

FANTASY

Introduction

"By the time this night is over
The stars are gonna shine on two lovers in love
And when the morning comes
It's gonna find us together
In a love that's just began....."

I still remember my wedding day. The sound of Peabo Bryson and Kenny G played while my husband talked and laughed with the people. In fact I don't think I'll ever forget that day. I was 18 years old. Yes, you read that correct. I was 18 right after high school and I was told I would get married the following month. The tears I cried begging my uncles not to do it but they didn't hear me. Why

would they hear me when I was a skinny young girl who was going to make them rich. Give our family some respect in the community because my marriage meant they could now drink with the Mbonambi clan.

I thought about running away but to where? The only place I knew was that house and nobody was going to take me in. My mother few days after I was born. They said someone bewitched her but now I see that something must have gone wrong somewhere when she was giving birth to me. She left me with her family and they raised me up until they started seeing me as a money making machine.

I won't lie and say my husband was abusive or that he treated me bad even though he was 20 years older than me. No, he treated me well. Sent me to school the moment we left the rurals and moved to Durban. When I finished my degree he bribed someone in the Municipality and I got the internship for two years which turned into full employment when the contract ended.

That's when my life began to change. I made friends with my colleagues. They invited me out and I declined at first because I was used to being a wife and I was told that a wife doesn't go anywhere without asking the husband first. I couldn't ask him so I made excuses until he went overseas for business and I decided to take a chance. A chance turned into many chances and I loved the life I was seeing when I was out. I wanted that life and whenever my husband was away on whatever he was doing I was out living the life.

chapter 1

I woke up with a killer headache, a full blown hangover even though I had drank three glasses of wine the night before. When my phone rang I almost threw it out of the window because it rang right inside my head. It was my friend Nombuso calling, probably checking if I was okay. That's why I loved them. They treated me like a sister. Something I didn't have growing up. They didn't frown at my lack of social skills when I told them

how my life worked out. They understood and wanted me to enjoy this without losing myself.

"Girl" I answered with my eyes closed

"Go the kitchen and I'll coach you on how to heal the hangover" she sounded like she was running.

"I'm dying" I stood up and slipped my slippers on before going to the kitchen.

"I know" she laughed.

When I got the the kitchen she started giving me instructions. Luckily I had everything she was saying I should use.

"Is it supposed to smell bad?" I looked inside the glass with my mouth turned down

"Yes. Pinch your nose and drink once. You will be fine after" she instructed before ending the call.

I did as told before going to the lounge to rest my heavy head on the couch. I still needed to clean because we didn't have a day to day housekeeper. When my husband suggested hiring a full time housekeeper I said no. I didn't want him to have a

spy and he said he didn't want us to have kids and we were hardly home during the day so it didn't make sense. I did the cleaning myself but the lady come for the laundry twice a week.

"Thembeka" someone woke me up.

I jumped up and rubbed my eyes when the person who had woken me up was my husband. I was expecting him around the evening not this early.

"You look sick" his hand touched my forehead.

"I think i'm coming down with a cold" I lied and looked at the clock. It was after 12 midday. He wasn't that early and I was still feeling sick from the alcohol

"Let me get you to the doctor. I'll change the shirt" he started to walk away but I stopped him. I couldn't have a doctor telling my husband that I was hangover not dying from an unknown bacteria.

"It's fine. I took some pills earlier. My friend Nombuso brought them. I'll be fine" I lied. I was getting better at it too. I didn't hear my voice shake when I lied like it used to when I started.

"Are you sure?" He looked at me like he didn't believe me

"Very sure. I'm even feel hungry. I'll go start on the pots" I didn't wait for a reply.

When I got to the bedroom I changed quickly and picked up the clothes I dumped on the floor the night before. By the time he walked in I was busy brushing my teeth in the bathroom.

I silently finished and left the bedroom while he stripped probably to take a shower. That was going to give me enough time to cook a quick meal and serve it few minutes after he was done.

I made him some macaroni and served it while he

was busy watching TV.

"Thanks MaKhumalo" he sat up straight and I kneeled down before putting the tray on the coffee table.

This was our life. I did my duties as a wife and he did his as a husband. When we had people over I didn't serve them like this and I didn't cook. He hired people to do all that and I just supervised here and there and then smile like he always said I should.

