I was supposed to buy.

"Please excuse me." I say rushing to my bedroom to get my phone from the charger. I pick my phone and log on myunisa to check my student account. He told me he will pay the fees and then buy the books.

"Ahh Mula, you didn't have to." I whisper. He paid for my semester like he promised before the break-up.

I walk back to the living room.

"Rotshi please tell Mula I will pay him back for..."

"Did he ask you to pay him? Haaaaai man Ria." Zoleka snaps.

"Maybe you should just accept that the guy loves you. I have never seen him like this. And allow him to be." Rotshi says.

I am rocking my new top from Zoleka's closet. I am glad she decided to take us out. I am glad Rotshi was unable to join us. Now I can be myself with my friend.

We pick the chairs outside and order the cocktails. It is crowded already. It is a little dark but still early for loud music so the music is playing softly in the background. Today I decided to wear my only long wig. Zoleka helped me plait my hair underneath and now I look like a million dollar.

"So when are you going to ask your crush out?"

“What? Akukho lula ukuthola indoda uma ufana nami.” She says.

“Come on... just ask him out and see what he says.”

“So that he runs away when I start shaking at night?” She says and i choke on my drink.

“Don't look now but Mula's fiancée is walking in with a man.” I say. She turns to their direction.

“What thee???” She gasp. “Is she even human?”

“Oh No...oh No... they are coming this way.” I am trying to keep my cool but I am panicking.

“Relax, she wont recognize you. You look too different.” She says. My heart is beating fast.

They grab the seats right behind me. I am super scared and curious at the same time. I wonder who the guy is if she is supposed to be engaged to Mula. The waitress walks to them to take the order.

“I think we should go.” I whisper.

“We have to find out who he is first.” She whisper back. She stands from her seat and walk closer to my ear. “Okay eavesdrop on them. I will disappear for a little while.”

“Are you crazy?”

“We can't swap seats. Relax, I will be back.”

Zoleka disappears on me leaving me sweating on my own. I am wearing a long weave but I am still uncomfortable. I take a deep breath and sip from my cocktail. Whatever I do, I should not dare turn my back. I quickly grab my phone and pretend to be busy chatting on it.

“I don't know what is taking you so long to make this guy fall for you.” The guy says.

“He wants nothing to do with me. He is not at his apartment and he has not been at work for a week now. His father says he is not home either.”

“So he just disappeared?”

“I don't know.”

“We are so close to the goal and you are messing up everything.” The guy says.

“Look, I am trying here. I cant make him love me.”

“Who does not want your booty?”

“What booty coz you don’t want me to sleep with him and make him go crazy.”

“Dare sleep with him and I will kill you with my own fingers. I can’t be sleeping with you and that stupid guy.” The guy says coldly.

“Relax, he is not my type.”

“Hurry this thing up so we finalize that deal.” He says.

What the hell are these people on about?

I take a sip of my cocktail and fix my wig. I am trying to b normal.

“I was thinking of going to the royal house. Let me try dig for the maps.”

“I like that.” The guy says. “What is more important is to get as much information about the land as possible. Once the King is convinced about the new mall, the guys will start digging.”

“This is becoming exhausting.”

“You know very well that the damn King wants his son to take over him next year when he marries you, it will only be easier then. Your father mentioned that that old piece of rubbish doesn’t want to do any business anymore, he wants that boy to inherit everything.”

“I will try to get him to love me.”

“He has got to marry you...make sure.”

“Fine.” She shoots. “Where the hell are the drinks when you need one?”

I am shaking from my seat. I am tempted to turn back but I cannot afford to.

Where is Zoleka now?

I try to act as normal as possible, sipping on my cocktail and trying to move my body with the rhythm of the soft music. I can’t even dance to save my own life. I see Zoleka standing by the bar so I wink at her and she comes to me. I don’t want to talk so I mouthed to her that we have got to go. She picks her purse from the table and leave the money under the cocktail glass. I pick my clutch bag and we parade out as normal as we could be.

“Why are you shaking?” We were now out of their sight. I am rushing to the escalators as fast as possible.

“They are plotting against Mula and his family.”

“What do you mean they are plotting against Mula and his family?” She asks following me behind.

“I have to find him... Zoleka I have to find Mula. ”

INSERT 27

MULATSHAWE

My voluntary job starts at 08:00 so I have enough time for coffee and some morning news. I am up very early every day. If I was in Pretoria, I would have been at gym now. I thought about jogging but it is already hot at 6:00 am.

I really miss Ria and I don't know if coming here is still such a great idea. Maybe I should have stayed in Pretoria and fight some more. I am really confused. This love thing is not for me.

Linda has been on my face all night on Saturday. Why couldn't this be Ria? Linda knew from the second she met me that I am engaged to my destined princess but she is keen to make me fall in love with her. She is so cute with her deep dimples and she always parades whenever she walks in front of me. Thank God I didn't have a condom on Saturday night, or else I would have fallen into her temptation. She might be sexually thirty as I am and I am really tempted.

Joseph walks into the kitchen while tying his tie. He is suited and ready to tackle the world. Joseph works for his brother, my father. He manages many of the businesses and his job entails taking care of almost everything. He is my advisor but he is not doing great with that. All he does best is bring me fresh thighs. Saturday it was Linda, and yesterday on Sunday it was another girl. I am really old for such. If he could make efforts to bring Ria into my life, I would muxh appreciate.

"I will be gone for a week. Your father and I are attending some business workshops in Polokwane." He says.

"Good luck." I would suffocate spending a week with my own father. I am glad he is going away. I will obviously visit my mother during the week before he returns from his business trip.

"Dude, my phone doesn't work in your house...what's wrong with the network?"

"You use a poor network...so you have got to go up a little hill to make a phone call or receive one. My phone works perfectly."

"Dude this is not a joke."

"Why do you need your phone anyway, didn't you say you are taking a break from the city and everything in it?" That's true but what if Ria calls. I still have that little hope but my heart is open for disappointments.

I have my cup of coffee with so many thoughts of her. How I dearly miss her and her beautiful self. She was just perfect for me. I want to keep her in my heart but I think I should just let go of her. She is messing with my head and I cannot even move on. I even felt guilty for allowing Linda to dance for me on Saturday. I don't even know what Ria is busy with wherever she is, but I just feel guilty.

"Ready for the day?" Joseph asks.

"Yep...I haven't been to work for a week already. It feels like a decade."

"Good thing you have Linda to show you around." he says and I laugh. "She is already falling for you."

I finish my breakfast and head down to the Valley. I drive past the dusty hall where I met Ria during the community meeting. She was so brave that day and I knew I want such a woman in my life. One who can stand for what she believes in. After driving past the hall, I turn to the dusty clinic. Now I know why Ria was so worked up. This place is falling apart.

There are a few patients already lining up outside the gate. I park my car, pick my briefcase and walk to the little reception room.

There is no one behind the reception desk so I stand there, trying to look around for a nurse or just anyone. I hear the noise from the other room just opposite the reception.

"A hot sexy doctor? Oh Thank God...No guys, don't get me wrong. I loved Dr Smith...he was a wonderful doctor. But we need some young blood...we need some sexy and hotness around here. Mind you, the only guys we see around here are going around wearing overalls." One voice says and I laugh. They really need some sexy and hotness around here.

"You will love him but keep away because he is mine." A familiar voice says. Who else if not Linda?

"I'm happy that someone thinks I could make a sexy hot doctor." I say while walking to the door and they all turn to me. I see panic in all of their faces except Linda's. "Can I please see Sister Elsie?"

"Uhm...yes of course." Linda says while walking towards me. She has her famed hypnotic smile on. She leads the way down the passage. She is parading in front of me and I cannot help but watch. We reach the end of the passage and she knocks on the door. She opens the door and an old woman is sitting behind the desk. She is wearing an old pair of spectacles and a white doctor's coat.

"You must be Dr Ratshali." she says while walking towards me.

"Yes and you must be Sister Elsie." I say while shaking her hand.

"We have a lot of work to do around here as you can see."

"Of course." I say while grabbing the chair. "I am ready for the challenge."

Linda walks out of the door. I hope she is the professional type that doesn't bring personal lives to work or else we will have a serious problem. Sister Elsie highlights me about the clinic and what I will be assisting her with. Apparently Linda is the oldest nurse who has been struggling with the clinic for years. The rest of the young nurses are new.

Sister Elsie showed me my office. Just a little room with an old table, a chair and a patient's bed. I will have to make it work with the little equipment I brought from the medical practice.

I get to my little office and put on my coat. I make myself comfortable before receiving the first patient.

There is a soft knock on the door.

"Come in." I say and the door slowly opens. Linda walks in with a tray on her hand. She is wearing a navy blue pencil dress that shapes her perfect body with black platform sandals. Her curves and thick thighs are showing as she walks inside. Oh Lord, Why is she tempting me?

"I was asked to bring you a cup of coffee by Sister Elsie." she says while placing the tray on the table.

"You shouldn't have."

"Oh please, we are blessed to have you here...no one wants to work here with us." She says with her perfect smile.

"I am glad to be here."

She walks out of the office and brings the first patient. It is really hard to work with limited resources. I manage to assist as many patients as I could until noon. Linda comes back to the office just after two o'clock, with two food take-away boxes.

"Hey I thought I should bring you food...and I don't mind joining you." She says while grabbing the seat opposite to mine. She likes being in control.

"I usually eat when I get home."

"Now I am convinced to take good care of you Dr Mula because you don't know how to take care of yourself." She passes me the take-away box.

"Thank you." I take a spoonful of pap and gravy. She got a chicken stew and pap.

"What time are you hoping to finish today? I can't seem to find my wallet. I want to look for it at Joseph's house."

"Oh, you do?" I laugh and she gives me a seductive smile. This woman wants my attention it is not even funny. "I am serious Mula. I can't find my wallet."

We eat our lunch over funny conversations about this small clinic and the village. She is also interested in the royal family you would swear she wants to be one of them. If only she knew the trouble we go through. I am also so tempted to ask if she knew Rialivhuwa, but I thought maybe not. Let me leave Ria out of this and let her live in peace wherever she is.

My last patient leaves the office at 17h30 and I am ready to hit a long shower and lazy around the evening. I walk to the reception to find Linda sitting with the security guard.

"Finally." She says while standing up and reaching for her handbag. "I thought we were going to sleep here."

"Oh, not really." I say and walk to the car. She jumps on the passenger seat and I drive to Joseph's house. It is really awkward in the car. I know she wants more than just her wallet in Joseph's room and I will surely give it to her.

We get to the house and she hurries to the kitchen while I hurry to Joseph's room. I am sure I can get a pack of condoms, in case I need it for the fun we might have. I get just one from the drawer and slide it in my pocket. I might need it.

I fold my shirt while switching on the television. I can smell the onion in the kitchen so I guess dinner will be ready soon.

I am watching the news when Linda walks to my couch. She has a glass of wine in her hand and her shoes are off. She jumps to the two seater that I am sitting on and curl her body around me.

"I can't seem to hold myself Mula. I am so horny from this wine." She whisper while biting her lower lip. My heart starts raising and in no minute I have my palm sweat. Good thing I am armed for war in my pocket. She breathe heavily while moving her body closer to mine. I pull her body and let her rest on my palm. I start kissing her aggressively while rubbing her warm thighs. I want her body right now. She responds to my aggressive kisses and starts unbuttoning my shirt. She is doing it as

fast as she could and I am helping her also. She pulls the shirt off my body and throw it on the floor. We suddenly stop when we hear the bell.

Damn! Damn! Damn! Some people got no timing.

Linda jumps off of me with a chuckle. The person by the door seem impatient since they are ringing the bell endlessly.

"I will get the door." She says while fixing her dress and the hair. She picks my shirt and throws it to me with a mischievous smile.

She walks away from my sight and I stand from the couch to put on the shirt.

"What are you doing here? Where is my uncle?" A familiar voice says.

"I am here with Mula." Linda responds.

"What are you doing here with Mula?"

Rotshidwa?

I hear a few footsteps match to the living room. I try to button my shirt as fast as I could but the visitors walk on me while I am still busy fumbling with the shirt.

"Ria?...Rotshi?" I say in shock. What on earth are they doing here on a Monday evening? Ria glance at me with saddened eyes. She trace my hands on my buttons and then turn to Linda who has her hands on her waist. Linda is barefooted while I am standing in the middle of the room with my half buttoned shirt. Everything about me and Linda is just wrong.

"We came here...uhm...to talk to you." Ria softly says with her eyes on the floor.

"We didn't know you were busy."

"No...no...we are not busy here." I say and Linda clears her throat with her hands on her waist still.

"We surely were busy here, Mula." Linda coldly says and disappointment dawns Ria's face.

INSERT 28

RIALIVHUWA

This is extremely awkward. This moment remind me of the day I walked into Joshua and his side chick. I opened the bedroom door to find her on top of him, all naked. He had her on top. That was one thing he never allowed me to do and I was used to it that way. He told me he wants to take control always. He was my first and I knew nothing much while he was a master of it all. It broke me to see him betray me with another woman, allowing her to do the very same thing he condemned me of doing. She was a thick light skinned girl who was the total opposite of me. I am a size 32 and she was three sizes up.

Today feels like that day again, except Mula has all the rights to be with this woman. We broke up weeks ago. She is also thick and the total opposite of me.

I wish to walk away and run-away from all this but I am exhausted from all the running. Instead of rushing out of the room, I burry myself on the couch far from everyone. Rotshi is standing next to Mula's woman with her hands crossed on her chest. On the other hand, the lady has her hands on her waist. Mula is standing in the middle of the room.

"Ria, this meant nothing...it meant nothing at all."

"What meant nothing? The fact that you were rubbing on my thighs and were ready to thrash me?" the woman shoots with anger in her voice.

"Me and you meant nothing Linda..." Mula raises his voice.

"That is not how it looked like five minutes ago." she also raises her voice at him.

Why did I have to meet Mula and fall in love with him? He is surrounded by drama it is not even funny.

"Listen, I came here because I have something important to tell you...you guys can carry on with what you want to do later." I don't mean what I am saying.

"No, no Ria...it was all a mistake...believe me."

"Mistake my foot." She shouts.

"You are getting into my nerves weee Linda. Please get your stuff, I am taking you home." Rotshi says. The Linda lady turns to Rotshi with a disgusted look. Rotshi is tiny and it is funny how she is commanding a giant of a woman in front of her.

“Mula will take me home.” She says without moving.

“Mula is not going anywhere, he has things to fix with his woman...you are going home.” She says and pushes Linda from where she is standing.

“Rotshi...stop.” I say.

“No Ria, you and Mula are going to fix things while me and Linda drive around this village until she shows me where her damn house is.” Rotshi says and I smile. I admire her stubbornness but it will get her in trouble someday.

“I am not going anywhere. Mula will take me home.”

“Linda, just leave.” Mula shouts with frustration.

“No, you don’t get to make me feel like a whore just because they caught you in this. Tell me you were not groaning helplessly because you were enjoying me on top of you?” she says and I stand from the couch. I am not going to sit here and pretend I am fine with all this. I walk out of house and Mula follows behind me.

“Ria...stop!” he says and I continue walking until I get outside the gate. I am not running away, I just need to breathe. He jumps into his car and turns on the engine. He reversed out of the gate, park beside the road and walk up to me.

“I will never raise my voice on you ever again, but GET IN THAT CAR RIGHT NOW!” he shouts and I fold my arms in disbelief. “GET IN THAT DAMN CAR RIGHT RIA.”

I turn and jump into the passenger seat. He also jumps in the driver’s seat and drive away fast. He is not playing any music and there is silence in the car. I should have sent him an SMS and stay in Pretoria than to be dealing with this drama.

“I am not here to judge you.” I try to say and he keeps his eyes on the road. “Mula, I am not here to judge you or...”

“Can you please shut up?” he asks calmly and continue driving up the hill. It takes us 15 minutes for him to stop at something that looks like a farm. It is a little dark outside but he jumps out of the car and open the gate. As he is busy pushing an old gate, he is joined by an elderly man who seem excited to see him. They stand there laughing and talking for a little while until he comes back to the car. He drives in and the old man closes the gate behind us. He parks the car and asks me to join him.

“Wow, this is so beautiful.” I whisper to myself as I follow him to where he is standing. We are on top of the little hill that I always admired from down the valley. It is the chief’s farm. Most of the villagers work here to help feed their families.

"Do you know how frustrated I am right now?" he asks coldly. Why is he turning everything on me now?

"How much are you frustrated?" I ask. He asked me if I know, and I don't.

"You still have to ask." he says and laugh sarcastically.

"Like I said, I am not going to judge you. You have all the rights to be rubbing your woman's thighs right now and I apologise for coming at a wrong time."

"She is not my woman."

"Then why were you rubbing on her thighs and allowing her on top of you? You were busy moaning and groaning to the pleasure she was giving you."

"Uhm...it was a mistake Ria."

"It is never a mistake to bring a woman in a house and start allowing her to get on top of you. Even worse to moooaannn and groooaannn to her pleasure. Plus it takes a lot of thoughts to allow a woman to get on top of you and getting her to do the things she was doing." My voice is breaking. I know I am letting the anger I have for Joshua on him. I am not sorry that I am shouting at him because I still have feelings for him and he should have waited a little longer to make sure we are really over.

"I am sorry. I just had a moment of weakness." He says. At least he is being honest. "I haven't moved on from us but I didn't know if you were ever going to allow me in your life again and when I didn't get the answer to that, I thought screw it, I have nothing to lose. I feel nothing for her, believe me."

"It's fine Mula."

"It is not fine. I should have waited a little longer."

"Damn right you should have waited....but she is too pretty."

"Not like you are." He says.

"Yea right."

"I still want to be with you and I want us to leave here with a solution. It is either you are with me or not and stop messing with my head. I cannot for a day go without thinking about you. I can't fall asleep without you playing in my head. Be with me Ria or walk away from my life so I continue to screw up. If I don't have you then I have nothing to lose if I screw up in life." he says and I keep quiet. I have nothing to say to him. I understand his frustration. On Saturday night I learnt how much he possibly loves me to not even notice a goddess of a woman trying to make

him fall in love with her. His destined princess is too beautiful, but he doesn't see that because of me.

We stand in silence, admiring the villages beneath us. I look at the direction of my house. I wish to visit my little brothers but I cannot. It is still early to walk to my step-mother and reason with her.

"I have been trying to call you." I say. I want to get done with this. "I couldn't get hold of you and when I spoke to Rotshi, she insisted I come here with her."

"I am glad you came." He clears the lump on his throat.

"I think your fiancée is plotting against you and your family." I say and see his face change. He looks confused. "I was out with Zoleka on Saturday evening and we saw her with a man that looked like her boyfriend...no, he is her boyfriend for sure and he was insisting she falls in love with you so that they can finalise the deal. I didn't hear what the deal is about but it involves you marrying her since you are going to take over your father's businesses."

"I am going to take over my father's businesses? I am not taking over his businesses. I am a doctor."

"It seems your father doesn't want to do business anymore, he is waiting for you to inherit everything when you get married."

"It doesn't make sense. How can I inherit my father's businesses if he is still alive?" he asks.

"I don't know."

I watch as he tries to make up answers to his own questions.

"Please come with me." we hurry to the car and he drives us out of the farm to down the valley. He is speaking to himself, trying to make sense of all these news. We drive for a good 30 minutes until he turns to the royal house. I have never been here before. He parks the car in a drive way and hurries to the front door. He turns when he notices that I am not behind him.

"Come, let's go." He says after opening the passengers' door.

"No, I can't come in there. It would be disrespectful."

"My father is not here and the helpers mind their own businesses."

I jump out of the car and follow him inside. This is a real royal house with everything close to gold and blue inside. He leads me to a huge living room and tells

me he will ask someone to bring me something to eat. He turns the television on and hurries to look for his mother somewhere in this mansion.

An old lady comes to the room with a tray of food. I am even ashamed to be served by someone older than my step-mother. She places the food on the table and walks out of the room without saying anything. I make myself a cup of tea and have it with a chocolate chip muffin.

The house is quiet and I can hear Mula raise his voice. I can't hear what he is talking about. I am bothered because he hardly raises his voice except for today. He has never let out his frustrations on anyone before. A woman has her voice raised and that should be the mother.

But why are they raising voices at each other now? Is it about me sitting here in the royal house?

I am thinking of walking away, but who will open the gates for me without a remote?

Mula what did you get me into?

Minutes later, Mula's mother walks to the living room in her white satin gown. Her eyes are puffy from crying. I don't know what to do, this is the queen standing in front of me, wiping her eyes and blowing her nose.

I quickly stand from my seat and keep my eyes on the floor.

"Please sit down." She asks calmly and I sit down slowly. "You must be Rialivhuwa."

"Yes ma'am." I say softly. I have been hurt enough, she can't afford to add on the pain. I am making a silent prayer to have Mula walk in the room any second.

I need some rescuing.

"I am sorry about what my husband did to you the other day." she says and I gasp. The queen of my land is apologising to me for what the chief did to me?

"It...uhm...no...it is fine." I struggle to tell her not to worry about it. I am over it now.

"Please take care of my son?" she asks and keep her eyes on me.

What does she mean I should take care of her son? What happened upstairs?

"I don't know what you mean. What is going on?"

“Please take care of him. He needs you.”

INSERT 29

MULATSHAWE

Damn! I fell asleep in my clothes. The conversation with my mother blew me over and I did not even want to face Ria as vulnerable as I was.

It is already bright outside so I sway my eyes to the watch on the wall and it is just after 06:00. I jump out of bed and hurry to look for Ria in one of the three guest rooms in the house.

I knock and open the two guest rooms and in both of them, there is no evidence of a visitor. She is not in the two guest rooms upstairs so I hurry down the stairs to knock on the last one in the house. I do not hear an answer so I try to open the door. It is locked.

“Ria, babe, are you in there?” I ask and I get no response. After a few seconds the door opens slowly. I widely open it to see her turn to the bed in a shirt. She throws herself on the bed and cover her face with a pillow. I close the door and jump on the bed next to her.

“Good morning...how did you sleep?” I ask and she uncovers her face.

“I didn’t sleep inwi Mula...how was I going to sleep? I am in the royal house for God’s sake. Where were you? I was worried about you. What is going on?”

“Don’t worry about me...I will tell you everything after work.” I say.

I wish I was staying in the house with her but I have got to work. I know I am not getting paid but I promised to render my services and I can never go against my word. I also don’t allow my personal problems to interfere with work.

“I heard you are helping at the clinic in my village.”

“I remember someone asking for help and I thought I give it a try while I take a break from the city.”

“Thank you.”

“Your people should be proud of you for voicing your concerns...that clinic needs some serious work.” I say and she smiles.

“Please drop me at that other house...Rotshi said we will sleep in your uncle’s house. I can’t be here.”

“Rotshi is here. I saw her car on the driveway...plus my mother will never allow you to sneak out with me.”

“What do you expect me to do around here?” She asks in panic.

“Stay in bed and lock the door...go help my mother in the garden....go shopping with Rotshi. Do whatever you want to do. My mother won't mind and I told you the helpers mind only their businesses.”

I try to kiss her but she sway her head away. I am aware that I still have to work on the trust issues after that episode with Linda. Just thinking about how Linda will be all over my face in the clinic already gives me a headache.

I plant a kiss on Ria's forehead and hurry to take a shower. Thank God I have something decent to wear in the closet, I won't have to drive to Joseph's house. I turn on the water and jump inside the cold shower. I bath while humming my song. At the end of a song, I close my eyes as the water pierce my body, allowing me to drift away to the conversation I had with my mother the previous evening. I never imagined a day I would appreciate my father for all the things he had done for me. Last night had been an eye opener for me and I have nothing else to do but to honour him. I don't know how but I will find a way to make everything work for all of us, Ria included. It now also makes sense why I am different from Rotshi and my little brother Mukundi. I am the total opposite of my father and the rest of my family.

“Are you going to tell me why I am supposed to inherit my father's businesses while he is still alive?” I asked my mother the minute I walked into her bedroom last night. She had just finished taking her evening bath. She was sitting on the bed when she allowed me in her room. I repeated the question a few times until she gave in and asked me to sit next to her.

“Who told you about that?” she calmly asked. I was hoping for her to be shocked from the news I was bringing to the table but she seemed to be aware of it.

“Rialivhuwa is here...all the way from Pretoria to tell me she overheard Luvhengo and some guy plotting against us. Apparently she wants to get married to me because I am going to inherit my father's business as soon as the wedding takes place.”

“I knew there was something wrong with that girl. I knew it.” she muttered under her breath.

“We will get to her plots but first, tell me why am I inheriting everything when he is still alive?” I asked and she ignored me. I raised my voice after asking the same

question a few more times and she stood up from the bed and walk around the room. "Why am I inheriting the businesses when baba is still alive?"

"Because he is dying...okay? Because your father is dying...he is dying and there is nothing I can do." she screamed with tears falling down her cheeks. This is the first time I see my mother break down in front of me. But what does she mean my father is dying?

"What do you mean he is dying?" I asked. I don't care that he is dying. He lived his life to control me since I was born. I don't really care if he dies, I am only worried about my mother and how she will cope after his death. They love each other dearly and I cannot imagine her without him.

"He has a brain tumour."

"Why don't I know about this? Didn't you take me to medical school so that I can take care of things like these?"

"He didn't want you to know. He still doesn't want you to know."

"When did they diagnose him?" I asked.

"It has been two years since the diagnosis."

"Two years mother and you didn't tell me about this? How can you be so careless about this? How are you going to live without him if he dies?" I raised my voice and she cried. I could see the panic in her eyes.

"He didn't want you to know and now I am worried that things are getting out of hand. He gets tired easily. He is struggling with his vision these days."

"Did he go for any treatments?"

"Uhm...the tumour is located on one of the main veins of the brain, the surgeon could only remove part of it...and your father got tired of all the surgeries, he gave up...and now he wants to die once everything is running smoothly." She said while shaking.

"Okay, I will see what to do to help him with the treatment...and I don't have to marry Luvhengo for me to inherit everything." I said.

"Mula...can you please do this one thing for him before he dies? You owe it to him."

"No I don't owe it to him. I have my own life to live." I say.

“Please son...I don't approve of this marriage but you have got to do this. You just have to watch out. Just watch your back. You will divorce after this but just do this one thing for him to die in peace.”

“Why, why are you agreeing to this when you know I deeply love Ria?”

“Because if you walk out of this, then everything will be on Mukundi's shoulders and your father is worried that he is not old enough...at least he had time to groom you.”

“How so? Isn't it that if I surrender the chieftaincy then Joseph can take over?”

“Not when the royal blood is still alive...and Mukundi is the first royal blood and...”

“The first royal blood?” I asked. “What do you mean the first royal blood? If I am the first born, then how is Mukundi the first royal blood?”

The water is starting to dig deep down my skin so I turn it off and shake the thoughts of the heavy evening away. I get dressed, grab a quick breakfast and drive down to the dusty clinic.

Linda is already at work when I got to my office. I asked for someone else to assist me except her and my day is going perfectly. She avoided me the whole day and I am totally fine with that.

After work I hurry home to be with my family and my woman. I wonder what they got up to all day. Knowing how shy Ria is, I bet she spent her day in the guest room watching TV.

Rotshi's car is not on the drive way when I get home. She is obviously out with Ria. I get to the house to find Ria seated with my mother in the living room. What a beautiful surprise. My mother and Ria are genuinely smiling and my heart warms up to the sight of them in smiles.

“Looks like I am disturbing something here.” I say as I walk to sit on an occasional chair next to my mother.

“Not at all...I was about to water my flowers.” My mother says while standing from her chair. She looks much better than the previous evening.

I glance at Ria to see her smiling all alone. It makes me happy to see these two women happy.

“Your mother told me everything.” She says.

“Everything? Including what I have got to do for my father and Mukundi?”

“It is not going to be easy but I will stand by your side.” She says and I feel like jumping. I walk up to her and help her stand.

“Thank you Ria.” I say. “I don’t even have a plan but I owe everything to my father and it is really an honour to have you by my side. It is going to be tougher than the pain you went through previously but I promise to be by your side and you will always be loved by me. No matter what.”

She lets me in her embrace and allow me to breathe out the stress and frustration I have. Just what I needed. What more can I ask for than having her by my side as I embark in this painful journey?

This is going to be a tough road to embark on.

INSERT 30

RIALIVHUWA

I just got myself deeper and deeper into this. I am assigned with the toughest job in the world. To keep a royal family's secret.

Mula looks excited about having me in his life but he doesn't know what I am getting myself into. This time I let my heart decide for me. I just hope that things goes well for us.

I am waiting for Rotshi to come back from Thohoyandou so that we could leave to her uncle's house. It is amazing here and the Queen told me to be myself, but where do I start to be myself? Be myself in my boyfriend's parents' house. Never!

I am sitting by the balcony with a magazine after lunch. It is Wednesday and today I helped with the breakfast and lunch. I could not watch the elderly women serve me food while I have my legs crossed all day. The balcony of the living room upstairs has the view of the garden. The flower garden is where Mula's mother spends most of her day. She either has her afternoon tea there or she is maintaining it. She is such a beautiful and a humble woman.

My phone beeps and I take it out from my pocket. It is nothing but a reminder that I need to charge it. It is as good as dead so I switch it off to stop it from annoying me with the beeping sounds. I will charge it later so I put it back in the pocket.

I still can't believe the story Mula's mother told me about where she comes from with her husband. She told me in confidence so I have no choice but to die with this secret. Mr Ratshali is not Mula's father. No one in the family knows except him and his wife. Mrs Ratshali told Mula and I on Monday evening.

I despised Mr Ratshali a few weeks ago but finding out the truth about the family secret warmed my heart and opened it for forgiveness. I can easily forgive him for humiliating me and regarding me as mere girl who is after his son's money.

Mula's mother was born in Liatsha Village and when she was 21 years, she was arranged to be married by a prince from another village not so far from hers. The news about the arranged marriage came out when she was deeply in love with one of the commoners, Tshamano. This man was also from Liatsha Village but worked as one of the protectors of Thavhakhulu royal family. His duty was to protect Mr Ratshali and Joseph from the enemies. It was years when Mr Ratshali's father was

chief and he was just a prince. During those years, royal feuds and politics were famous. It was rumoured that people were plotting against Thavhakhulu's chief and protection had to be tightened. Mr Ratshali and Tshamano became very close during that year. From morning until sunset, Mr Ratshali was surrounded by his protector Tshamano. It was then where Tshamano shared about the love of his life. His love for his woman was forbidden as he was just a commoner and she was a princess to the ruling Chief of Liatsha Village. Tshamano spoke about his woman and the love he had for her day and night. Just a few months later, Tshamano broke down in front of Mr Ratshali telling him that he found out his girlfriend was pregnant. She was just three weeks pregnant. He broke down with excitement and Mr Ratshali was touched by how deeply the man adored his forbidden family. He also started helping him to save little money so they could run away once the pregnancy starts showing. Things didn't go according to plan. A feud erupted between the Thavhakhulu royal family and their rivalry, fighting for the land and rulership. That is when Mr Ratshali was held hostage but saved by Tshamano. That same day was the very last day he set his eyes on him. He was declared dead after taking the bullets for Mr Ratshali, trying to help him escape from the captors. Tshamano saved Mr Ratshali's life with his own. That became a burden on Mr Ratshali's shoulders. A burden to make sure Tshamano's girlfriend and child are protected. He knew how ruthless the royal family could be because he was also from one. He knew for sure they were going to kill the baby once it was born. The baby would have been considered a curse and a disappointment. Mr Ratshali then insisted that his family marry for him a princess from Liatsha Village. That way he would be able to take care of her and stage her pregnancy as his.

I shed a tear when Mula's mother told me all this. If it wasn't for that man who humiliated me in front of people, Mula would have been dead. He would have been killed on the day he was born.

I still can't believe that Mr Ratshali lived his whole life to protect Mula from the truth and from his own family. Certain family members once suspected the boy looked nothing like his father but Mr Ratshali kept fighting until they believed he looked exactly like him. He kept Mula away from family rituals so they could not pick it up that he is not a Ratshali blood. He did all of that because he was honouring the man who saved his only life. He started falling in love with his wife a few years later. He saw the exact beauty that Tshamano preached about. She was a very humble woman who was also beautiful. They became inseparable ever since.

I page through the magazine while sipping the iced tea. I feel a little sleepy. Maybe it is this heat. I place the magazine on the table beside me, rest my head on the chair and drift slowly to a quick nap. I am softly drifting into a sleep when I hear the gate close.

Yoh! I shouldn't have closed my eyes. Mr Ratshali is standing in the middle of the drive way, with his hands on his waist and his face straight up to the balcony. He searches for his spectacles from his pocket. He puts them on and shoot his eyes back to the balcony. His eyes meet mine and I quickly stand from the shock.

He calls for his wife while rushing inside the house.

Oh No!

I can't run downstairs to the guestroom because I will meet him in the staircase. I have got to hide or I will get myself lashed. Mula is still at work and there is still two hours before he gets here. Rotshi is out and the helpers mind their own businesses.

There is no way I going to stand Musanda Ratshali's wrath. Not after the episode we had at the launch. I quickly rush to Mula's room and lock the door. I take the key from the door and stand in the middle of the room. I am terrified and trembling from the sound of his angry voice. Maybe I shouldn't have ran away, but that was the only thing my brain told me to do.

"Where the hell are you?" I hear him yell. "What on earth are you doing in my house?"

Where is the queen when I need her the most? It is her fault that I am stuck here. She insisted I stay because Musanda will only be home on Friday. Mula also insisted I stay so that I am closer to him while he keeps an eye on his mother.

Where is the Queen? Oh, I just remembered. She asked one of the drivers to drive her down to the plant land to get more flowers for her garden. My phone is dead in my pocket.

I hear him struggle with Mula's door.

"What a blasphemy? Huh?" he shouts from behind the door. "Come out now."

There is no way I am going to come out of this room with him ready to attack me.

"Someone bring me the spare keys to Mula's room now. Bring it now." He yells and I hear one of the helpers lets him know she received the request.

Okay, I am defeated. It is either I walk out of this door or he walks in this room. I slowly open the door with my eyes on the floor.

"You are such a disrespecting child." He says when I step out. I am expecting a clap or something worse.

"Musanda, I apologise for being here."

“Didn’t I tell you to stay away from my family? Who let you in?” he asks.

“Yes Sir, I am from around and I came here to apologise for the disappointment and the shame I brought to your family.” I lie. There is no way I am going to tell him I have been white sheeting in his guest room and feasting on his food since Monday.

“Where are you from?” he asks.

“Zwisimani valley.”

“I never want to see you...uhm...I never...I never want to see you here ever again.” He stutters. He is struggling with the words. Musanda Ratshali never stammers. I am getting curious at this behaviour so I raise my eyes a little and notice he is struggling to keep his eyes open. He keeps closing and opening his eyes.

“Sir, are you well?”

“GUARD! GUARD!” he roars from the top of his voice. His voice is trembling yet intimidating. A guy comes running up the stairs. The same guy who held Mulatshawe the day of the launch.

“Musanda, are you well?” he asks while helping him to walk to the living room.

“Take that girl out of my house and drive her to her father compound at Zwisimani Valley and tell him if she ever sets her foot in my house, I will have his family banished from my village.” He says and the guard walks to me. He pierces me with a look and I get the message. I stride down the staircase to the guest room. I pick my bag which was already packed. I hear him give one of the helpers a message to attend to the chief and then lead the way to the drive way.

He opens the door for me and I jump in. I have no idea where I am going to end up. It is either to my father’s house where I am not welcomed or to Tshilidzi’s house who won’t mind to accommodate me. Well, Tshilidzi’s house is out of the question as I don’t want to complicate my relationship with Mula. I have no choice but to go home.

“Uhm...Sir...I was wondering if you could drop me at Thohoyandou or anywhere where I can catch a taxi to there.”