Nqubeko wasn't a bad person. He didn't shout at me. He didn't treat me like rubbish. Most of the time he let me be. When I got married they said I needed to attend all his needs and I asked what were those needs. No one told me straight, they said he will tell me himself. The first months I expected a list of needs but it never came. He didn't wake me up in the middle of the night and ask for sex. We did do it but it didn't feel like an exhausting chore.

Sometimes we went weeks without it and when he was away on business he called to ask if I was still okay and I was satisfied with that. He could have shouted at me, treat me bad and abuse his power

but he didn't. I was given an allowance for my things such as clothes and toiletries. The grocery was bought once a month and he bought bread every evening from work. To be fair I was better than most girls who were in arranged marriages. One girl said her husband used to beat her up when she forgot something and my husband never did that. He didn't even shout at me. If I didn't do anything he politely asked me for it. We were functioning so well. Even with my newly found lifestyle of drinking wine and visiting bars I was managing it so well.

When he finished eating I went to clean up and he was back to watching TV. I used this chance and cleaned the kitchen before moving to the dining room. He put his feet up to get them out of the way as he continued talking about business on the phone. I didn't know what he did exactly except that it involved huge trucks that transported things all over the country and other African countries. That's

all I knew and he didn't tell me anything else. When I was studying I thought he might get me a job in his company but he said he didn't want me to be forced into a place just because he was there and I was grateful. I wasn't sure about seeing someone 24/7. It was okay this way.

"MaKhumalo" his voice broke me out of my thoughts.

"Yes" I replied. I didn't use the words that some couple used. Maybe I would have gotten used to them if he used them as well but he didn't. He called me MaKhumalo and I called him Mbonambi or simply said 'yes'

"Khethelo is inviting us for dinner. At 7" it wasn't a question. He was letting me know and we were going.

"Okay. I'll get ready" I resumed my cleaning and he went back to the TV.

"I'll wear my blue shirt and jeans" he added after a while. I didn't answer because he knew I heard.

I was ready before six o'clock and Nqubeko was still showering. I used that chance and perfected my eyebrows just like Nombuso and Phumelele taught me. I didn't wear make-up often because I only had pimples when it was close to my monthly cycle and they didn't leave marks so I accepted my face as I was but sometimes I did use powder when it was hot to avoid the oily nose.

Nqubeko exited the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his lower body. He wasn't fat. He worked out from time to time and it helped that he was taller. He was fair in complexion. He didn't grow hair but he did let his sideburns grow along with his beard. He stood straight most of the time and he spoke in a full of confidence voice. People said this was the case with business people. I accepted him as he was. Me next to him, I didn't look 20 years younger because I wasn't small and thin. I was that when I got married but when my body began filling out I became taller and larger too. I wore size 36 and my friends taught me to walk tall to embrace myself.

Nombuso was tall and slim while Phumelele was short and thick.

"Are you done?" He asked after he finished buttoning his shirt and folded the sleeves twice.

"Yes i'm done" I picked up my bag and phone.

"Let's go" he picked up his own phone and wallet before we left the bedroom.

He locked the door while I walked to the car. The sun was completely gone and the evening cool air was settling in. We were going to be back late but I didn't mind because I still had Sunday to rest before going to work on Monday.

The trip wasn't completely quiet. He turned the radio on and we did make some comments about the bad driver, the bad traffic on the other lane, the winter coming in too early. This was our normal life. When we were both out of words the radio filled in until we arrived in Chesterville and we were

welcomed by his friend Khethelo.

"Mrs Mbonambi" said Khethelo before he smiled.

"Hi" I smiled back before hugging his wife who was pregnant and huge.

"I was starting to think I must have done something to make you avoid me" she laughed before taking me by hand and led me to the kitchen where two other ladies were busy with the food.

"Work has us busy" I lied. She was trying to befriend me but I wasn't sure about it. It wasn't because I was acting like I was better but she was a housewife with two kids already while I didn't have any kids and Nqubeko said we were never going to have them because he didn't want them. Between that and me not being interested in their business and her being a housewife it seemed like we had very little in common.

"I can imagine. Khethelo told me about the trips Nqubeko has to take. Being home alone must be getting to you hey" she smiled and brushed her stomach. I wondered how it must feel to be

pregnant. Surely it was good, bringing a life into this world. Feeling a person grown inside you and all that.