“I get the orders from the chief, not from you.” He says with his eyes on the road. He turns to the main road to Zwisimani.

“Sir, please...I don’t want...”

“Either you direct me to your father’s compound or we will return to the chief for more instructions.”

I can't go back to face Musanda Ratshali. My phone is dead I can't even call Mula or Rotshi to come and save me. He drives into the village and stops at an intersection. He glance at me from the rear-view mirror.

"Left...the blue house on the right." I say and wipe the sweat on my forehead.

He parks outside the gate. I can see my twin brothers playing under the avocado tree while my step-mother is hanging the laundry. He opens my door and leads the way to where my step-mother is now standing with her hands on her waist. I am following him with my eyes tracing my feet.

"Hee Nnda!" The guard greets.

"Aa!"

"Am I at the right house? I was sent to bring this girl home."

"Well...you are at the right house." she responds. She is playing a little nice today.

"I have a message for her father."

"Heeee! Didn't she tell you my husband is no-more? You can give me the message."

"The chief of Thavhakhulu sent a warning to her. She is no longer allowed in the royal house or else she and your family will be banished from the village."

"Yooowee!!!" she starts screaming. Her famous behaviour.

"Please, calm down." The guard says.

"This child wants me dead. You people don't know, this child wants me dead. What were you doing at the royal house? You want to bring shame to this family? Huh? So the trouble you caused for me before you ran away was not enough?" she yells for everyone to hear. I am tempted to roll my eyes but I don't.

"Please, keep an eye on her or else you will be banished from the village." He says and walks away. He shouldn't have left because I am not ready for the yelling and the swearing.

"Helllaa...what business do you have in the royal house? Ohhh I see, this is your little scam to have me banished with my children so that you can sell your father's house. Yoweeeeee!!!" she continues screaming, walking around the yard with her hands on the head.

INSERT 31

MULATSHAWE

Things are starting to look a little better around here at the clinic. I am taking care of the patients while Sister Elsie is running prenatal and postpartum check-ups, as well as baby vaccinations. In a week's time things will be a little better. I made a few calls to some of my doctor friends to lend a hand and it looks promising.

I like it here. If it wasn't for making money to have a best life for me and my Ria, I would stay here and help out as much as I could. Maybe I should just come down here one week a month to check on things and ensure that things run smoothly.

I am busy with a patient when my phone beeps. I know it is an SMS from Ria because I have personalised her ringtone and everything related to her cell number. I smile because I know she is just thinking about me as much as I am thinking about her. She has brought so much joy in my life and I will make sure to make her happy too. It is unfortunate that our relationship is dragged into family complications but I am excited she agreed to walk beside me.

"Please take this card to the nurses at the reception desk and they will give you the medicine." I say to the young girl who has been coughing the moment she got here. I examined her and there is nothing much to worry about. It is just a dry cough from the dust and after a few cough syrups, she should be fine. She picks her clinic card and walks out of the room.

I have a minute before another patient walks in so I quickly call Ria.

"Hi Mula."

"Thinking about me my princess?" I ask and she chuckles.

"Look, I am home."

"Pretoria?" I didn't understand. She told me she is not allowed in her father's house so the only home she has is her flat in Pretoria.

"No here in Zwisimani. Your father is back so I had to go."

"You had to go?"

"It would have been disrespectful to be there when he is there." She says and I doubt her words.

A patient knocks on the door and open. I allow him to take a seat while I finish with the call.

"How is it there...is your mother not giving you trouble? I can pick you up after work and book you into a lodge."

"No. I can handle my step-mom. Let me spend the day with my little brothers but I will have to leave for Pretoria tomorrow morning."

"Alright. I will call you later."

I am uneasy about this. I know my father might have hurt her once again. My anger is starting to build up at the thought of him throwing her out of the palace. She can't live to be humiliated again. I shake the thought away when my patient cleared his throat in front of me. I turn my focus back to work. I will deal with everything when I get home.

Once the last patient of the day left the office, I followed behind. I could not stay a minute longer. I hurry to my car and dial Ria's number.

"Hey Mula." She says in her sweet voice.

"Are you alright?" I ask.

"Yeah...what's up?"

"Did my father throw you out of the house...I don't understand how you got there."

"No, he asked me nicely to leave and asked his guard to drop me here." she says. I want to believe her but I am failing to.

I drive home with Ria on the speaker. She has to leave for Pretoria the next day. She has to go back and start studying for her semester. I wish she could stay a little longer but I can't keep her here and allow her to deal with my problems. I hang up just after parking next to my father's car.

There are two old men sitting in the living room. It is my father's uncle and I am not familiar with the other man. I greet them while sitting down just to show respect. It seems like there are some issues to solve. I am not looking forward if it involves me. Family meetings bore me.

"It has been a while since I have seen you Malume." I say to my father's uncle.

"Yes, if it wasn't for your father fainting again, I would have been herding my cows right now. It is always better when I do it myself." He says.

My father fainting? I jump from the seat and hurry to my parents' room. I knock on the door a few times and open without getting a response. It is not like my parents will be having sex now. I walk in and my father is sitting on the bed with his back rested on the headboard, with the support of the pillows. My mother is sitting on the chair beside the bed.

"What happened here?" I ask.

"He had an epilepsy episode a few hours ago." My mother says.

"Is it bad? What is he taking to control the seizures?" I ask and my mother picks a bottle of pills and hand me. "AED's, okay this should work."

"Only if he keeps taking them. He doesn't care about medication."

"Murunwa, I take my medication." My father says with a hoarse voice. He clears his throat and repeats his word. He looks fine, just a little drained.

"Are you going to tell me why you don't want to go for radiation or chemo?" I ask and my mother walks out of the room. I take it she is exhausted from all this. She is afraid to lose him and he has made up his mind about giving up on surgeries.

"I am tired of those doctors opening up my skull. I don't even trust this white medicine." He says disgustedly and I sit on the edge of the bed.

"You are being selfish for not wanting to get better. What is Mma going to do without you?"

"I have lived my life for her, the whole 30 years, she knows it, and now it's time for her to allow me to do what I want with my life."

"You are so selfish, you know that?" I say and he laughs.

"I am selfish? After living my life for you and the rest of the family. All the things I had to do. You mother told me you now know the truth. Who is selfish between you and I? I lived my life protecting you and now I am asking for a little favour but you don't even want to honour me."

"Well...because I am in love. Tell me you have never been in love?"

"What do you know? I was in love. Everyone warned me but did I listen? I only listened when I got my mother killed."

"What do you mean?"

"I was stubborn just like you. I was in love deeply and I refused to marry my destined princess then. It was before your mother came in the picture. I went on and

brought this girl into the family. I was in love with an enemy who was sent here to kill me and my father who was the chief. My mother ate the food that was meant for me and lost her life instantly."

"No Ria is not like that."

"Why is she forcing to be in your life?"

"No, she is not forcing me...she is not forcing to be in my life."

"Where did you meet?"

"At the restaurant in Pretoria the time you were there...before the engagement."

"And you find it to be a coincident that she is from a village just beneath the palace? Wake up...we have rivalries all over this place. You know nothing."

"No, not Ria."

"That is exactly what I thought about Mulondi. She was as beautiful as that little girl that you think you love."

Is that even possible? What about fate? There is no way she could be after me for other things other than love.

"How are so sure that Luvhengo is so right for me?" I ask. He is so fond of her and doesn't know she has her own agendas.

"We marry from the family we know. The people we know very well. Whoever started with this arranged marriage beliefs knew what they were doing. It keeps you away from marrying the enemy."

"What if I tell you that the same family you are marrying me a wife from is plotting against us?"

"Who told you?" he asked with a raised eyebrow. I hesitate to say because he won't even believe. "I asked you, who told you they are plotting against us?"

"Well...Ria overheard Luvhengo...she is sure of what she heard and she was here to warn me." I say and he laughs until a cough stopped him.

"You must be very stupid for a doctor...so you are telling me the same woman who you met in Pretoria but is born in Zwisimani valley, came all the way to tell you she overheard your fiancée plotting against us? You must be very stupid Mulatshawe Ratshali."

He is just messing with my head. There is no way Ria is capable of harming anyone. No!

"It could be true that they are plotting against us." I say.

"And what if she is making it up so you leave Luvhengo and be with her? Come on, we grew up bad mouthing other guys so that their women could leave them for us."

"No, Ria can never do what you are saying."

"Go downstairs and ask my uncle what kind of a woman was Mulondi. We are talking about an angel walking on earth. Ask him how she was and how she killed my mother. You are a man just like me. A beauty of a woman can make you lose your mind in a flash and you end up doing things that don't even make sense. Ask me, I let a woman kill my mother in her own house."

He is messing with my head. I feel a knot deep down my stomach. I am now starting to reflect on the first day I met her. I might be missing something here, or not.

I was in the gents' room alone and she walked in. Why would they send a waitress to the men's room when there are waiters?

When I wanted to pay for the drink she gave me, they told me it was her last day. What if she never worked in that restaurant?

Our first encounter was just awkward, I agree.

I met her again here in Zwisimani valley at that community meeting. Did she know I was going to be at that meeting? Maybe she stood up to raise her concerns so that I notice her. She then showed up at my office when she was stranded.

Everything is just a little blur.

"I said, go and ask my uncle who killed his sister?" my father brings me back from my thoughts.

This is messing with my head. I don't want to allow myself to believe a bit about this theory. But what if there is more to this?

She is perfect. She is an angel. Could she be faking this to get to me and my family?

"Ria?" I gasp.

INSERT 32

LUVHENGO

I just landed from a mini vacation by myself. Exactly what I needed after the whole wearing drama a few weeks ago. I was in Cape Town for a few days and I managed to go down to a spa, dine by myself and slept a whole lot. I needed to unwind. I wanted to regain my strength. I also managed to look around the boutiques at Canal Walk Mall. Maybe I can get a space and squeeze in my boutique there. There is always room to expand my business and the money is there for any expansions.

I am not looking forward to get home. My life has turned into a bore. All I do now is run after Mulatshawe and his father. It is becoming tedious but it is one task I have to fulfil.

AB sent a driver to pick me up at the airport. I take it he is busy with other means of making money. We have been together for so many years but I can't seem to figure out what drives him to thirst for so much money. It is him, his two brothers and friends. They hustle for money and will never rest until they have enough to buy a country. I mean, AB can afford anything we want, but he will never rest until he has more than ample. With all the glam and glitters, I still curse the day I met him.

The driver drops me home and I parade to the door pulling one of three luggage bags I took to Cape Town. The drivers follows with the rest of the bags and place them by the door. It is a Sunday afternoon and our helper is in the kitchen. She comes three times a week and only on weekends when we host parties. I wonder what she is doing here on a Sunday.

"Afternoon ma'am." She greets when I walk into the kitchen.

"What are you doing here?"

"Mr Abednego requested that I help prepare for the dinner with his brothers."

"They are coming here? For dinner?"

"I believe so."

I roll my eyes. These two brothers are not my favorite. I leave for my bedroom. I booked an early flight which got delayed by two hours and right now I feel like a nap. I woke up too early.

I change into PJs and snuggle with my pillow inside the duvet. I am only woken up hours later when the door opens. I can hear AB walking around the room, trying to

be as quiet as he could be. He knows better that I am a light sleeper. I open my eyes and watch as he put on a golf-shirt. He still has the six-pack and the muscles I drooled over years ago, but now it does nothing but disgust me. I use to love his dark chocolate skin but right now it turns me off. The sound of his voice even makes me sick but I am imprisoned. I have nowhere to run to.

“Oh, you are up?” he says, walks to me and kiss me on the lips; and goes back to stand in front of a mirror.

“What time is it?” I ask while pulling myself to sit.

“Just after five. Maxwell and Bako are coming later for dinner.” He advises. I wish I could tell him to keep his brothers away from my house, but I would only dare to say that if I want to die a slow death.

“Am I joining them?”

“Of course. We have to discuss this Venda thing. If you were doing your job well, we would have been digging up by now.”

If I were doing my job well? That job entails making a man fall for me without seducing him. All I need is to walk around him naked and he would lose his mind in a split second. But I am not allowed to do so because the monster here is covetous.

AB leaves the room and I jump into a shower for a quick one. I pick a black long dress to wear afterwards. AB prefers me on clothes that don't show my figure and booty when his brothers are here. He doesn't want to tell me the reasons so I just abide.

The two brothers arrive an hour after my shower. The helper is gone and I am left to host the three men I detest with my whole being.

Bako is loud and annoying, while Maxwell is quiet and reserved. AB is the oldest, followed by Bako and Maxwell is the youngest and the master mind to most of their deals. I am warming the food in the kitchen but can still hear their conversation. The conversation is meant for me to hear judging by how loud they are.

“So how far? We are ready to dig.” Bako asks. AB glance at me from his seat and shakes his head. He is easily gesturing that I am the one delaying the whole process. I am faraway from him but I can see the displeasure in his face.

“We are getting closer.” AB says.

“What are we still waiting for?” Bako asks.

“Have they at least approved the erection of the mall?” Maxwell shoots in.

“Nothing yet.”

“What are we waiting for?”

“Just some logistics. Don’t stress, Luu is working on it.”

I take the bowls of food to the dining area.

“We will be doomed if they soon find out that they are living on top of a diamond mine...and once they find out they will never allow us to do business there.”

“Luvhengo is leaving for Venda tomorrow, right love?” he asks with his brutal eyes on me. I have no other choice but to agree. I was not planning on going there but my road leads to Venda tomorrow.

I dish for all of them and only sit when they start eating. I don’t want to be here. My phone vibrates on top of the table and everyone glance at the screen. It is Mr Ratshali calling. I pick the phone and hurry to the bedroom.

“Ndi madekwana...Good evening.” I say while closing the door. I don’t want him to hear the voices of the men in the house.

“Hello.” He says. He doesn’t sound as excited. “I have been looking for you all week.”

“I was away on a vacation...after that hectic emotional launch, I thought I needed to unwind.”

“What is this I hear about you plotting against my family?” he says and I choke on my own saliva. Where the hell did he get that from?

“What...what plot? Musanda you are speaking to Luvhengo, Mula’s fiancée.” I say, pretending to be confused.

“I know who I am talking to.”

“I don’t know what you talking about...who is spreading such stories about me?”

“That Mula’s girlfriend...apparently she overheard you while discussing the plots with some foreign looking man...I am starting to worry.” He says and I fake a laugh. I am sweating under this black dress I am wearing.

“Only if it was someone else. How could you believe her?”

“I don’t...but I just have this...this uncertainty.”

“Don’t worry yourself. I am just doing what I am destined to be. I am destined to be the princess of Thavhakhulu and not everyone is excited about that. And Musanda, before you go, I was thinking of coming to visit you tomorrow. I have a week to spare.”

“That will be nice. Mula is also here. He is working at a small clinic around here.”

“That is wonderful.”

I make sure I chit chat with him before he hangs up. Just to shift his mind away from the plot issue and get him to trust me again. This Mula’s girl is crossing the line now.

After the call I throw the phone on the bed. She is getting in the way and she will get hurt. I walk to the bathroom to splash my face with water. This mission can’t go wrong. AB walks into the bathroom and find me panicking.

“We have to go to Pretoria.” I whisper.

“What’s going on?”

I share with him about the news I received from the Chief. We are not safe anymore. Not at all. AB walks to the closet while I call Lufuno to get me that girl’s number. She surely still have it somewhere since she hired her to waitress in my damn launch. Lufuno promise to send me the number in a short while. I had to lie about why I needed the number. AB comes from the closet with his loaded gun.

“Get me my gun silencer in the drawer!” he orders.

“What? What gun silencer? We are just going to scare her.”

“Get me the damn silencer.” He hisses and I hurry to pick the silencer from the drawer. I give it to him.

He shove the silencer in a pocket of the jacket he is now wearing and place the gun on the back of his jeans. He walks out of the room without saying anything. I know he is pissed. He always doesn’t want people standing in the way of his accomplishments.

I don’t want him to kill her, he just needs to scare her a little. But AB is capable of anything. He has killed a number of people with me forced to watch.

He gets in the car and I jump in the passenger’s seat.

“Where is she?”

“I am still tracing her number.” I show him the little device they use to track people with their cellnumbers. AB once showed me how it operates.

“I want her out of the way and afterwards you are doing your job.”

“Yes...yes.”

We got the location so we park outside the flat. It is busy outside with people going in and out of some shopping Centre, “Barclays square” it reads. I am still praying that he doesn’t kill her but just scare her with the gun, but he doesn’t just take a silencer for nothing.

“Give me that and stay in the car.”

“You don’t even know her...let me come in with you.” I want to reason with him. Maybe he won’t finish her up.

He sees a young boy tagging into the flat and he hurries before the gate closes. I follow behind. We try to be as normal as everyone who is going in and out of the elevator.

“The stairs.” He says and leads the way. I am sweating and trying to be calm at the same time. I pose a smile to everyone I meet in the way. The tracker starts beeping when we are on the fourth floor. I am already breathing heavy. I am fit but the panic is taking its toll on me.

“That flat over there.” I say and he turns towards the door. All the other doors are closed and the burglar doors are locked, including the one in front of us. AB looks around for anyone, then grabs the gun from his back, plugs the silencer and shoot on the burglar door lock. He shoots twice until it opens. The gun is silent but the lock made a concerning sound. He looks around for any watchers but there is none.

Mula’s girl opens the door to find her nightmare standing in front of her. She might have heard the noise from the burglar door. AB pushes her inside with his finger on the mouth, signaling her to not make noise.

She falls on the ground and her friend jumps up from the couch in shock. I close the door behind us.

“Which one is it?” AB asks and I point at her on the ground. He cocks the gun on her face and whisper for her to stand up.

“Please...please don’t shoot.” The friend says with tears running down her face.

“Shut up. We are not here for you.” AB says and she moans with her hands shaking covering her mouth.

“What is your name?” AB asks Mula’s girl.

“Ria...Rialivhuwa.” She says in between the sobs.

“Ria. So you are the one who told the chief about our plan?”

“No...no... it is...not me.” She fumbles with the words.