"Sometimes it does" I lied. I liked being alone. Listening to music and singing along to some songs I knew and watching television and then being out with the girls.

"You should come visit me next time he is away. We can have a girls in" she suggested and I welcomed her suggestion even though I wasn't going to take it.

The dinner wasn't a cruel affair. They spoke and made jokes and I laughed until Khethelo commented about how I was a little different.

"Different how?" Asked Nqubeko looking at me.

"More relaxed. She doesn't sound like she is scared like she was when you first brought her here. In fact the last time we had dinner together she hardly laughed like this. I'm glad"

There was a moment of silence until Sindiswa

agreed with her husband about how I was different. I held my breath because I wasn't sure if someone had seen me drinking with the girls and they were taking this conversation to that direction. I needed to be extra careful now.

"She is growing and I won't lie. I love it too" agreed Nqubeko even though he did sound like he didn't know what he was talking about.

"I won't lie. At some point I did think you guys will grow apart" continued Khethelo

"Why?" Asked Nqubeko putting down his fork

"I don't know. Maybe because of the whole arrange marriage. She was young and she grew right in front of us. Most women like her end up leaving the marriage because they have seen something else out there and wanted it. She is educated and working but still she remain the well mannered wife. Someone else would be showing you flames by now" he laughed and no one else did

"She is loyal and I appreciate that about her" replied Nqubeko

"That's an amazing quality in a person Nqubeko. We should appreciate these woman. They make us who we are" he smiled and squeezed Sundiswa's hand. That was the difference with us. We didn't do that at all. Nqubeko touched me only when it was necessary but even then his touch was gentle. Even the first time we had sex I was really scared not really sure what to expect. He was gentle and continued being that gentle every time we did it. I appreciated all that about him.

Chapter 2

Nqubeko went to Cape Town Monday morning. I woke up to him already dressed and ready to go saying there was an emergency on some deal he was working on. He left me some money saying I should buy myself something nice. I was grateful because my friends were suggesting a weekend get away we needed to save for. I was going to make a plan about Nqubeko if he wasn't out there traveling. I watched him go before preparing my own day. The weekend wasn't all bad, after we returned to

Khethelo's dinner we had sex and then slept. Sunday was my wash day so I did all that while Nqubeko was busy working in the dining room. We had a quiet day before retiring to bed and then him leaving for Cape Town for the emergency.

"Earth to Thembeke" said Phumelele before she dumped the files on my desk.

"I need coffee" I grabbed my handbag and searched for my wallet.

"Coffee? Are you feeling okay?" She grabbed her chair and pulled it closer.

"I'm fine. Hone alone again. The husband went to Cape Town this morning. An emergency he needed to take care off" I pulled out the notes and closed my wallet before dumping it back to my handbag.

"When is he coming back?"

"Tomorrow evening. At least I won't cook today" and I was going to sort out my wardrobe as well.

"We should have a sleep over" she turned around

towards Nombuso's desk before asking if she wanted a sleep over.

"Sleep over? Its Monday" replied Nombuso walking over to my desk as well.

"What are you? 12? Yes a sleep over. We won't do anything exhausting. Popcorn and watch a movie" pressed Phumelele pushing her glasses in place

"I'm sold. Let me grab the coffee girls" I stood up and left them.

Our Offices were on the second floor and the first floor was another department and then the ground floor had coffee spots and a restaurants so we did the coffee run all the time.

"The lift is out" said one of the building caretakers as I made my way over "Sorry" he looked at my shoes. They were going to be a nightmare to walk up and down the stairs but i had no choice.

"Thanks" I went to the stairs taking them one at the

time until I was downstairs.

The weather was great and warmer. I was tempted to stand outside for a while but I had work waiting for me.

I bought three coffee and added a giant muffin for myself before going back upstairs.

Nombuso and Phumelele were still sitting on my desk when I returned.

"Thanks girl" said Phumelele when I handed her the coffee.

"Let me check my wallet" said Nombuso walking back to her desk. I didn't refuse when they paid me back. It was still the good days after payday.

"Thembeke, Mr Nene needs you downstairs" announced Tracy walking past the door

"Thanks" I left the coffee and went back downstairs. The guys were still working on the lift so I took the stairs.

"Watch out" someone yelled before everything started moving in a different direction and I was

clearly heading downstairs head first. Something cushioned my fall as I landed down but the pain in my leg was unbearable.

"You are okay" someone said beneath me and I tried to wake up but I couldn't. Ear rang and then it felt like there was needles on my eyes.

"Shit" someone pulled my head up a bit before I was placed down on something soft.

"My leg. I think its broken" the ringing and the discomfort in my eyes was nothing compared to the pain on my leg.

Someone touched the leg and I screamed in pain when their touch wasn't gentle anymore.

"Not broken. Did you call for an ambulance?"

"Did she hurt her head?" Asked Nombuso sounding like she was out of breath.

"The back of her neck but she landed on me mostly" explained the person above my head. I tried to figure out who it was but I didn't recognize it.

"My eyes hurt. Like I have needles on them" I tried to

open one but it was the same so i closed them again "Can someone call my husband?"

"Shii. We will let him know" someone replied before heavy footsteps come over and then they put something that made moving the neck really hard.

"Still in pain?" Asked the doctor when i finally woke up and the ringing in head was gone.

"No. My legs doesn't hurt that much" I looked at the cast "Is it broken?" I could feel my toes

"It's not that bad. You should be fine in few weeks. But you have to put up your leg for a while"

"But I have work. I have to....."

"To heal and get back into health. Its important Mrs Mbonambi"

"I guess so. So I can go home today?" He laughed a bit before shaking his head.

"Not today. Maybe tomorrow. Your friends are outside. I can call them in just for few minutes" he picked up his file

"Thank you doctor"

He nodded and left the room before Nombuso and Phumelele walked in. Nombuso was carrying my handbag.

"Thanks girls" we hugged before they started telling me how sour the mood was at the office after I got injured.

"I'll be fine. The leg will heal in few weeks" we all stared at the cast.

"We should sign it" suggested Phume

"And i'll walk around with a dirty cast? No ways"

"We will sign it neatly"

"Forget it. Did you manage to find Nqubeko?"

Phumelele looked away while Nombuso started twisting her fingers.

"Is he okay?" they were hiding something.

"I called but he didn't answer. I left a message though" she was definitely hiding something.

I nodded and took my bag before searching for my phone. Nombuso even wrapped up my half eaten muffin with a cling wrap. I no longer had an appetite for it.

There was no message or missed call. I dialled his number and it rang to voicemail but I tried again.

"Hello" answered a voice that did not belong to Nqubeko.

"Hi. Is Nqubeko there?"

She didn't reply before I heard voices and then the line went dead. I called again and this time he answered.

"MaKhumalo" he sounded so cool for a person who just had his phone answered by another woman.

"I broke my leg. I'm at the hospital"

"What happened? Which hospital?"

I gave him details and the hospital name and that I was in a cast.

"I'll take the next available flight back to Durban"

"Okay" that was my reply before ending the call.

"When I called someone else answered. I'm sorry I didn't want to add to your worries" said Nombuso as she looked so bothered as if she was the one having people answering her phone.

"Its not your fault" she had no reason to feel bad.

"Who do you think is that woman?" Asked Phumelele.

"I don't know"

"Maybe it's a PA or something" said Nombuso clearly trying to make me feel better.

"Maybe" that was all I could say. I didn't even know if Nqubeko travelled with his PA. Did he even have one? There was a lot I didn't know about the man I was married to and for a long time I settled but it was never too late to check things closer and see what was really happening.

The phone made all of us jump when it rang. We laughed at our silliness before I answered.

"Hello"

"I managed to get a flight. I should be there before this evening. I'm driving to the airport as we speak"

"Okay. See you then" I was surprised by him calling me just to say that. Was it guilt? Or a real worry over an injured wife in his absent.

"Okay" he ended the call after that.

"Do you think Nqubeko is cheating on me?" I asked my friends straight out.

"Yes. I think so" said Phumelele quickly "I'm sorry but I really think he has someone else out there"

Chapter 3

The doctor let me go home the second day. Nqubeko was back and taking care of me. He didn't want me to do anything at all. He didn't say anything about the person who answered the phone. I didn't ask but I didn't forget. I was sure he was seeing someone else and my sixth senses were awake and alert. I watched the way he handled his

phone. I listened when he made calls and noticed the differences in his tone each time someone called. Whenever he went to the shops I went through his things hoping to catch anything that was going to be proof but there was nothing.