“Okay then...are you the one having an affair with the prince?” he asks and she trembles. I don’t like the sight of this. My heart is pumping out of my chest. AB has a cocked gun on her face. One mistake it goes off. I pray she doesn’t move or do anything stupid.

“Uhm...no.” she says and drops her eyes to the ground.

“No, look at me. I want you to see me when I take your life.”

“Please...please...don’t shoot.” She begs with her eyes back on AB. Tears are streaming down her face like a cascade.

“You are standing in my way, did you know that?”

“No...please...I will never...”

“Shhhhhh!” He hisses. “I want to make millions in those villages. They are sitting on top of diamond and they know nothing about it...and you know what? It all belongs to me. All I want is my diamonds but you little girl are standing in my way.”

“AB, please babe.” I am starting to panic.

He turns and points the gun to me and I startle, then he turns back to Ria who is now bawling. In just a second after his turn back to Ria, I hear the tiny sound of the silenced gun.

INSERT 33

MULATSHAWE

This is so unlike Ria unless we are back to square one. It could be that she decided to leave me again. We call each other daily and before bed we chat until one falls to sleep. It is already noon and we haven't spoken since last night. I know I have been a little cold towards her because of the unknown. I refused to let my father's theory get to me but I wish I knew the truth. I tried to hide my concerns from her. I don't have the guts to question her but I wish she could come clean if there is more to our relationship. She loves me and I love her as well. I have seen her genuine smile and how she looks at me. If there is something more, we can deal with it together.

Linda has been giving me a cold shoulder since the day Ria arrived. Perfect. I am glad there is no drama. I have enough issues to deal with.

It has been a hectic today at work. It is a hectic day today but I work perfectly under pressure.

After work I get home to my mother picking some mint leaves from her kitchen garden. She is going to brew us a minty ice cold drink. I used to love her drinks when growing up. My father is watching her and also reading the newspaper. He is doing much better than the week before. I am still inculcating in him the idea of radiation to destroy the tumour in his brain. He is not having it. The old man is just ready to die but he is just been stubborn. He can still live more years with just medication.

The whole of last week I have been working with some guy I was linked to by one of my friends, Innocent. The guy used to be a private investigator, but is now retired to start his own investigation company. His name is Jacob. I requested him to dig any dirt on Luvhengo. I was concerned about how she makes the money she has. I also wanted to figure out what could be the plot that Ria advised about.

According to the records, Luvhengo owns two expensive boutiques and a Salon & Spa. Also, she is a partner to her father's logistic company which is doing quite well. She partners with the Smiths & Devan Enterprises Pty Ltd. They are a group of company that is owned by Daniel Smith, Nicolet Devan and Abednego Eze. They deal with franchises of most restaurants across the country. To my surprise, all businesses are legit and are also complying with the regulations of the country. She should be a hustler. I stopped the guy from sending me the bank account balances. I

don't want to see all the monies she owns. A trace was done for this Abednego Eze. He is also clean. He is a South African citizen, born and raised in Soweto by his Nigerian mother with two other brothers. His brothers' partners in a construction firm that tenders to build malls and all other sorts of infrastructures.

I am trying to put the puzzle together. What deals was Ria talking about? It could have been that she overheard them talking about doing business with my family. Nothing is making sense. S & D group is worth billions and they do business all over the world.

I feel a little bad for judging Luvhengo because of her hustle. How cold could I be to doubt that a young black woman could be making her own millions? What a mentality. Young black girls making the waves and partnering in multi-million businesses seem impossible to the eye of the public.

Jacob was also following Luvhengo in and out of her estate. She drives in and out of the estate alone and hangs with her friends most of the days. Jacob picked up that she was in Cape Town and his associate followed her around. She was alone all the days in Cape Town. No sign of a man around her. Jacob's associate also sneaked into the hotel and pose as a cleaner for a few days. She stayed alone in the hotel room and dined alone. With all that, I called the job off on Sunday afternoon. It was when Jacob reported that she was picked from the OR Tambo by Uber. At that last report I called the operation off. I am just stressing myself. I should start working on how I am going to marry her so the old man can die in peace but make Ria happy on the side. She agreed to walk with me in this journey after all.

"Luvhengo is on her way here." My father says.

"Why? What's up?"

"She is just visiting. You should be nice to her." My father says.

Whatever!

I leave for my room. I try Ria's number once more and it is still off. This is not sitting well on me. Should I be worried? Yes! I should be very worried.

I call Thato's number. He and the wife stay in Pretoria. Thato is the only one who can help since Vuyo's wife is related to Luvhengo.

"Hey dude...how is it going down there in Venda?" Thato asks.

"Can you please do me a favour?" I just want to get down to business.

"Anything."

“I have been calling Rialivhuwa and her phone is off since last night. It is so unlike her. Can you please go check out what could be the problem? Her flat is in Sunnyside, next to Barclays Square.”

“Eish man...I can't. I am grounded. Sara found some exotic photos of some chick on my phone and she dared me to go out today...and I know when she gives me a dare, things might get out of hand.”

“Please man...let me talk to her so she can let you go...you can even go there with her.”

“Are you crazy? She will think I asked you to call. What did you do? Maybe your woman is just angry at you for nothing. You know how this women are sometimes?”

“No man...not this time.”

Rotshi is still enjoying being spoiled by her father. Her classes are only starting next week so she is still here.

If Ria doesn't switch on her phone, I am driving to Pretoria tomorrow. I need to find out what is going on.

The next day I wake up to no SMS or a missed call. This worries me. I jump into the shower as fast as I could and prepare for my trip to Venda. I send a message to Sister Elsie to excuse me for a day or two and then hurry to drive out of the Palace. It is 05:30 and everyone is still asleep except the helpers who are already busy around the house.

I meet Luvhengo at the drive way. She arrived last night just before dinner. We chatted a bit before I left her with my parents when I went to sleep.

“You are up early...where are you heading to?” she asks while pulling the headphones out of her ears. She is coming from a jog and her vest is wet from the sweat.

“I have to take care of something.” I say.

“What could that be?” she asks and I shake my head. I am not about to tell her I am on my way to Pretoria because I will not hear the end of it.

“I'll see you when I come back.” I say while getting into the car.

I drive straight to Pretoria. It is a Tuesday morning, so there is light traffic. I get to Pretoria at about 10am.

I wait for about 15 minutes until someone tag in and I follow behind. The door is open so I walk to find the living room empty and two guys carrying a fridge from the kitchen.

“What is going on?” I asked the two guys who are wearing overalls.

“Go knock in that room...the owner of the flat is there.” One guy say while walking out of the kitchen carrying the heavy refrigerator. The guy pointed at Zoleka’s room but I walk to Ria’s room first. The bed is neatly made, the pink curtains are closed and it is as tidy as how she always kept her room. I walk in. Her morning gown is hanging on the back of the door. I open her closet and her clothes are neatly folded.

“What are you doing here?” Zoleka asks from the door. She has her arms crossed. Her eyes are swollen like she didn’t sleep at all last night.

“I am looking for Ria.” I say and she shakes her head.

“You should have stayed away from her life from the day she found out that you were in her life to complicate it. I feel so stupid for reasoning with her to stay with you.”

“What is going on?” I am shaken. I have never spoken to Zoleka before, except for greeting her when I pick Ria up.

“You should have stayed away from her life. You are so troubled and trouble follows you wherever you turn to. She should have stayed away the day she learnt about your lies.”

“You are speaking in idioms...where is Ria and what is going on here?” I raise my voice.

“Don’t shout at me.”

“I am sorry Zoleka. Please tell me where Ria is.” I ask and she walks out of the room.

What on earth is going on here?

She shuts her door. There is no way I am going to walk into her room. That would be disrespecting.

I turn to the guys who are now collecting the boxes from the kitchen.

“Bro, tell me...where are you taking this?”

“Didn’t she say we taking this to Chiawelo?” he asks as if I know.

I rush back to Zoleka's door and bang on her door. I am calling her name out loud and she is ignoring me.

What the hell is going on?

Zoleka refuses to come out of her room so I walk to Ria's room and sit on the bed. If only Zoleka was reasoning with me. I am unsettled so I stand from the bed and walk around trying to think of the possible reason why Ria is not here and Zoleka is moving back to her parent's house. I was told that this flat belongs to Zoleka.

Did they fight?

I walk around the room and something catches my eyes. Ria's phone is lying on her pedestal next to the bed. I pick it up and switch it on. The phone is working perfectly fine.

What is going on here?

"Zoleka, what is going on? Why are you moving out when this is your flat?" I yell from her bedroom door. She opens angrily and fold her arms.

"My parents wants me home. That's why."

"Then where is Ria. Her phone has been off from Sunday and it is lying there in her room. What is going on?" I shout and she walks back to her room.

Why am I being punished?

I know I haven't been the perfect boyfriend because of the royal feuds but I would really appreciate if I am told what is going on. I would appreciate if Ria comes to my face and tell me she is fine and doesn't want to be with me ever again. I just want to know that she is fine.

Two hours later Zoleka and the guys are done cleaning up the whole flat except Ria's room. I wish I knew what is going on.

"I need to lock the flat."

"Zoleka I beg you." I beg and she doesn't even look at me.

Why is this woman so angry at me?

I turn to Ria's pedestal where I place back her phone. There is a beautiful picture of her. It feels like she has her eyes on me.

"Zoleka, please."

“I need to lock my flat.” She says walking out. She waits by the door.

I stare at the picture and close the bedroom door.

“Ria, where are you?”

INSERT 34

RIALIVHUWA

I am sitting on the bed staring at the bowl of water stationed in the middle of the room. I am supposed to take a bath but the water is freezing cold. I do not have electricity and the owner of the main house is out early today.

I am renting a back room from an old lady who lives with her two little granddaughters. There are no lights in the backroom so I warm the water to bath in the main house and make sure I get a day during the week to iron my laundry. This has become my life since the day I was almost shot.

Four months later but the events of that fateful day play in my head like it is repeating all over again. I still see the cocked gun on my face. I still hear the cup breaking into pieces when that callous guy shot at it. That was a warning enough. I literally saw the bullet pass on top of my shoulder and thereafter the cup broke behind me. He then whispered to my ear that it will be my skull that breaks next if I don't stay out of their way.

I had to leave. I had to disappear and be far from where Mula can find me. He can never find me. I should never be associated with him ever again or else I will die.

I am too young to die now.

I also had to part ways with Zoleka. I don't want to get her in the middle of my drama and I don't want to risk her life even more.

On that night, hours after Mula's fiancée and the guy left, Zoleka asked her uncle to pick us up just in case they change their minds and decide to finish me. The uncle picked us up to Soshanguve. I stayed behind the house when Zoleka went back to the flat to pack her things for Soweto two days after. I was hunting for a room to let and I got it only a week later. Zoleka's uncle insisted I stay with his family but I didn't want to be a nuisance. Zoleka has helped me enough.

This is where I ended up at. I ended up in a back room in Soshanguve. I can't go back to Venda or anywhere closer to Mula. This is far enough according to my budget.

Zoleka now stays in Arcadia. She is closer to school and now stays in a bachelor flat. She couldn't stand changing flat mates because of her nightmares.

It is either I dig into this cold water or run late for a seven o'clock bus to town. I have to register for the second semester. I did pretty well in the first semester and I am encouraged to do even better. My life depends on this degree.

I am now sitting in the full bus on its way to town. I always love to sit by the window so I can get my mind off things. The traffic is lighter than hours earlier so we are moving a little faster. The girl sitting next to me takes a magazine and place it on her lap. She zips her bag and place it on her feet. I can't help but notice the familiar man on the front page.

"May I please borrow the book when you are done reading?" I ask. She looks at me and smile. She is nice. She passes the book and takes her phone out from a pocket.

"You can read...I will read it later."

Mulatshawe Rathali, the first Prince of Thavhakhulu is on the front page. I smile at the blazer he is wearing. It is the one I picked for him when we were out shopping. He loves his royal blue blazers but this one is a maroon checked-blazer. He had to buy it because I loved it. He always chose the simple but sophisticated and I love a little catchy. Oh, how i miss a bit of him.

I page through to page 12 where his story is at. I cannot help but smile. They just re-opened the clinic last week. Mula made it possible that they renovate and enhanced the clinic. Wow, I am impressed. He mentioned he was honoring the request that was made by someone in the community who was brave enough to call out for help. He also made his engagement to his fiancée public. It is said that they are engaged but there is no news about the wedding date.

He is really doing well for himself while I am in hiding. I am hiding from him and his damn fiancée.

My phone rings in my bag and I search for it immediately. I have been applying for part-time jobs so I can't afford to miss any calls.

It is my only friend on the phone.

"Hey...how are you?"

"I am good. Are you good?" She asks. I know she has news for me. I can tell by her voice.

She tells me about her date with a new guy. She met him at a mall and hopes things goes well for her. I also hope that things goes well for her. She says she told him about the nightmares and he told her it is nothing to worry about. Normally, guys would run away but for the first time, this one told her he will walk the journey with her.

"Ria, are you pregnant?" She asks and I laugh. This is the main reason why she is calling me.

"Oh please...I have been a virgin since the days with Joshua and that is a year ago." I say with a laugh but she doesn't laugh with me. "Zoleka, what did you see in your dream?"

“Uhm...it was nothing.” She says. I know her too well. There is something.

“I am not kidding with you. What the hell did you see in your dream?” I hiss at her. She needs a little push sometimes.

“No...you were holding a small baby that brought so much joy to you.” She says.

“Well. Maybe it is your baby.” I laugh sarcastically.

“You know the dreams are never about me.”

“Then it is just void because I don’t have a boyfriend...and also for your information, I am not looking for one.”

“Yea...maybe it is void. But how are you holding up?”

“I am fine. I am a big girl, remember?”

I truly am a big girl. I think I was made to survive anything. I thought I was never going to survive living without thinking about Mula. It took me a few weeks to write him off my life. I can't live to protect someone when they don't do the same for me.

I get to school and manage to register five subjects. Afterwards I go to the tellers to pay for the minimum amount of money required to finalize my registration.

“Hi, please tell me how much I need to pay to finalize my registration.” I ask while taking my bank card from the wallet. I have about R 11 000 left from the money I fought for with my step-mom. I don’t know how I am going to survive without a job. Atleast Zoleka used to include me in her groceries and she never really cared if I payed rent or not. Now it is a different story. I pay for the back-room, transport to town sometimes and food.

“Well...why would you want to pay when you have a surplus on your student account?” the teller guy asks.

“No, I don’t have a surplus.”

“Yes you do.” He says while turning the computer screen to me. “See you just registered...so R 7200 was deducted from your student account...and R2800 is left.”

“When was this paid to my student account?”

“It was paid...on...the 24th. Last week.” He says.

There is no one else except Mula. He is still keeping the promise even when it is not necessary. I wish to call him to stop him from making me indebted to him. But I changed my number and no one owns it except Zoleka.

What does he want from me?

I am excited but concerned. I feel more indebted to him. Why doesn't he let me live in peace. Didn't he get a message that I don't want him in my life anymore? I don't want him to find me and he will never do.

My way back to Shosha had me think a lot about Zoleka's dream. It concerns me that most of her dreams are never void but on the other hand, there is no way I can fall pregnant. I have been hurt enough to even want to be in a relationship with anyone right now.

I get to my place. The owner is not home but her granddaughters are playing outside. They always hang around my room when the grandmother is running late from work. We are sitting outside and I am helping with their homework when the neighbor guy calls for my name.

"You are Mpho neh?" he asks and I turn to him. He is standing by the fence.

"Yes...can I help you?" I ask. I let everyone in Shosha believe my name is Mpho.

"You know I saw you once at Pretoria show grounds for Unisa exams and I thought it was not you? But I saw you earlier today at the campus again." He says.

"Yeah...I was at Unisa today."

"Then we are school mates." He says with a charming smile.

"Oh, sure." I say.

"Well...don't you think we should hang out? Today is Friday and it is my birthday. I know when it gets dark you are going to sleep. Why don't you join us for my birthday celebration with some friends at TCE...it's just a few blocks from here?" he asks.

I have never went out since the day I moved here. What I do is lock myself in my room when it gets dark and fall asleep from boredom. A few block from here doesn't sound too bad. I can always walk back home if I don't feel the vibe.

"I don't know you." I say. I don't know his name but I have seen him a million times. He drives a grey Polo Vivo and leaves the house every day at 05h30. I am always up when he leaves with his little sister. He usually come back home after 18h00 when I am sitting outside my room, waiting to go to bed.

"My name is Philani." He says.

"Okay Philani, maybe I will join you for your birthday." I say. I need a breather. I need to live a little.

"See you in an hour then."

I get into my room and pick a white jumpsuit for the night with sandals. I don't know the vibe at TCE but I feel like going all out. I miss going out and having some fun.

I sit on the bed and glance at the mirror on the wall. I don't like my new haircut but it is a better disguise than the afro that Ria confidently wore. I want to start a life as Mpho and she has short blonde hair.

I brush my hair and touch up on my make-up before it gets a little dark. The candles doesn't do justice to me.

Philani calls my name about an hour later. I am now dressed and looking dapper. I might be a little overdressed. I am used to going to Menlyn and the likes for drinks and TCE is just streets away.

"Are you pregnant?" Zoleka's voice starts ringing in my head.

I shake the thought off. I just met Philani and there is no way I am going to fall in love in hours.

The car is parked outside his gate and the music is blasting from the car.

God knows I just need some little fun. I need to live a normal life, with normal people and this is the beginning of it.

"Are you pregnant?" Zoleka's voice rings in my head once more.

I think I have thought so much about this question, it is starting to mess with my head. I am just going out for a few drinks and a chillas with other kids, and nothing else.

I get to the gate and Philani comes out of the car. He is stunned to see me. I don't know if I am charmed by that, but the look in his eyes is concerning.

"I have never seen you so beautiful."

"Please. You have never seen me."

"I see you every day. In fact, I watch you watch me every day when I go to work and when I return." He says while opening the passenger's door. That embarrasses me a little. I thought he never noticed me watching him over the white curtains in my room.

"Happy birthday by the way." I say settling in the front seat.