The cast stayed in my leg for three weeks. The whole three weeks he took care of me without showing any impatience. He made me meals in bed when the weather was bad because he said the bone hurt worse when it's cold. I still did some work but mostly completing here and there because Nombuso and Phumelele didn't feel comfortable being around him. I was that woman, the one people look at and feel sorry. They were my friends but they were people. I could see it in their eyes that they were saying 'Obviously'. I was married but my husband and I didn't have what most couples did. We were like two people moving around carefully so we don't bump to the other part. He was treating me just like I was treating him. Doing my part and him his even though him cheating was not part of the equation.

The cast was removed on the 3rd week and at work they gave me that week to stay home and rest before limping to work because I did have a little limp that the doctor said will go away with help from workout activities they gave me. I was happy to have the weight on my leg gone even though it left my leg dirty and thinner than the other. The first day without the cast Nqubeko didn't go to work and worked from home. I offered to cook because I missed being busy and sitting around wasn't something I enjoyed unless I was alone. He didn't say anything instead he went outside to work in the garden because the evening sun was good.

I cooked and cleaned the kitchen while my my eye kept looking in the garden because he was on the phone mostly. I could tell just by the body language that he was talking to her. He seemed relaxed, too relaxed and laughed from time to time.

When my heart couldn't take it anymore I poured

some Juice and took it to him.

"I told you. I'll sort it out" he was saying on the phone before he looked up and saw my shadow approach because I was coming behind him.

"Yes. I know. I'll call you back" he ended the call and placed the phone on the table before looking back at me. There was no smile just a pleasant face that I was used to.

"I thought you might be thirsty so I brought you juice" I put the glass down next to his phone. His hand reached over and removed the phone next to the glass.

"Thank you MaKhumalo" he pushed the laptop aside before his attention was back on the papers in front of him.

"So how is everything in Cape Town? You came back in such a hurry. I hope nothing was ruined" there was resentment in my voice and if he knew me as his wife he would have picked it up but there was no uncomfortable shift or sudden pause as someone being caught out.

"Everything is fine. But I have to go back soon"

"Soon?" I asked my voice trembling just a bit

"Yes. It should be tomorrow but I don't think its fair"

"Fair to who?" I asked quickly, so quickly he actual looked at me when I said it "I mean I don't want your business to suffer because of me. If you are desperately needed there I say go. I'll help you pack" my statement was meant to hide the real feeling inside me but I was failing.

"It can wait. In sickness and in health" he raised his eyebrows as if to say 'duh'

"I'm fine now. I really don't mind"

"No. Not tomorrow and you are starting to sound like you are chasing me away"

"Of cause not. I was just saying because it's been weeks" I faked a smile but deep down I was sobbing.

"Don't worry about it. Thanks for the juice" that meant now go and I nodded before going back to the house.

My mood didn't improve. Not even when I dished up and he ate everything I cooked. Each time I looked at him I saw him with someone else. Someone who was probably there waiting on him. Someone he laughed with while he hardly made a joke with me. Someone he held hands while sitting on the couch while we hardly sat in the same couch. Someone he sent these little texts to while I was asked if i'm okay and updated so I can stay put like a little wife that I really was.

My anger grew each time I saw the clues I've missed over the years. When I was studying he could go for days without saying more than hello to me. I thought he didn't want to disturb me because I was focusing. He hardly took me to school unless it was raining and he didn't want me to drive in the rain. All those were the clues. He was busy entertaining someone else while I was treated like a chore. Someone he was responsible for.

"Right now?" His voice snapped me back to reality. He was on the phone and already standing up as if

he was going somewhere.

"Okay. I'll call you when I know" he walked to the bedroom leaving me to stare behind him wondering what was going on now. Before the wake up call none of his calls bothered me. But things were different now.

I sat still when he came back with his jacket.

"I have to go to the hospital. Khethelo was in a car accident. I took my key so lock up" he instructed and I didn't dare ask to go to. I simply nodded and locked the door behind him.