"This is the best birthday ever." He smiles at me before turning on the ignition.

INSERT 35

MULATSHAWE

I miss Ria. I truly do, but I have accepted the fact that she doesn't want to be in my life anymore. We spoke before she left Venda for Pretoria and I had an impression that we are on the same page. I thought we were going to walk beside each other until I untangle the mess I have in my family.

She might have gotten cold feet. But I would have appreciated her telling it to my face so I close her chapter. Now I am left to wonder why she did what she has done.

It has been a good four months and I haven't heard from her. I have tried looking around, but I failed. I sent my father's assistant to look for her at her house in Venda and they haven't heard from her since the day she left.

I just have the comfort that she is still alive. She changed her numbers but Jacob confirmed her ID is still active. She has withdrawn money a few times in Pretoria CBD.

I kind of made peace with it. She doesn't want me in her life anymore and I have to live with that. I was just fooling myself, thinking she could withstand my baggage.

Today is the second month since I am back in Pretoria full time. I was able to run with the clinic project and so many people came through to help. We managed to renovate and brought a lot of changes. I am proud at how everything turned out.

It is just after 17:00, so I am packing my things away so that I knock off. I am not coming to work tomorrow.

I get my briefcase and hung my jacket on the stand. Vuyo meets me just outside my door.

"Good thing you are still here." He says while unfolding the sleeves of his shirt.

"What's up? I am done for the day." I say. There is no one in the reception so it is confirmed, business is closed for the day.

"Thato called just now...he is calling us for a chillas in Sosha."

"Dude...you should know better. I need to sleep." I have been busy with meetings and patients' consultations all week.

"You know he said since we became doctors, we think he is too ghetto and cheap for us?"

"That's a blackmail and you know it."

“How many times have we turned down his invitations? He is always around here the East for our braais and stuff.” He says while opening the door for the both us.

“Come on...I don't feel like the Sosha vibe...plus he will be taking us to that TCE place. I have outgrown that place.”

“We used to hook up chicks there...plus you need one to get things off your miserable love life.”

I get into my car while he gets into his.

These guys enjoy going out. I feel a little grown up for such or maybe I just have a lot on my plate.

My phone rings and Thato's name flashes on my screen.

“Shoo Thato.”

“Don't even think of turning down my offer. Let's meet at LiQuid Zone tonight man. Drinks are on me. It is time you guys take off your Pretoria East snobbishness and join us in the hood.”

“Dude...I have...”

“Have another important presentation to prepare for? Come on don't spoil this for us man. This is for the old time's sake. Dube will pick you up at around 9.”

“No...no...I will drive there myself.” I say. The last time I drove with Dube I got home the following day after 8:00am. We went from one party to the next until the sun was out. If I drive there myself then I can easily sneak away when I feel like leaving.

I get home to watch the news and prepare something easy to cook. Luvhengo calls to confirm our date the following day. She invited me to her house for supper. I don't want to but I have to start warming up to her. Things have been less dramatic these past months. She is co-operating with me and that is what I need. We have decided to take things at the lowest pace. My father is glad I chose to work together with my family. On the other hand my mother is worried that Ria disappeared off the face of the earth. She blames herself for putting too much pressure on the girl with too much family secrets and expecting her to love me despite everything.

My phone has been ringing none-stop and I know the guys are already meeting up. I get myself into a pair of jeans, sneakers and a gold-shirt. It is 20h30 and I should be coming home by mid-night.

I get to Soshana just after an hour. I get to LiQuid Zone and park just across the street. I don't want people parking me in. The guys are already dancing with bottles in their hands. Thank God there are no women yet in their table. I don't like picking and choosing.

This is what we used to do when Vuyo and I were studying in Medunsa and the other guys at TUT Garankuwa. Fridays were for partying, Saturdays morning were for nursing the hang-over and then library the rest of the weekend

"Hey, you made it." Thato calls out as I am walking to them. They are surrounding the table full of booze. They are sitting outside so that they can easily pollute their lungs with cigarettes.

The crowd is still acceptable, but come mid-night, it will be overcrowded.

Thato passes me a bottle of Corona. He is excited to have us all here.

"The drinks are on me." he says and I nod my head with a laughter. He always says that and thereafter borrows money from all of us the next few days. We are used to him this way.

"Whose party is it?" I ask. Most of the people are wearing all white and there are decorations inside.

"Some local Dj and some friends." Thato says.

Okay, I think I needed this. I am so strained with work and some glitches in life but this is actually fun.

I am on my eighth bottle when I freeze in front of the guys. Vuyo shakes me.

"Dude, seems like you have seen a ghost." He says and they all laugh.

"Ria is here." I say to Vuyo.

"Ria, your afro girl?" he asks looking around for her. The girl sitting on a table in front of us is Rialivhuwa Makhado. She has short blonde hair and is wearing a short white jump suit.

I place the bottle on the table and walk up to her.

"Ria?" I ask from behind her. She turns to me and startle. She looks away, grab her bag and tries to walk away. The crowd is blocking her way so I catch up with her before she could disappear.

"Ria...we need to talk." I say from behind.

"Stay the hell away from me." she says while pushing her way out.

"No, we are going to talk." I grab her arm and she tries pushing it away.

"You are hurting me. Leave me the hell alone Mula." she says and I let go of her arm. I let her walk and I follow behind her. She is almost drunk. I can just see.

"Mpho, what is going on here?" a guy comes running. I take it, it is the date. She stops from her track and turns to the guy.

"Both of you, leave me alone." she says pointing her little cute pink-painted manicured finger at the both of us.

"What's going on here?" he asks.

We stop by the cars parked a little far from the noise. Ria angrily throws her clutch bag on the ground and breaks down. The guy watches as I rush to her. Whatever it is, I know it is my fault.

She lets me hug her while she blub with tears wetting my shirt. I love the fact that she always welcomes an embrace but I am going to see fire when she wipes the tears away.

"You can go. I will take care of her."

"Dude, I came here with her." the guy says with fear in his face.

"I have it under control now."

"I don't even know what is going on here. I brought her here and she will leave with me."

He is fair, but I won't allow him to leave with her. I am not going to allow her to run away from me again.

She is crying with the guy watching. I am squeezing her tight with each deep sob. Her heart is throbbing. I can feel it beat faster than it should.

After a little while, the sobs becomes quieter by the second and I am getting myself ready for a lash. She pulls herself out of the hug, wipes her tears with her hands and pick her clutch bag on the ground.

"Mpho, please...what on..." the guys tries to talk.

"Shut up and leave me alone. I know my way home." She says while walking away from us.

We both follow behind her.

"No Mpho...I have to take you home." The dude says. I think she told him her name is Mpho.

"Babe...please...calm down." I say and she turns to me.

"You have no right whatsoever to calm me down after all the things you made me go through. You know what you are Mula? You are childish. You are useless. And you are not the man for me. I deserve so much better than you." she has so much

anger in her face. I have seen her angry before, but his is beyond what I have seen.
“What is so special about you anyway?”

The guy gets the clue. He knows there is history between us so he had to back down on this. She is a little more than one can handle right now.

“Babe...please.”

“Don’t you dare babe me when you always fail me! My heart loves you but you are soooo stupid. You are so stupid Mula.” She says and I smile. Her heart still loves me but I am stupid. I can work on that.

“Please talk to me?”

“And say what? What are you doing here following me around anyway when your god-damn goddess of a fiancée is waiting for you?” she yells. We are getting somewhere.

“Babe, let’s go home...come with me so we could talk this through. Please.”

“No, I am not going anywhere with you.” she says while walking faster.

“Then I will walk with you until you get to where you are going.” I say and she stops as if I threatened her to.

“No, you can’t see where I live.” She says. “No, you can’t follow me.”

I convinced her to come with me instead. We are going to talk about this and if it means to stay up the whole night, let it be. I am a little tipsy but she looks better than me. I drive us out of Shoshanguve after getting us bottles of water. She asked for a black coffee too.

We get to my house after an hour of a silent journey. She didn’t want to talk to me. She kept sipping on her coffee and from the bottle of water.

I pull a shirt and sweat pants from my closet for her to change into. Her jump suit got dirty the time she broke down and her clutch bag made it worse. She closes the guest room and I get myself comfortable on the couch. I switch the TV on to keep me company while I wait for her. We are going to talk this out and settle this once and for all.

I am flipping through the channels when I notice her standing at the end of the room. She is wearing just a t-shirt.

“Ria?” I whisper. She was just standing there with one hand on her waist and the other on her forehead. “Babe, are you alright?”

“Damn right, I am fine.” She says walking to me.

“Ria, what are you doing?”

“I am not drunk. Relax.” She says while getting on top of me.

I have been waiting for this day for so long I even gave up on it. I don't know if I should be worried that she was drinking hours ago. This woman was spitting fire an hour ago.

“Are you sure?”

“If I have to die for you then it should be for the whole of you.” she is unbuttoning my golf-shirt then take it off. She unbutton my jean and slide her hand inside my boxers. “You are a doctor right? You will fix this mess tomorrow, right?”

“Uhm...yes.” the lump on my throat fails me. I sound like a wet puppy now.

She rubs on me until I cannot take it any longer. I kiss her while helping her take my jean off. I have dreamt of this day and I am not going to waste no time. I pull her shirt off to take off her underwear and she is already without one.

Oh my goodness Ria!

When the kisses are getting hotter and more aggressive, I pull her up so I can stand, throw her on the other couch so we can get to business. She pulls me down from standing.

“No, I am going to be on top.”

“You are?” I whisper.

“YES!” She whisper without a smile.

“Ria?!” I gasp reaching for her neck.

INSERT 36

RIALIVHUWA

He is moaning and groaning on my face with all the pleasure that his body is receiving from me. I have never been on top before but from his gasps and how he is holding my waist so tight, I know I am doing a good job.

I stop moving for a minute and stare deep down into his eyes. Our souls are connected and I feel like I can see through him. The love he confesses, I can feel it right now with him inside me and I on top of him.

He tries to move me but I don't let him.

"I love you." he whispers with his eyes begging me to continue what I have started.

"I know."

I move my body aggressively with my eyes fixed on his and my teeth biting my lower lip. It is nice to be in control. I slightly lift my body and continue dancing on top of him.

"Relax Ria...I am...gonna cum...before you."

"This is about you." I say while riding what belongs to me at this minute and he lets go of what he was holding inside him. He grips on my waist tight and swear under his breath with his cum.

Job done.

I feel good.

I lift my body from his and hurry to the bathroom to get myself clean. Damage control should be done tomorrow for all this mess running down my inner thighs. I glance at myself on the mirror and give myself a mischievous smile. I clean myself with a warm towel and then go back to the living room. Mula is still lying on the couch with his eyes covered by his one hand. I chuckle at the mess we made on the couch. Thank God it is leather.

"Here." I pass him the towel to clean himself up while I put on the shirt.

This is not how I imagined my night to be like. I thought I was just going to finish my six pack of Hunters Gold that Philani insisted to buy for me.

"Uhm...that was..." he doesn't finish the statement. He shakes his head and pulls me closer to him. He kisses me. "I am going to make you happy too."

"I know."

"Seems like you know everything." He leads the way to his bedroom. I had thought I was going to use the guest room.

He throws away the hundred pillows on the floor and leave just two. We get inside the duvets and cuddle.

"I am sorry for..." He tries to say. There is a lot to discuss but he is going to mess the moment. I just want to catch a breath and maybe he will return the favour.

"Shhhh! Let's sleep." I say and his hand goes over my waist.

We both drifted to sleep, but now I am waken by wet kisses on my neck.

The moment I was waiting for.

He lets me lie on my back while he gets on top of me.

"We have to make you happy too...don't we?"

"You want to try?"

"Do I want to try?" he laughs out loud, with tears almost coming out of his eyes. I like him when he is happy.

He slide his right hand under the shirt and rubs my nipple.

My boobs, my weakness!

He continues planting the kisses on my neck and then down to my boobs. His one hand is all over my body while the other is supporting the boobs that he is now sucking. My body starts to shake.

How embarrassing? In two minutes of a mere touch and my body lets go? I wanted to make him sweat a little with foreplay but my body needs his. I am already dripping underneath.

"Looks like we are ready." He chuckles.

"No, I...I am not ready."

"Let the doctor find out then." he says and move his hand down there.

"Okay No, No Doc...I am ready." I say and he laughs out loud again.

I really like it when we are happy.

"So the doctor don't have to make sure?" he asks and I shake my head. I don't want him to fish things from my honey pot. It is like a water-well down there.

He enters me. Hey, I gulp for air with a moan. It is a little painful. Nothing I can't handle though. I have dipped my finger there a few times but his thing is tearing me apart once again.

He gives me a few strokes to get me comfortable. Then he gives me a dance with a rhythm playing in his head. I take the ride. I fully take on the ride. My one hand is on my mouth to stop me from making noise. I am still a little shy.

I am about to cum and he grabs my hand from my mouth.

"Mulaaa..." I try to get my hand back but I am weakened by each move he takes inside me. My body is working against me too early.

I had no choice but to just gasp when he finally hit it.

No screaming Ria, no screaming on the first day.

He pulls out, walk out of the room and comes back with something to clean up. He puts the boxers on and wait for me to join him back in bed. We cuddle once more before falling asleep until the morning.

His alarm rings from the pedestal.

Who on earth puts a 05:00am alarm on a weekend?

I softly shake him to let him know his alarm went off but he tells me to switch it off. He gives me a weak smile and drift back to sleep.

Now I can't fall back to sleep. I have a lot of things ringing in my head. Things I don't even have solutions to. It was just four months ago when a cocked gun was pointed to my face to stay away from this guy. Seeing him last night changed the whole thing. I just needed him. I knew it the time I broke down in front of him that I need him. It is my heart that needs him.

He looks so peaceful when asleep. This is the only man that my heart longs for. He has got his weaknesses and they annoy me, but I like him still. If it wasn't for the longing heart, I would pick a stronger man any day. Maybe that is not what I am destined for. I always feel that I was made to be stronger than the most.

It is 08:30 and he is still softly snoring. I have been battling with my mind since the alarm went off.

"Mula, we need to talk." I say shaking him.

The gun chapter is messing with my head now.

"What?" he stares at me before rubbing his eyes. He pulls himself to sit with his back on the headboard. "I missed sleeping like this."

“Uhm...I need to go.” I say and he raises an eyebrow.

“No, let’s spend the day together. I will take you home tomorrow?”

“No Mula.” I say. I clear the lump on my throat. I am having cold feet all over again.

“What’s wrong?” he asks and I laugh. What is wrong? Everything is just wrong.

“I will have to go.” I say jumping out of bed. He follows me to the guest room. He pulls the jump-suit that I am putting on.

“That thing is dirty, I will get you clothes when the shops open.” He says. “Now, tell me what is going on?”

“Nothing is going on. We had fun and I need to get home now.” I say.

“Are you in a relationship with someone?” he asks with his hand on his forehead. It is starting to hit him that I might have moved on. Most people would have moved on from this messed up family of his.

“So low coming from a man who is engaged.”

“Ria? Come on.”

I sit on the bed and he sits with me. Honestly, this is hard. Loving a man who is not really yours. I just gave him my body and I complicated this mess even more.

“Let me quickly shower then I will grab you breakfast and something to wear. I will also get you...uhm...morning after pills.”

“Sure.” I whisper and he kisses me on the forehead before leaving me for a quick shower. I get to the guest bathroom and fill the bath-tub with water. I pour as much foam bath as I could. I miss this. I only take a proper bath when I visit Zoleka in her flat.

Mula left for the shops when I was chilling in the water. This will be longest bath ever.

An hour later, he comes back with a long-sleeve t-shirt dress and underwears. It is a little chilly outside. He places the breakfast on the table and gives me the pills.

I throw the pills in the clutch bag, change into clean clothes and join him for breakfast afterwards. He keeps glancing at me.

“So, who do you stay with?” he finally asks. He is dying to know.

“By myself. I am renting a place.”

“Why did you move from Zoleka’s flat? Did you guys fight?” he genuinely asks and I laugh. If only he knew the reason.

I choose to love this man with his imperfections. I choose to keep him away from the truth. I can handle it on my own and I will find a way to untangle this mess.

"She had to move back home." I lie.

"Why don't we get you a bachelor flat close to school?" he asks.

We just re-united and he is already talking about renting a flat for me. No!

"I am fine where I am. I like it there."

We finish the breakfast and I go get my clutch bag from the guest room. I shove the jumpsuit in a plastic bag and take it with me. I don't want no trace of me. I already washed the shirt I was wearing. I don't want people sniffing my perfume and calling a search party on me.

Mula gulp the juice from his glass and leads the way to the car. I get in and he drives us out of the estate.

"Please drop me at Parkview."

"What? I am taking you home."

"I don't want you to know where I stay."

"Why, why won't you want me to know where you stay?"

"Because I don't trust anyone." I say and he stops the car on the side of the road.

"Please Mula...I am not up for this."

"Ria, what do you want from me? What do you want me to do to show you that I love you?" he asks emphasising every word he is saying. Dude, you know what you are supposed to do and you cant do it. "Is this fair? This that you doing Ria, is it fair? I can't stop thinking about you. Last night was the only day I fell into a peaceful sleep because you were on my side. I am worried about you. I want to know what is going on?"

"I am fine."

"I love you Ria." He sighs. "I think it is time I break this stupid engagement."

"What? No...No...Mula No." I say and he raise his eyebrow. They spared my life four months ago, they will not spare it again.

"I don't know what to do." he says throwing his hands in the air.

"Do as I tell you. Drop me at Parkview."

"If I don't drop you home you will disappear on me. I know you will." He sadly says. This touched my heart.

"I won't disappear." I say.

"Okay thank you."

"Don't tell anybody...Mula don't tell anyone that you found me."

"Why not?"

"Because I am the mistress here." I raise my voice.

"No...Ria come on...you are not..."

"Will you ever shut up?" I shout.

He doesn't understand. I want to be with him but I am scared. I can't tell him the truth because I don't trust anyone yet, not even him.

"Okay?"

"Don't tell Rotshi, your mom, your best friend, your uncle. Don't tell anyone that you found me and I was in your house." I say.