When the gate opened and closed I turned the light off and went to his study. His laptop was on the desk. I flipped the screen open and turned it on. It requested a password. I tried few names but there were all wrong so I gave up and started searching the drawers. All the drawers I didn't check properly the weeks before. There was nothing much just the company files. I even searched the book shelves flipping pages just in case he was hiding something inside. There was nothing but I didn't want to think I

was wrong. I wasn't wrong. There was someone and that someone was clearly important to Nqubeko.

I searched until I started retracing my own steps just in case there was something I was missing. There was nothing out of the ordinary. When I was satisfied I started checking if I put everything back and picked up some papers on the floor. My breath came to a sudden stop when I saw it. A photo. A woman standing in front of the camera while Nqubeko was behind her wearing sun glasses and half naked. I stared at the photo until a tear dropped on the photo instantly ruining it. The pain felt like someone was busy stabbing me repeatedly in the heart. The first tears since my wedding day were the tears of heartbreak because my husband had another woman. A woman he seemed to relax with. Someone he had conversations with. They even took photos when we never did that. All my photos were taken in the mirror because he never took any photo of me. He never even compliment me on a hairstyle even though he said I only needed to cover

my head if we were home with the family. I did different hairstyles and he never said anything about them. He didn't need to, he had someone he cuddled with when cold. Someone he smiled when he took his photo. Someone who loved him even though he was wearing a wedding ring. I was just there to clean and cook and give him sex if he wanted some and she wasn't available.

With shaking hands I put the photo back to the papers it was in and went to cry in bed until I fell asleep.

Chapter 4

"What are you going to do?" Asked Phumelele lowering her voice.

I was back to work and Nqubeko was away again. This time he said he was going to "Ghana" but I knew that "Ghana" was his side chick.

"I don't know" I replied and looked away so she wouldn't see the tears in my eyes. It felt like everyone knew even though they didn't. That's what

humiliation does to a person. You begin to feel like everyone knows and they are laughing at you.

"It's lunch. My treat" shouted Nombuso walking over to my desk.

I didn't want to go outside but staying glued to the chair wasn't helping at all.

Phumelele grabbed my handbag forcing me to get up as well.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Out. Come" replied Nombuso with a wide grin on her face.

The lift was working again and I was still afraid of the stairs even though they did explain that the fall wasn't caused by the shoes. Someone had spilled some water and one of the handy men was gone to find the mop.

"You dragged us out for hot dogs?" Complained Phumelele when Nombuso offered to get us

hotdogs on the side road stand.

"Be grateful" she laughed and placed our order to the guy. I didn't mind and I knew that Phumelele also did really mind. We weren't those people who looked down on this. I knew where I came from and they also had their past.

"Hot for you and plain for you" she handed us the takeaways before we walked across the road for coffee.

"I have no idea how you eat a plain hotdog" they started taking a jab at me and I just laughed. On a normal day I would have gone all out to try and convince them that it was better without the drippings. But my heart was still sore.

We picked a corner table before ordering coffee.

"Okay. Talk" said Nombuso turning to me

"About what?" I already told them the whole story about the photo. I couldn't do it again.

"Everything. You cannot act like you didn't see anything. She answered his phone Thembeke. She

did that on purpose" said Phumelele sounding like she wanted to grab my shoulders and give me a little shake.

"I know but what can I do? Do I just demand the truth?" I looked at her

"You think? He is cheating" this time she did yell and then covered her mouth when people around us raised their heads and looked at us "Sorry"

"What I don't get is why does it bother you?" Asked Nombuso sipping her coffee.

"What? Phumelele and I asked at the same time.

"Don't what me. You and Nqubeko live two separate lives. He has his and you have yours. Sure, his just happen to involve a woman but yours also involve clubs and parties"

"So that gives him a right to cheat?" Asked Phumelele looking at her with her eyes wide open

"It doesn't but all i'm saying is, is it fair that Thembeke does all this and then expect Nqubeko to have this perfect life"

"Wow. Just wow" tears filled my eyes. She was so cruel. Blaming me for his cheating.

"We are your friends and as friends we owe you the truth. You are also treating your husband as a stranger and doing things behind his back"

"So he should cheat for that?" I yelled at her

When the tears exited my eyes I searched my handbag for the tissue.

"He is wrong to cheat. You should confront him but while at it also think about your part in this. The secret nights out, the drinking. Damn you basically have another life Thembeke and he doesn't know. You don't even show any affection towards the guy" continued Nombuso as if she wanted to fully use the opportunity while she had one.

"And he showers me with love?" The memory of him smiling while talking to her on the phone flashed on my mind and the pain spread all over my body. Why didn't I get that too? Why not show me some affection as well.

"Look. All i'm saying is, let's not act like Nqubeko is

this big monster. He is a man and men cheat. At least he come home when you need him"

"You are unbelievable. Thanks for the hotdog" I stood up and grabbed my bag before walking away.

"This is silly. Will you stop!!" She shouted behind me sounding like she was out of breath. I kept walking hardly looking up because I was crying. It was bad enough that I was heartbroken but my best friend was busy defending my husband. What was drinking and dancing compared to him sleeping with another woman?

"Thembeke" yelled Phumelele sounding closer than Nombuso but I kept walking before something hit me hard at the back of my head. I went forward and landed on the pole head first.

Someone else yelled and I could see people looking at me mostly with their eyes wide open.

"Is she okay?" Someone asked before two men

kneeled next to me.

"She hit her head. Someone call an ambulance" they replied. I stared at them wondering why they needed to wear same clothes. They were too old for this.

"Thembeke" shouted Nombuso. I tried to move my head but it felt stuck. Like my neck was bigger than the head.

"Don't move her. She could have a serious injury. Instructed the twins getting up.

"The ambulance is here" said Phumelele taking my hand. She was also a double and a little blur.

I was awake and alert as they carried me to the hospital. They said a pallet fell from the truck and hit me. It didn't make any sense and the more I thought about it, it made my head hurt before I finally sleep only to wake up in a hospital bed with Nombuso and Phumelele watching me.

"You are awake" exclaimed Nombuso clearly crying.

I nodded and my neck was a bit sore but I could move my legs and arms and head. So I wasn't paralyzed just injured.

"How bad is it?"

"Its not that bad. They said you have no major injuries. A bruise in your neck that should heal in few days. The head knock wasn't major as well" explained Phumelele.

"Thank God. So when do I leave?"

"The doctor will let you know. I sent a whatsapp text to your husband. With your phone" she pointed the phone next to the bed.

"Thanks" I reached for it and there were messages from Nqubeko and another number I didn't know.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you angry. If I didn't make you angry you wouldn't have left like that" said Nombuso sounding like she was going to start crying.

"*I was hit by something. That wasn't your fault"

"The van was delivering the pallets in that building next to ours. It slipped after the rope broke and one hit you" explained Phumelele

"Its fine. I'm not seriously injured anyway" I unlocked my phone and read Nqubeko's messages first.

He was coming back home as soon as he got the flight out and he wanted to know how I was. The second message was him asking Nombuso to reply because she wasn't answering my phone. The next two text messages were him still demanding a reply because he wasn't getting anything from the hospital.

I decided to text him and tell him I was fine. He called immediately after that and I waited for a moment before answering.

"What happened?" There was no hello

"I walked past a delivering van and got hit by a falling pallet. Its nothing serious. They will probably let me go home tomorrow" the doctor walked in

"A falling pallet? Where was...." he stopped talking

"Who? I was walking past, with my friends. They didn't injure me on purpose" he was being dramatic. Acting like a loving husband when he was a cheating pig.

"Is the doctor there? Give him the phone" he demanded and I held the phone out to the doctor before mouthing sorry because this was so unnecessary.

They spoke for few minutes before the doctor returned my phone.

"I'm sorry about that"

"It comes with a job. But like I told him. So far everything seems to be okay but you are staying just to be sure. I did see that you had a broken leg before and it might be a little tender because of the fall but it should be fine as well" explained the doctor sounding pleasant.

"Thank you Sir" said Nombuso smiling politely to him.

Phumelele and I looked at each other. The doctor wasn't ugly. Without the white coat he probably

looked good.

"The nurse will come to give you your medication and unfortunately ladies you will need to give her some rest"

"We will come back to tomorrow" said Nombuso and we laughed before the doctor walked out quickly after fumbling with the handle a bit.

"You are so dirty" teased Phumelele

"I'm available" insisted Nombuso flicking her weave dramatically. We were back to being us girls.

"And I say go for it" I encouraged before he laughed. When the nurse arrived they said goodbye and left.