"Okay?"

"I am the mistress here...I am a fucken mistress here and you don't go around telling everybody about the things you do with your damn side chick."

He wants to tell me I am not a mistress but I raise my hand to stop him.

What am I if I am not allowed to be with him?

He turns the engine on and drops me at the taxis by Parkview Shopping Centre.

I might have deeply hurt him with words but I am also hurting here.

INSERT 37

MULATSHAWE

I am starting to believe that karma got my address right. All those tears that those other women shed when I was hurting them are coming back to haunt me. I had a few women falling deeply in love with me while I was just pushing life then. Their tears were not in vain. Karma is dealing with my heart and my love life now.

I finally found the woman that my heart beats for but she is giving me a hard time. We are just in this messy relationship. I have been running after Rialivhuwa since the first day we met in that restaurant toilet. I went up and down searching all over for her and I am still doing the same job even today.

How do I survive this?

My heart wants her in my life.

Even worse, she gave me the best sex I was longing for. It was worth the waiting. I connected with her and she promised not to run away from me again, but she lied.

I have not heard from her since the moment I dropped her off for the taxi. I am worried about the things she doesn't want to tell me. If only she could level up with me.

All the words she told me that day still hit me hard. How could she say it in my face that she is nothing but just a mistress? She is not my mistress. She is the woman my heart chose. It is just unfortunate that we are in this turmoil.

It is Thursday and she hasn't called me yet. I asked Thato to organise his little brother to look for my Ria. I can do it myself but I do not want to look like an unprofessional at work. It cannot always be me who is off from work due to personal problems. So I had to get someone to help.

Thato's brother just sent me a Whatsapp location in Shosanguve Block L.

Block L? She doesn't live too far from LiQuid Zone.

He tells me he struggled to get her. He only got her when he started asking around for 'Mpho' with blonde short hair. It's a good thing I remembered the name the guy used on Saturday evening.

I am on my way to Soshanguve right now. I am just stuck in the peak hour traffic. I could have waited for the traffic to end but I just couldn't wait to see my woman.

So many things are running in my head as I drive. I am praying that she stays alone or with a relative. I don't want no drama with no man, if she is seeing one. I wouldn't blame her if she has a man. I have stressed her enough and at times I feel I don't deserve her.

My phone keeps vibrating on the passenger's seat. It is Luvhengo calling. She is at my house since yesterday. She insisted on coming over since I cancelled the dinner date on Saturday night. How was I going to dine with Luvhengo while Ria got me stressed out that same morning?

Luvhengo has changed a lot and is now less dramatic. I bet her family sat her down and advise her on how to behave. She was starting to annoy me.

I grab the phone from the sit and send her a text that I will be home a little late. I have to find my woman. Okay, I didn't tell her that but I really need to find Ria.

The traffic around here is terrific. I only got to Sosha Block L just after 18h00. Thato's brother told me it is grey house I should look for. I follow the directions on my phone until I got to the grey house. I park outside the gate and look around for anyone around the yard. There is no one around the yard. I have no choice but to go knock on the door.

I knock for a while until I give up. No one is answering the door. I am about to turn back to the gate when I hear chuckles at the backside of the yard. I follow the voices to the back. Ria is sitting with two little girls who are writing on their school books. They are laughing while Ria is seated with her hands on her waist.

"I told you guys to count with your fingers and toes. You will never get it wrong that way." She says and they giggle.

"Good evening." I say and Ria is shocked to see me. She gets up and walks to me.

"What are you doing here? Who are you with?" she asks while looking behind me.

"I am alone. Can we talk?" I ask.

"Okay, come this side." she says and walk to the room at the back. I follow behind. I thought she was going to kick me away.

Its confirmed, there is no man living with her.

"Is this where you are staying?"

"Just temporarily until I get a job."

The room is even smaller than my main bathroom. It is so small and dark inside.

"Really Ria?" I sit on the bed and she grabs an ottoman and sit on the other side with her hands folded. I should be careful with what I say. "I forgot to take your new numbers...and you didn't call me all week."

"I didn't have airtime." She says and I nod. She could have sent an SMS or a Call-Me request. She just didn't want to talk to me.

"I am worried about you. There is something you are not telling me and I want to help you." I say.

"I am fine. Really."

"So uhm...the morning-after pill...didn't you get any side-effects after taking it? I was worried that you might be spotting or you were dizzy while travelling that day." I ask and she shoots her eyes out. She jumps from her chair and get the bag from behind the bed. She fumbles inside the bag until she takes out a small Levonelle box I gave her days ago. She opens it and the pill is there.

"Oh my God, I forgot...how could I forget? Oh my God Mula, I forgot." She says and hurry to a basin next to the door. I know she won't listen to me so I watch her take the pill. It won't work anymore. She comes back and sit quietly on the ottoman. I can see panic in her eyes.

"Do you know when you ovulate?"

"What the hell Mula...why would I know the days I ovulate? I don't give a damn about those things." She raises her voice. She is stressing.

"Do you know your menstrual cycle days at least? I can help you calculate if...you know?"

"Won't the pill work? I have never used this thing before."

"Should be taken 72 hours after the intercourse." I say and she widened her eyes. I can see her eyes starting to twinkle with tears. She stands from her seat. The tears are running down her face now. "Ria, please don't stress."

"Don't stress? I am might be fucken pregnant and you are telling me to not stress?" she raises her voice. She doesn't need to swear but I understand the frustration. I am happy there is a possibility that she is pregnant. That way we will be connected for life.

"Shouldn't we be happy if you are pregnant?" I ask.

"Because you are a doctor? I am just a kid and I still have school. I just started my degree and still have two years to go. I can't fall pregnant now." she says. It could be selfish of me, but I like the idea of having a baby with Ria. It might change our life and the connection we have. I can get someone to take care of the baby while she studies. Nothing has to change.

"Babe...you just stressing. Maybe you were not fertile the day we made love."

"Oh my God Mula...Zoleka's dream." She whispers. "How could I be so foolish?"

She throws herself on the bed and start crying. Yoh! Ria breaks my heart when she does this. I always feel the pain when she cries. I always feel guilty for hurting her always.

"Babe, please don't stress."

"Stop telling me to not stress Mula. Your life is a mess and there is no room for a baby right now." She snaps.

The little girls are calling her name from outside.

"Mpho are you okay?" the little girl asks from the door. The door is wide open for the light to shine in from outside.

"Yes sweetie...I am fine, I am just a little sick. Please go inside the house and switch on the TV?" Ria says calmly from the bed. The kid glance at me and then walk away.

I have never been in a complicated situation like I am this year. My love life us just a turmoil and I keep messing up.

"Babe, can you please move into my house? I cannot allow you to live like this." I say to change the subject. We will dwell on the baby issue once she is confirmed pregnant.

"I will never move in with you."

"In my other house in Olympus. They finished building it two weeks ago. You can stay there with Rotshi until you get a job and can afford something better than this?" I say and she keeps quiet.

She doesn't say anything for a while.

"Please Ria...no one knows where my new house is. They don't even know it is finished. I will stay in the apartment until you get a job or we will figure something out."

"I don't know. I will sleep on it."

"Rotshi will pick you up tomorrow." I say and she lets out a giggle. I smile.

"I said I will sleep on it."

I stayed with her for another hour. We just lied on the bed in the darkness. She still doesn't want to tell me what is going on but she is warming up to me.

I never thought I would fall in love and ever get to enjoy the simplest things in life. I never thought a woman could turn my world upside down like this.

We are giggling at the silly jokes we are sharing and my phone vibrates in my pocket. I know it is Luvhengo. I keep the phone in my pocket.

"Your phone is ringing." She says. "You can answer it if it is her."

"No, I don't want to answer it."

"You will get in trouble with her." she says and I feel a knot in my stomach.

"Babe, I will fix this."

"Whatever you do Mula, please...please don't break-up with her."

I sit up and stare at her face. It is dark but I can see her glowing eyes. Breaking up with Luvhengo is the only way my relationship with Ria will survive. But doesn't she want me to break up with her?

"Why not? Did she threaten you?"

"What?" she quickly sit up straight and stare at me. "Did she say anything?"

"No. but why do you say whatever I do, I should never break up with her? Isn't it the only way we will work out?"

"Well...you still have to honour your father...so I will just be by your side like I promised your mother. As long as you don't tell anyone that you found me...okay except Rotshi because she is picking me up tomorrow."

"Really?" I pull her close for a kiss and a tight hug. "Thank you."

I think I picked up where the problem is. Luvhengo has everything to do with Ria's running away from everything. I have seen the way she jumps when we mention Luvhengo's name. Pity I can never question my fiancée about this, but I will have to get to the bottom of this.

Ria assured me she will be moving in my house tomorrow. It is still empty but she will make it work.

I leave for Pretoria East and only got home an hour later. It a long drive from Soshana to the East. Luvhengo is having dinner while watching TV.

"Where you with her?" she asks with her eyes fixed on the TV.

"I was with who?" I frown at her.

"Your mistress?"

"My mistress? Come on Luvhengo, you know I don't even know where she is." I say and she fakes a smile. "Do you have something to tell me?"

"No, but I have something special for you." she advices.

Talk about girls with money. She bought me TAG Heuer watch just few weeks ago. I wonder what she got me this time.

“Alright...let me take a shower then.” I say while walking to my room.

Could Ria be pregnant? I can't stop thinking about it and the thought of us having a baby. A cute little girl that will look exactly like Ria.

The water is piercing me while I imagine my little perfect family.

After my long shower, I dry myself with a towel before wrapping it on my waist. I pick my dirty clothes from the floor and throw them in a laundry bin then walk to my bedroom.

“What the hell Luvhengo?”

She is sitting seductively on the bed, in her lingerie. She has deemed the lights and have candles all over my room.

“This is the surprise I have for you.” She says reaching to strip off her bra!

~~~~~

Guys, after LIKING the post, pretty please go and SHARE the page?? Please!

If I get your PAGE sharing popping up in numbers, I will be SUPER MOTIVATED to even throw another Insert before we sleep tonight!!

## INSERT 38

### LUVHENGO

Mula is just standing in front of me with his jaws on the floor. Doesn't he see my bare chest?

Haaa!!!! This dude will be the death of me!

I can see he is strong under the towel but he is just standing without making a move. I parade to where he is standing and reach for the knot of the towel. He grabs my hand before I could uncover him.

"Uhm...look...No...we can't." He says and I widened my eyes.

What the hell?

"You are a princess and I a prince...uhm...you know we are supposed to wait for the marriage." He says while busy clearing his throat.

"Really Mula?" I snap. "What do I need to do to get your attention?"

"Come on. You have got my attention." He says and walks to the closet. He leaves me standing by the door with just an underwear and bra-less.

What is wrong with this man? Does he know I had to order this lingerie especially for him from that kinkylingerie website? And he does nothing but to ignore me like I don't exist.

"Are you seeing that girl?" I ask while throwing a gown on my body to cover up.

I have never been turned down like this. What an embarrassment.

"No, I don't know where she is." He says. "Maybe you can tell me where she is."

"Excuse me?" What does he know?

"You have been asking about her since I got back. How many times should I tell you that I don't know where she is?"

"What do you want me to think? You went AWOL after work and now you don't even want to get intimate. It's obvious you were busy with a woman."

“Look Luvhengo, you are so sexy and I find you so attractive...but I want us to do things the right way. We will have lots of sex after the wedding and I would love to see a lot of those lingerie. Let’s hang in there.”

There is no way. There is obviously someone he is hiding. This two trips to Pretoria North side? The first visit on Friday was innocent but another one today? I will find out what he is hiding.

I pick my bra and shove it into my overnight bag. I pick a night dress, put it on and get into the duvets. I know he is going to sleep on a couch or the guest room.

“Are you not going to blow all these candles?” he ask while picking a shirt from the closet.

“You can blow them up yourself.” I am so annoyed right now.

He switches the light on and walk around the room blowing the candles. The rose smell of the scented candles is now annoying me. He walks to open the windows.

No man. Mula looks happy about something. I will find out what.

“Good night sweetie.” He says before walking out of the room.

I cover my head with the duvet and force myself to sleep. I am out of ideas on how to get him to fall for me.

I am waken up in the morning when I hear the shower running. The clock on the pedestal says 06:20. I should be waking up and making him breakfast but No! I have exhausted all my energy.

He finishes getting ready while I am sitting on the bed.

“We need to discuss something when you come back.” I say.

“What is it?”

“Some business ideas I have for Thavhakhulu and the villages there.”

“That sounds interesting.”

I have to change the game plan. Maybe if I just sell him the idea of the mall, I might get somewhere.

He leaves me getting ready for the day. I have a meeting at the Menlyn boutique and thereafter I will follow the direction of this tracking device. I have to find out who he was seeing last night and the other night.

The meeting takes longer than I expected. It finishes at 12h30. I get into my car, put the Friday night coordinates on the navigator and drive up to Pretoria North. I don't know Pretoria too well but I will know it today. The navigator beeps when I get to the location. I park outside a place called LiQuid Zone. He was out drinking here on Friday. I punch yesterday's coordinates and drive just down a few streets to a grey house.

It looks like Mula hooked up with a chick from the club and he was checking on her last night. But why would he check up on her after a week?

I park outside the gate and enter inside the yard. The door is open so I knock a few times until an old woman walks out.

"Can I help you?" she asks with a frown on her face.

"Well...I was looking for Rialivhuwa. Is she home?"

"Who? I don't know any Rovhuwa." She seems confused and unwelcoming.

What up with her? Hasn't she seen a gorgeous woman before?

"What is the name of the girl that stays here? We met last week and she wants assistance with something so I am here to see her. She is a little tall with an afro."

"Hai, the girl that stayed here was Mpho and she had this white short hair."

"Are you sure? And where is she?"

"She moved out this morning."

"Oh, her boyfriend came to pick her up?" I fake a laugh. I am trying to fish for information here.

"Haikhona, I have never, never, never seen that girl with a man. She was picked up by her sister."

It is not Ria. Mula is seeing a new girl.

I parade to my car. The old woman is watching me with her hands on her waist. I drive back to Mula's apartment.

I don't know if I should be annoyed or angry about this new girl. When I take care about one problem the next one pops up. As long as it is not Ria he is messing with, the new girl should not be a problem.

Where is he going to take a girl with white hair anyway? I laugh out loud. The old woman meant blonde hair. I forgive her.

Mula is already home when I get to his apartment. There is a box of pizza and a 2 litre coke.

"Come join me for a movie." He says when I enter the room.

I get myself a bottle of water and join him on the couch.

"You are not having a slice of pizza?"

"Pizza and coke? You should know better."

"You nursing the figure?" he asks and I nod. i work damn hard for my body.

We watch some boring soldier movie, followed by a stand-up comedy show. I am pretending to like it. I want him to warm up to me.

"About the business." I say and he reduces the volume of the TV.

"Yes."

"I was thinking of bringing a mall in Thavhakhulu area. It will work perfectly there because there are so many villages around...and..."

"Wait. A mall in Thavhakhulu? It won't work." he says.

"Did you ever think Thavhani Mall will work? See now they are making so much money."

"Yes, it is in Thohoyandou. You can't bring the mall to the village?"

"Let me show you the plan of what I am talking about. I have drafted something on the laptop."

"Okay, you will show me later. I have to go to the office now."

"After 20h00? Why?"

"Uhm...yes...I want to pick some files. I have a meeting to prepare for tomorrow." He gets up from the couch. I know he is lying. He picks the keys and a wallet from the table.

"You are forgetting your watch," I say while picking it up from the table.

"Excuse me?"

"You are forgetting your watch."

"Oh, I don't have to glam up at night, do I? Plus I am just going out for a few minutes."

“No. My man should always accessorize all the time. You need it.”

“Yeah, you are right. I need it.” he takes it from my hand while staring into my eyes.

Damn! Does he suspect something?

Why am I panicking?

I watch him put it on.

Oh No! I think he is suspecting something.

“You know what? Just leave it. You are right, you can’t glam up at night, you know?” I say walking to him. I have to get this watch.

“No, a man should accessorize all the time.” He says with an obvious fake grin while walking to the door. He opens the door, “Don’t wait up.”

## INSERT 39

### ROTSHIDZWA

She is the cutest natural looking girl I have ever met. Unbelievable that she is from the village down in my father's little kingdom.

I like her.

I watch as she walks outside the gate and straight to my car. She has cut her hair and dyed it blonde? She still looks beautiful though.

She opens my door and I step out.

"Look at you." I say while pulling her for a hug. I squeeze her so tight until she laughs her way out of the hug. "I missed you.

"Same here." she says.

"What happened to you?"

"I had to get away for a while."

Ria looks very drained and sad. Mula pleaded with me not to talk too much or question her about anything unless she is keen to talk. I choose to respect that. I know she will open with me when she is ready to.

"Are you ready to get out of here?" I ask and she nods.

"Let's do this."

"Go get your handbag, those guys will pack up your things." I point at the two guys who are stepping out of a truck.

She goes back to the yard. I see her hug the old lady who is standing by the door. Afterwards she comes to the car.

"They will give Gogo the keys after packing up." She says while getting into the passenger's seat.

Yes they should do their job.



I drive us out of the township to Hatfield. I get the bags from my flat and we head to Pretoria East, Olympus Country Estate. I was here earlier with Mula. His new house is honestly beautiful.

I park on the driveway and Ria follows me to the house.

"I love it." she says.

"Imagine the house parties we will host here. We even have a pool." I say and she laughs.

I am a party animal. I am not even ashamed of that. I party with my father's money so no one has a right to judge me.

Ria walks around the house while I pack up my clothes in the closet. I am staying in my own room and Ria will take the main bedroom. We can't share the room since Mula would want to come and have a piece of her. I can never sleep in her sheets. Never! Imagine me sleeping on my brother's stains.

Heck No! Oh, hell No.

I am worried about Ria though. I am curious to know why she disappeared from us for the past months. Mula even asked me to keep it to myself that we have found her.

She walks into my bedroom and sit on the floor, at the corner of the room.

"Thank you for doing all this for me." she says.

"Yea, you are my sister-in-law and I love you."

"Come on, I am not your sister-in-law. There is that other woman."

"Who? That fake slay queen of a woman? Don't stress yourself about her. Mula doesn't love a bit of her."

"But she is there and will always be there."

"She is there until my father dies." I say and she laughs. "What? The old man wants to die so let him die."

"Rotshi, he is your father."

"But he wants to die. Inwi Ria, I cried for weeks and weeks after finding out about the brain tumour and I begged him to go for treatment. He doesn't want to go for chemo-therapy or another surgery. He wants to die so let him die. And once he is dead, Mula is divorcing that...fake woman."

“You won’t be saying that once he is dead.” she says. She is sweet and considerate.

“Well as long as he leaves me with just a few millions, I will be fine. I told him if he wants to die then he should start sending money into my investment account. He has got to take care of me even when he is dead because you know what?”

“What?”

“I am never going to get married and I can’t always bother Mula. So he has got to take care of me in his dead sleep.”

“Don’t you have a boy-friend? I am sure he will want to marry your beautiful ass one day.”

“So that I bawl myself out when my heart is too attached? No?” I say and she folds her arms to her chest. “Okay, also because guys can’t stand me. They say I talk too much. Do I speak too much? No I don’t...but they say I do. So I don’t see myself married. I hook up when there is a need.”

“Come on Rotshi, you know you talk too much.”

“And you love me still, right? Then why can’t they love me too?” I say and she rolls her eyes.

I can’t stand a relationship. Having to tone down myself so that some stupid guy can love me? Never. I am very fine by myself. My father just have to make sure I am sorted so that I can live by myself.

The truck arrives. The two guys unpack the things and put them in the main bedroom. This is what you get when Mula pays people to carry things for you. You just fold your arms and show them where to put them.

My furniture arrived in the morning. I brought just my bed, TV and a three seater couch. The rest I left at the Fields.

Our furniture is here so what is missing is the grocery and the home allowance. Mula will take care of that when he comes later.

I leave Ria packing her things and drive to Olympus Village to buy me some wine and take-away food for us. It is just a 10 minutes drive. I get a few bottles of wine and juice. Every house should have a few bottles of wine. For the guests you know and for cooking too. I also buy us burger meals from Burger King and drive back home.

“Would you like a glass of wine?” I asked after our late burger lunch.

"No thanks. I don't want to end up talking too much like you. I am not in the mood."

"No, you don't talk too much. You become emotional and start crying. When I am drunk I become so quiet." I say and she laughs. I found it cute the last time we drank together and she became emotional. She cried all night for Mula. I can't find myself crying for a man, even when I am drunk. They always tell me I am still too young to make the conclusions but I know I will never cry for no man.

"You are driving my brother crazy. I have never seen him like this."

"He drives me crazy too. He makes me do things I never thought I would do. I want to let go of him but my heart wants him. It is painful to know there is another woman but...here I am."

"I don't know why people can't just kick that girl away. You know Mula is too sweet and humble it gets to me sometimes? I would never allow anyone to push me around and make me do things I don't want. It's like he owes his life to someone and he is repaying it by doing things against his heart. Sometimes I would swear we are not born of the same parents. I can never stand some useless rubbish and you know what he does? He goes with the flow. He puts other people's happiness first. I am not like that and we are siblings? My father should do a DNA test.Haike!" I say and she chokes on the coke.

"uhm, sorry...I wanted to laugh and...you know?"

"Stop laughing and listen to me. I was still saying don't know why Mula is so sweet. How can one be so humble like they were appointed to be angels in this world? Well, he is my brother and I love him so much I can even kill for him."

"That...is so sweet."

Mula gets to the house at 20h20. Ria and I are still watching TV when he walks in. He looks like he has seen a ghost.

"What is wrong with you?" I ask and he just stands by the door. "Oh, yeah...let me tell you before I forget. Please take us grocery shopping tomorrow and leave some home allowance."

"Please wait a minute Rotshi."

"Haibo!"

"Please give us some space." He asks coldly while walking to Ria.

Yoh! I grab my glass of wine and walk to the kitchen.

“Luvhengo threatened you to stay away from me and you disappeared...you disappeared and made sure no one knows where you are. You had to change your number, your look and you lied about your name.” Mula says with a firm voice. This is interesting. I am not going anywhere.

“No...No...she did not...”

“Stop with the lies Ria.” He raises his voice. Mulatshawe just raised his voice at Ria?  
“Stop with the lies and tell me the truth.”

“What truth?”

“The truth that she threatened you. Why on earth are you protecting her? What did she do to you?” his voice is on the roof.

Yoh!

“I am not protecting...”

“Stop lying. Stop lying to me goddammit!”

“Why are you shouting at me?” her voice is breaking. She is too emotional she is going to cry this one.

“Your tears are not going to scare me Ria...tell me the truth. That woman is a snake and I want to know what she did to you. Did she hurt you? I swear I will strangle her...what did she do?”

“She did nothing.” Ria repeats.

“You know how I know? She had put a damn tracker on a watch. A tracker on a watch! I have been wearing that watch for weeks.” he says.

Mula has never been this angry.

“What? She is tracking you?” she asks with panic in her voice. “I have got to get out of here. Please, I have to go.”

“I found out about the watch before I got here. I left it in my office.” He says.

That witch!

There is silence in the room so I peek to see what is going on. Ria is walking around the room with her hands in her waist.

“It is your fault Mulatshawe. This is all your fault.” She is now yelling.

“I know I am the...”

"I once overheard your fiancée and her boyfriend talking about the plots they were making against your family. What did I do? I ran to you! I ran to tell you everything and the next thing your fiancée and her same boyfriend came to my damn flat. He pointed a cocked gun on my face. He pointed me with a cocked gun Mula. I saw a bullet. I saw a bullet. For the first time in my life, I saw a bullet passing in front of me to a glass for a warning. I had to run away because they told me the next bullet was going to be on my skull if I don't stay away from you. I am just as stupid as you because I know I will die if they ever find me with you but I am here in your house, ain't I? How stupid of me." She is crying painfully and her voice is breaking.

"Ria...oh my God." He tries to reach for her.

"Don't touch me. How could you confront her without evidence of what I was talking about?"

"No I didn't confront her, I mistakenly told my father...but it was unintentional, I swear."

That was not so smart.

"You know your father hates me. He does. Why would he believe my story? I told you because I trusted that you will look at it, but you failed me. You kept on failing me I had to disappear."

This is fucked up. That Luvhengo woman is a snake.

"I am sorry." He say.

"Don't be sorry. Get out of here and go fix your mess." She hisses with tears flooding on her face.

He walks to her. Mula is risking his life right now. Oh, not really. She allows him to hug her. He holds her tight as she cries. His shirt is soaking wet from her tears.

See why I will never fall in love? I can't bawl and snot like that for anything related to a D!

I am standing in the kitchen sipping my wine and watching them hold each other tight. It is really cute. The sobs becomes quiet after a while and she pulls out of his grip.

"Now go fix your mess." She says quietly and the dude walks out of the door without another argument.

Let me get this straight! So he just hugs her until he is sure she is fine and then walks away when she asks him to? Is this how the love thing works?

Heeee! This is not for me.

Mula disappears and I walk to Ria. She is sitting on the couch while wiping her face with her dress.

"Don't stress I have a plan." I say and she stares at me. "I just have to become her friend so she lets me in her house. She will invite me for sleep over and I will go. Then I will shoot her with her own gun while she is asleep."

"Really, Rotshi?" she rolls her bloodshot eyes.

"Don't stress. I got you. While Mula is fixing the mess on the side, I will also deal with her for you."

I don't know what I will do but I will deal with her!!!

"Slay queen, I am coming for you."

## INSERT 40

### LUVHENGO

I am pacing up and down the living room. My freaking body is sweating even when I am just wearing a tank top and an underwear. I am curious to find out about the watch. Mula has been gone for an hour and I have been panicking since he left the house.

Abednego is going to be so furious when he finds out Mula knows the watch is more than what it is.

I have tracked it and the last time I checked it was at the hospital so I know for sure that he is there.

Oh, Lord. I feel like vomiting right now.

I startle when I hear the key on the lock. He is here. I quickly grab the fleece blanket and lie on the couch to pretend I was asleep.

He walks in and switch on the kitchen light. I yawn and drop my feet to the ground from the couch. I rub my eyes as he walks closer to the living room. He places a few files on the table.

"Oh, you are back?" I ask and he smiles.

"Yeah, did you wait up for me?"

"And I dozed off." I say. I can't read his face. I can't even keep eye contact. He might see panic in my eyes.

"Go to bed." He says while burying himself on the couch and scrolling through the channels.

My heart is still pounding.

"Are you okay?" I ask and he turns to me with a smile.

"I am tired and lazy. Tomorrow I have a meeting in Johannesburg and I am not yet prepared. I still have to finish some reports. I shouldn't have watched those movies." He giggles and I feel a little better.

"Maybe I can give you a massage?" I am testing the waters.

"Don't stress yourself. Go to bed so that I finish up."

I get the blanket and stride to the bedroom. It doesn't look like he is aware about the tracker oh his watch. He would have been angry about it and asking me a million of questions, right? Also, I believe he was at the office. The weeks that we have been tracking him, he didn't move around much. It was either the hospital or home.

I sigh.

I am tired about this mission. I wish we could just abort the mission and I move on with my life. Now, I just want Mula to marry me so I could run away from AB. Mula is a gentleman and he cares. As funny as it sounds, I am falling for him and his heart is not opening up for me. At first I thought it was because of Rialivhuwa, but even now when she is out of the picture. He still doesn't warm up to me.

I toss and turn the whole night, trying to figure out how to get out of this mess. I have gotten myself so deep I can't pull myself out.

Mula is already in the shower when I wake up in the morning. I get up, make the bed and pack my things. I just want to go to my house and shut myself in my room.

I am suffocating.

This life is becoming hard for me.

I am exhausted!

Mula walks to the bedroom to find me sobbing. I am burdened.

"Hey what is wrong?" he asks and I break into a cry. I need help. I need him to save me from my life.

"I need you Mula." I say and he just stands on the other side watching me. I do see concern in his face but I need more than that.

"But I am here and we are on this journey together." He says.

"Why do you hate me so much?" I ask with tears clouding my eyes. I want him to want me.

"I don't hate you. This arranged marriage is hard for the both of us but I know we are going to pull through some day." He says. I need more than just words. Why can't he give me a hug and assure me that everything will be alright?

"It hurts me that I am the only one trying here."

"Why do you have to try? Why don't you just cancel the whole engagements?" he asks and it hit me. He really doesn't want to be with me.

I clean up my face and continue packing things into my bags. How can I call off the engagement when it is my only escape out of Abednego's imprisonment?

I desire the life Mula has. I desire his love. I have never met a humble and a human like him.

He moves to the closet to pick clothes to wear. He is so cold towards me right now.

I can't give up now. I have been hurt worse, this is nothing. I can handle any coldness that any man can bring. If I am surviving AB's, then I can survive more.

"Are you not taking a shower?" He asks. I am wearing my pair of sneakers and putting on a hoodie.

"I will shower when I get home!" I snap.

"When am I going to see you?"

"Who cares? You never give me your attention when I am here. It feels I am the only one willing to make this work."

"I am sorry for making you feel like that?"

I grab my bags from the bed and storm to my car. My heart is pierced into pieces. He doesn't care to follow me or even ask me to stay.

The life I chose is heavy on me now.

AB's car is parked outside when I get to the house. I wished he was not home so I could just have little peace. He is playing those Nigerian songs that I despise so much. He is dancing alone with a glass of whiskey on his hand.

"You are drinking? This early?" I ask while turning the music down.

"I had to finish this bottle of whisky, plus I was thinking about you." he says dancing towards me. I slide away from him and go up the stairs to take a longest shower. I unpack my overnight-bag. I throw everything on the bed. I will sort these clothes after my shower.

The water is warm and refreshing. I close my eyes and drift to the thoughts of me and Mulatshawe. I could live a simple life with him. I could give him all of my love. He deserves it. I can vividly see the children playing around the garden in Venda and running around with him. He could make a perfect father and a great humble Chief. I could give him the whole of me and respect.

"What the hell is this?" AB aggressively opens the shower door and throw



something at me.

Flip! It is the lingerie.

"Uhm...it is not what you think." I say. The water is still splashing on my face. AB switches off the water and grab my wrist.

"Didn't I tell you not to sleep with that fool? Am I now sharing your whole with some idiot?" he screams on my face.

"I didn't sleep with him. I swear."

"Then what the hell is that black thing? What is that?" I can see his eyes turning red.

"I thought I could..."

"You thought what Luu? I don't share you with anyone. I don't share you with that fool or anybody." He moves around the bathroom with his hands on his head. I grab the towel and walk out of the shower. I don't want to die inside this shower.

"I swear I wanted to just seduce him...I was selling him the idea of the mall."

"You discussed the mall with him? Are you stupid?" he roars.

"No, I wanted to change the game plan...I didn't sleep with him...I swear," I beg while reaching for his shoulder. He shoves my hand away. "Let's make love. Come, you will feel it for yourself."

"Don't make me an idiot you have been gone for days." He shouts.

"Yah, but I didn't sleep with him. I swear." I am not going to dare tell him I was tempted to sleep with him but he refused.

I don't want to die.

AB walks out of the bathroom to the bedroom. He takes my handbag and shake everything out. All the items from the bag are all over the floor. A bottle of perfume falls and breaks on the floor. I am just standing at the door praying for my life. He doesn't find what he was looking for. He sits on the bed and wipes the sweat on his forehead.

"Did he like the idea?" he asks and I shake my head.

"He still wants to see the plans."

"You shouldn't have told him a damn thing."

I am fucken tired of all these. My life is at risk either I am part of this mission or not.

"Why don't you just shoot these people and get what you want?"

"If you were doing the job well, I would be shouting them right now."

Abednego wants me to be married to Mula so that I have the signatory rights. The Ratshali's signatures should be on all paper works of the project. Before any digging is done, approval should be done at the Regional, Municipal and National level. A member of Ratshali royalty is supposed to be part of all these agreements. Once I am married I will be able to sign off and give approval as a member of the royal family of Thavhakhulu soil. He needs Mula and Mr Ratshali alive for now. He can kill them later when he gets what he wants.

"I am tired of all of this Abednego. This guy doesn't want me. He doesn't feel me. He even has a girlfriend."

"What? That girl is still standing on our way?" he asks angrily. I fear for that girl's life.

"No...another one."

"That is easy to deal with. You just have to do your part so that the wedding speeds up."

This guy doesn't know what I am dealing with. I am dealing with a man who doesn't look at me twice. I try to be sexy but he always look the other direction. He stands from the bed and walks out of the room.

Phew!

This is what I have to deal with on a random day. It is exhausting.

Before he left, I managed to make him believe I did not sleep with Mula. His anger subsided when I gave him a mouth. He refused to make love to me because he is still disgusted.

We spend the day at the pool side. I am chilling on the sun lounge chair with a cocktail and a magazine; and he is swimming. He is topless and his dark body is appetising. I just don't feel it anymore.

He pulls himself out of the pool and wipe his body with a towel.

If only it was Mula. I was going to push him back to the pool and join him for a silly quickie. If only!

AB walks inside and comes back wearing clean shorts, a vest and flip flops.

"I am going to buy newspaper." He says and I nod.

After a little while, his phone rings. He forgot it on a table. It rings a few times until it stops. I don't touch his phone. That is one of his rules. No matter the emergency, I don't touch his phone. He taught me well. It doesn't even bother me when it rings a million times.

The doorbell rings. I am not expecting anyone and the personnel at the main gate did not call me to grant access to anyone.

I am wearing a bikini so I pick the beach dress from the other chair and put it on while walking to the door.

"Hey, surprise sweetie." Mula flashes a smile with a bouquet of red roses.

"Uhm...what are...how did?"

"Oh, I am here for a braai at a friend's house in this estate. We decided to hang out after the meeting so my friend just dropped me here. He will pick me up a little later. You know his house is just four streets from your house? Imagine." He says.

"Oh...I...okay."

"Can I come in?" he asks and I freeze. He sway his eyes to my ring finger and it is not there. AB always forces me to take it off when I am in the house.

He asks to come in again and I move out of the way.

"I felt bad about this morning so I came to apologise." He says while following me behind.

I don't have a chance to clean up the house. AB's phone is on the table, I can't warn him to stay away from the house until Mula leaves.

"It's okay. You...you shouldn't have."

"Are you alright? Looks like you are shaking." He asks and I fake a smile.

"I didn't expect to see you." I say.

The door opens when we are still standing next to the kitchen.

"Hey Luu...I got your favourite chocolate." AB yells when he enters. His bad habits. Mula turns to the door.

~~~~~


INSERT 42

MULATSHAWE

I leap to the last step and walk to the end of the passage to get to the main bedroom. I can hear footsteps behind me and Luvhengo shouting my name. I know where the main room is since my friend has a house a slight similar to this one in the same estate.

“Nice house sweetie.” I shout to make it look normal to be pacing around the house.

I get to the bedroom to see the man’s clothes on the bed. I walk into the closet. There is a side with man’s clothes. Things are neatly packed in the walk-in closet. The shoes and sneakers are lined up neatly on the corner of the closet. I walk back to the bedroom. I have to be careful, these guys have guns. Luvhengo is standing outside with her hands on her mouth. She obviously saw a pile of clothes on top of the bed. She looks sincerely sorry but I am not buying any of her stories. She has done enough damage already.

“So you fought Ria to be out of my life while you stay with a man? You stay with a man Luvhengo?” I ask and she doesn’t say anything. “You know what?”

I walk back to the room acting all angry and take a picture of the closet. She is standing outside the bedroom so she doesn’t see me take a picture. No one would believe that the precious princess stays with a man.

“Mula please.”

“Don’t please me.”

“I had the same problems like you did with Ria. I was still going to tell him about the engagement but I didn’t know how. Please.” She is still making me look like a fool.

The three guys are now standing outside the room, behind Luvhengo.

“What is going on here?” Bako asks.

“I was just having a chat with my fiancée.”

“But is everything okay?” Maxwell asks.

“Where is he? Where is this man who lives here?” I ask and the guys look at each other and then back at Luvhengo.

“Uhm...we...we fought and he is away. I told him about the engagement and he walk out of the relationship.” She says.

I see a smirk on Abednego’s face. They think I am stupid, don’t they?

I storm out of the room and Luvhengo follows behind. There is nothing much I can do. I just needed confirmation and I got it. I have to get out of here before they pull the guns out of their jeans.

“Please Mula. I am so sorry.”

“It’s okay, whatever!”

“Please don’t tell the family.”

“You humiliated my girlfriend in front of people. Good thing I am nothing like you.” I say and walk out of the house.

She truly is a hypocrite. Whatever plots they have for my family will not succeed. I will soon find out. I am also believing that this arranged marriage has everything to do with their schemes. Why would she want to be married to a doctor chief when she has a billionaire for a boyfriend? I can’t even afford her.

My friend drives us to his house. I get into my car and head straight to Olympus to see my woman.

She and Rotshi are packing the groceries when I get home. Ria has a new hair-cut which suits her just like her afro does. She is a beautiful woman, my beautiful woman.

“But Mulatshawe, where are the flowers and chocolates and something that a man should bring when he comes to see his woman? You are disappointing me. And you Ria, you can’t just let him hump you without showering you with gifts and romantic things.” Rotshi says. I love her still though.

“He buys me books and pay for my fees. That is more than enough.”

“He should buy you books and pay for your fees and stillllll buy you romantic things. Do books make you feel sexy?”

Yoh! Rotshidzwa Ratshali.

I walk to Ria to give her a hug. She looks better than all the days and it makes me happy. With Rotshi, she has no choice but to bubble up. She reaches for the hug and kiss me afterwards. I don’t understand how we could shout at each other the previous day but still be loving the next.

"I love what you did with the hair." I say.

"Thank you...but I will grow my afro soon."

"Next month is Ria's birthday. So I am hosting a pool party during the day and a lingerie party at night. It is going to be lit!"

"No Rotshi. We can't have people over yet. I don't think it is safe for Ria...let's keep it low for now."

"I didn't think of that."

"And please don't bring your crazy friends here Rotshi. I don't want anything happening to Ria and you."

"Cool. Got it."

"Let me take you to a vacation Ria, for your birthday. Just you and me."

"And there will obviously be lots of sex, so I will pass." Rotshi utters.

"You were not invited." I say and walk to the couch. I take off my blazer and throw it on an ottoman. I rest on the couch and switch on the TV. The house is so empty I have to buy furniture. It was not part of the plan but it looks dry and too huge.

Ria walks to me and sit on top of me with her hands locked on my neck.

"Are you horny?" I ask and she laughs.

"No silly. I just want to talk." I grab her ass and pull her closer so we could talk.

"I have been thinking about the baby. I will be happy if I am pregnant." She says and I smile. This is making me happy.

"Are you sure babe?"

"I know I am pregnant. Zoleka's dreams always comes true. So I just have to accept it and start focusing on it. It is going to be difficult with school but I will make it work."

"And I am going to marry you soon."

"I know."

I pull her and reach for a kiss; and she gives it to me.

Lord, I love this woman. I am going to be so happy with her, I know my world will be complete with her on my side.

“Yoh, please...pleaseeee don't stain my couch.”

“Sies Rotshi! Whats with you and semen stains?”

“Don't sies me. She won't be having her body on top of you if you guys don't wanna shag. I know that position very well. Heee, you guys just don't understand that I have semen allergy. I can't even stand the stain. My body boils at the sight of it.” She says with a frown.

“What the hell?”

“No, I am serious. I can't come to contact with a sperm. My body itches, swells and it burns. So the semen stains makes me wanna vomit.”

“Rotshi, you lie.” I say.

“Mulatshawe, I was diagnosed with seminal plasma hypersensitivity.” Rotshi responds and we laugh. I know about SPH and yes it is a sperm allergy, but she is lying.

“I am a doctor and you would have come to me for advice.”

“I found out before you were comfortable to talk about sex with me and I didn't want you to know that I am having sex already. Now I don't care to tell you. So pleas!!!!”

“So you don't swallow?” Ria asks and I laugh.

“Yuk!! Ria. That is just so disgusting.”

Ria moves her body to sit beside me. She is shocked about all this. Most people are not aware but I still don't trust Rotshi's story.

“How did the watch issue go?” she asks while sitting next to Ria. She is obviously changing the topic.

“I pretended not to know. I also went to her house today. Guess what? She stays with the boyfriend.”

“The snake.” Rotshi gasps.

“And she humiliated me for being with you. What a hypocrite.” Ria adds.

“I was trying to find out what their plot is all about. They want to build a mall that side.”

"The day they came with a gun, that guy spoke about diamonds. Apparently the villages are sitting on top of the diamonds."

"Diamonds in Thavhakhulu?" I ask. I have heard stories about that.

"What? No!" Rotshi shouts from her seat. "Those diamonds are ancestral."

"The 1960's...it is 50 years later now?" I gasp at Rotshi.

"Yes, grandpa told me this story so many times. These guys can't dig or they are calling for a disaster."

"Do you think it is true?" I ask Rotshi.

"I don't know but I think so. Grandpa made me believe."

"What are you guys talking about?" Ria is lost.

"They say every 50 years, the ancestors' gives diamonds to the villagers. A few people find them all over their farms and some in their homes. Some years ago a mining company tried digging there but they were found dead days after. Again, in the 60's, another company came and hired a hundreds of the villagers to dig up to search for more diamonds, so a lot of people died there."

"That is soooo freaky." She shouts covering her eyes. "There are dead people all over Thavhakhulu? That is crazy.

"No, they are burried in the same wholes they dig." Rotshi chuckles. This is not funny.

"I never believed but come to think of it, how can people just pick diamonds in the farms? Don't you have to dig down to mine for them?" I ask while taking the phone from my pocket. I dial Joseph and he picks after the fourth ring.

"Hey Dr Chief...I was about to call you. You know ever since the women saw you on the magazine, they want a piece you and I am ready to pass a few to you. The days of the salt are over my guy."

"Joseph this is an important call." Can this guy ever be serious?

"What's up?"

"The diamonds. It is 50 years later."

"Yes, I heard that some people are finding small shining stones in their homes. The ancestors are happy once again." He says and I hang up.

I know for some reasons you can find diamonds on the shoreline and riverbeds but it is not the case at Thavhakhulu. The diamonds are randomly scattered in different parts of the villages. Small shining diamond stones. Some use them wisely but some villagers sell them off for a few hundreds.

Rotshi stands from her seat and say, "Why don't we go down to Thavhakhulu to tell people about it and that they shouldn't take the jobs when the digging company gets there? Theeennn Luvhengo and her crew can go dig up themselves and then they can all die? Simple."

I laugh, Ria too.

My phone beeps and it is a message from my mother.

"You and Rotshi have to come home immediately. Pick Mukundi at the boarding school. Your father needs to see you."

Huh? Is he dying so soon?

INSERT 43

MULATSHAWE

I tell Rotshi about the SMS from our mother. She goes to her room to pack a few things for the trip. Ria doesn't want to come with us so she will go to Zoleka's flat until we come back. I can never leave her here alone.

I am praying that the old man pulls through for Rotshi and my mother. I don't need him much but the girls need him. Rotshi depends fully on him and he is my mother's rock.

Rotshi finishes packing her unnecessary overnight bag. We drop Ria at Zoleka's flat. I am still not Zoleka's favourite person.

It is already late so we will get to Venda in the evening, hopefully before everyone goes to bed.

"So where is the watch?" Rotshi asks. I am not wearing it anymore.

"Somewhere on the N1 in Johannesburg. I will tell her I threw it away when I couldn't handle the truth about the affair. I am a man after all and I can't handle been cheated on, remember?"

"What? Okay not so bad for a doctor," she laughs. "Imagine some nigga picking it up and wearing it every day? They will be tracing the wrong guy."

"It will serve them right."

"So, what is your plan with Ria?"

"I am going to marry her. I just need to create the safe haven for her first but we are going to get married."

"And Luvhengo?"

"I will find a way to convince the elders to go call off the wedding for the reasons that she has a man and that I was disrespected. I will find out how they knew about the diamonds and believe me, they are going down." I say and she giggles.

"I will help you to spy on them." She rubs her hands together. "I am happy that things are going well for you now and you can finally be happy with Ria. She truly has a good heart and I can't imagine anyone best for you...and now I can stop

protecting you from girls. But before I resign I will have to deal with that girl we found at Joseph's house. That dimpled thick thighs and a damn tiny waist girl. After that I will give the ropes to Ria. She will deal with the rest of the women."

What do I respond to that? I just laugh. But I know there is nothing to worry about Linda.

"And what about you? Who is he?" I ask and she shakes her head. I take a quick glance at her. I have never seen Rotshi speechless.

"I don't think this love thing was meant for me. I can never make anyone happy and I am tired of trying."

"You are still young. It is better you stay away from this fuck boys you know? And when you are older, you will see things differently."

"I guess so...but you know I used to love this guy and he doesn't like me back. What a disgrace. Mula look at me. He doesn't like this, me, and I tried toning down for him but he just didn't like me. I remember we went on a date and I kept my mouth shut half of the evening, trying to impress him. That was the longeeesst evening for me and he refused a second date. Ever since then, I said no more. No more toning down for a man." she says and I chuckle. This is the Rotshi I know.

"You know they might be marrying you off to some prince soon?"

"Dad won't dare. I am not like you so he won't dare if he knows what is good for him. I will give him a heart attack. I am telling you. Boom! Heart attack. So he won't dare marrying me off."

I believe her. No one messes with her except my father's uncle. She tones down only for him. My father has spoilt her so much he doesnt have control over her anymore.

We play music half of the trip until we pick Mukundi at the boarding school in Makhado. He was shocked to see us. Rotshi tells him we are going to throw dad a surprise party. What better excuse do we have of why we are picking him up on a Saturday evening? He usually visits home on the last weekend of the month and he doesn't like it there. Apparently, we cramp his style.

My mother is sitting in the living room with a bible. Mukundi gives her a hug before going up to his room. We are not cool for him so he hardly chills with us unless he is obligated.

"How is he doing? Is he still up?" I ask. I would have liked to see him.

"No, he is sleeping. Let him rest. His eyes are swelling up and the seizures are getting worse. I am so exhausted from watching him in pain." She says and Rotshi hugs her. I can feel her pain. It is written all over her face.

I leave Rotshi and my mom in the living room. I get to my room so that I can call Ria. Her phone rings a few times before she picks up.

"Hey, are you there already?" she asks. She sedates me with her sweet voice.

"Yeah we just got here."

"How is he holding up?" she asks with a concerning voice.

How does she do this? If I were her, I would be so angry at my father for humiliating me. What he did to her was painful. I would wish him to die instead of caring about his wellbeing.

"He is resting. I will see him tomorrow morning." I say to her. She sounds more concerned than I am.

We flirt and flatter for hours until she dozes off to sleep. I am left just wondering about what the future holds for us and our possible baby. I wish for a little girl who will look like her mother, with the widest smile that will warm my heart daily. She will be the world to both me and Ria; and I will love both of them unconditionally.

The next morning I am woken by my five o'clock alarm that goes off every day. I don't know why I keep forgetting to put the alarms off. I get out of bed and sit by the huge window. I didn't sleep well. I kept dreaming of how I will handle Luvhengo and her crew. I have got to dig up how they found out about the diamonds. I need something rock-solid to blackmail them to stay away from Ria and my family. I want dirt to use as a coercion for them to stay away for good.

There is a lot I have to do.

I can see the view of the villages from afar. The royal house is slightly on top of the mountain so I can see the valley perfectly. Venda is such a beautiful land. I am supposed to be Chief of the valley before me. I don't know if I want to do so. I am not Musanda Ratshali's child and I don't know why he wants to go to the grave with such a secret. I will only do it to honour him for my life, as long as I have Ria on my side.

My mother is sitting beside my father's bed while Rotshi is sitting with him on the bed. They are both resting their backs on the headboard. I wonder how Rotshidza is

going to survive without this man. Mukundi walks in a few minutes later and seat close to my mom.

"How are you holding up?" I ask.

"I am fine," he mutters.

"Tell me why you don't want to go for external radiation therapy?"

"We have been through this before," he says. "I don't believe in such things."

"But you believe your sangoma telling you they bewitched you, nga tshifula? Come on, dad." Rotshi snaps at him. Her eyes are swollen. She has been crying this one.

"That's not how you speak to my husband," my mother snaps back at her daughter.

Everyone is just frustrated.

"No Mma, he is unfair. We still need him and he doesn't want to do the treatments for us." Rotshi has tears in her eyes. It is really painful. My father has his own beliefs and he is choosing them over what everyone believes in.

"How are things with that girlfriend of yours?" he asks and I narrow my eye. Is he asking me about Ria? I am tempted to tell him that we are fine but I don't want them to know I found her.

"Rotshi and Mukundi, please excuse us," I say and they leave the room. "We need to discuss about the marriage with the Kutamas."

"Tell the uncles. I brought them here for that." He says.

What is going on here?

"Your father wants you to do what your heart desires. If it is Rialivhuwa you want? Find her and let it be. The uncles will go and pay for the breach of the agreement at the Kutama's family." My mother says and I ask her to repeat.

"I can't push you to honour me for sparing your life whereas it was my choice to raise you as my own son. I am dying soon and I won't even be here when you suffer with a woman you don't love. Fokof to this tradition."

Should I be happy that he is on his death bed? Because instead of damaging his brains, this tumour opened it up instead.

What took him so long?

"You don't know how honoured I am to hear that." I say. I am delighted.

"I have seen the way you look at her. What more should a parent wish for his children, if not happiness? But I am so worried about Rotshidzwa. That girl is going to turn into something I don't wish for and I am afraid I will not be here to leash her. I have got to find a way to leash her or else she will destroy her life," his voice is breaking and you can feel the pain he is going through.

Rotshi walks in after knocking a few times.

"Daddy, the lawyer is here to see you."

"Let him in," my mother says.

So my father is really giving up. I mean, he is executing preparations for his death now.

"Don't forget to assign a few millions to me since you are choosing to die over us." Rotshi says and close the door.

This girl! No wonder my father is worried about her.

My mother and I leave the room and head for the dining room. My father's uncle is here. That one that prefers to herd his cattle instead of attending family meetings. His name is Samuel. There are other two of my father's uncles and my aunt as well sitting in the living room. These two uncles are my grandfather's brothers. It is Vho Vuledzani and Vho Tshikhudo Ratshali.

There is tea and all sorts of scones all over the table. I join them while my mother passes to the kitchen.

"Your father was telling us that you are going to give us direction about the wedding." Uncle Tshikhudo says after sipping tea from the mug.

"Yes, I am going to request that you go to call off the marriage." I say and everyone gasp.

"My brother's son, what is your problem?" My aunt asks. She is one of Luvhengo's fans.

"I am calling off the wedding." I say.

"What is the problem, we can solve whatever problem it is. If it is that you are not in love with her, you will learn to love each other when time goes on. Arranged marriages always work out."

"I am disrespected and what kind of a chief will I become if I allow to be disrespected the way she did?"

“Haaa Luvhengo, disrespect? Haikhona.” My aunt says from her seat. She sees Luvhengo as a goddess, remember?

“She lives with a man.” I say and they all gasp once again in shock. “That woman was supposed to stay pure for the chief, but No, she has a man who is as good as her husband. I am disrespected by that and want nothing to do with her. So you are going to the Kutama’s on Saturday to cancel the wedding.”

I show them the picture of what I found in her house. The evidence of a man living in her house. I don’t care if they believe it or not. They are calling off the wedding on Saturday.

I am not going to tell them about the plots. It will just complicate everything for the royal house. I will deal with it myself.

“So, we have to pick another wife for you as soon as possible.” Uncle Sam says.

“That will not be necessary.” I say and they stare at each other as if I am joking. “I will pick the wife for myself.”

I am not going to compromise anymore. Ria might even be pregnant. Even if she is not, she is going to be the queen of Thavhakhulu if I ever become the chief.

“Alright, I will call the Kutama’s and we will drive to Joburg on Saturday morning.” Uncle Vuledzani advices.

I am thrilled.

Ria and I can finally be together without no stress.

Uncle Sam announces that the scones are giving him a running stomach. Too much information, I tell you. He hurries out of the room, leaving us laughing at him.

I pick my phone from my pocket and type an SMS to my woman.

“I love you too my prince.” She responds to my text.

“Send me that pic I saw on your wallpaper.” I text her.

I receive the picture seconds later. I love her new haircut. She looks so different in it.

I smile to myself. I am finally going to be with my love without anyone interfering. I scroll to my phone gallery to browse on the pictures of us the day we made our relationship official. It was on my birthday. I scroll past a few pics of us hugging and laughing, until I stop at one of her standing alone. She was smiling at me.

“Heeee vhanna...what are you doing with Mulondi’s picture on your phone?” Uncle Sam shouts from behind me.

“Excuse me?”

“I asked you what you doing with a picture of Mulondi on your phone?” he roars again with fierce eyes.

I remember the name. I am good with names.

My aunt stands from her seat and stands beside my uncle to also see the picture.

“Mula, hoyo ndi Mulondi...that is Mulondi.” My aunt shouts. “That woman’s face haunts me every night.”

“No, it is not her.” I say. “This one on the picture is Rialivhuwa.”

“That is a replica of the woman who killed my sister. I am not going to rest until I kill Mulondi with my own bare hands. I swear. ” Uncle Sam howls. My aunt yanks the phone from my hand and scroll through the other pictures.

“Mula, who is this girl?” she asks.

Am I and Ria ever going to love each other in peace?

“Who is she?” my aunt raises her voice while Uncle Sam is taking off his jacket. The old man is now struggling to breathe.

Oh, Lord!

~~~~~

**THE REST OF THE CHAPTERS WILL BE ON THE BOOK.**

**IT'S COMING OUT SOON!!**