When the nurse left as well I took the phone and went to read the messages from the number I didn't know.

"Just because I let him marry you, it doesn't mean you get to call the shots. Nqubeko is my man. He asked for my permission when he married you. The stunts you keep pulling for his attention are starting to annoy me. Don't make me lose my cool and

destroy your little fantasy"

I stared at the message feeling my body start to heat up and my armpits itching. How dare she?

When I tried to call her back the number went to voicemail. I decided to send a text message as well.

"You are the one living a fantasy. You are cheap and he didn't marry you because he didn't want to. The reason he 'asked' for permission was because he knew you were dumb enough to let him continue using you while he married me. He declared his love for me in broad daylight while he is having a hidden affair with you. Keep thinking you are calling the shots but we both know that you are a delusional hoe" when I was satisfied I pressed send and watched as the message got delivered and then the two ticks became blue. When I tried to call again she dropped the call. I tried three more times before giving up.

She sent another message. It was a video this time. I waited as my phone downloaded the video and then pressed play. It was dark at first and then the

hand that was blocking the video was removed revealing Nqubeko in bed while a woman was sitting on him. She was naked and his hand kept brushing her nipples. I watched for few seconds as she laughed and started moving on him. Doing the back and forth move. I wanted to cry. Scream on top of my lungs and smash my phone across the room but I didn't. Instead I found myself typing a reply.

"Great video. Let me see how many likes it will get on Facebook" without missing a beat I quickly uploaded a video and then put my phone down before sobbing on the pillow.

Chapter 5

Nqubeko arrived early the next day. I could hear him asking to see me even though it wasn't visiting hours yet. The nurse refused before he started demanding his tone sounding scary. More voices sounded before he finally walked in looking beyond pissed off.

"Its not like i'm planning to kill you and i pay real money for this" he clicked his tongue before dumping the bag on the bed. His phone rang and he looked at it before answering.

"And?" He didn't greet

I couldn't hear what the caller was saying but Nqubeko kept nodding as if the person could see him.

"And you can't stop it?" He asked after a while.

I reached for my phone and switched it on because i switched it off after uploading the video. The moment it came to life messages came flooding. Facebook notifications as well. I read the messages first. Most came from my colleagues saying i was hacked on facebook and i needed to deactivate the account. Some from my friends saying i needed to delete the video. I checked the facebook messages next. Some were insulting me calling me a bitter woman for humiliating another woman like that. Some praised me for it saying they deserved it and that i had done it for all married women who are

forced to deal with side chicks who forget their places.

"Can't you talk her out of it?" I heard Nqubeko ask before he turned and looked at me.

"Thanks man. I know" he ended the call before he put the phone back to his pocket.

We both remained quiet for a minute and when Nqubeko seemed like he was going to speak the door opened and the doctor walked in.

"Mrs Mbonambi. How are you feeling today?" He asked after he greeted my husband.

"I'm feeling fine" i replied without looking at Nqubeko.

"No nauseousness?" He looked at the file

"Nope"

"Good. I see here that you got some painkillers late last night. The neck pain?"

"It was just a headache" i couldn't say it was because i was crying and my head began hurting and my nose got blocked.

"I see. I was going to let you go now but i think we should wait at least midday and see. J ust to be sure" he smiled politely before writing down on the file.

"I'm fine for real"

"I know but we need to be sure plus this is your second head injury. I know its nothing major but still"

Nqubeko coughed making the doctor turn and look at him before he continued writing down and then asked to be excused. I watched him walk out and close the door behind him. Nqubeko grabbed a chair and sat down his eyes still on me.

"Turns out distributing porn is a crime even if you did it to get back at your husband. A case has been opened and as soon as you leave this place you are going to jail" he voice remained the same as if he wasn't delivering something that made my heart want to stop. I was trying to hurt someone who was trying to hurt me.

"I was just angry because she sent me messages

and then the video"

"And you thought why not upload it on facebook?"

His hand closed around the hospital sheet he held it tight "For the whole world to see?"

I didn't have an answer for that one. Thinking about now i realised why it was such a bad idea. Sadly it was too late.

"I'm sorry" that's all i could say. But i wasn't completely sorry. He was the one who put us on this situation. If he didn't go out there and did a sex video it wouldn't have existed and she wouldn't have sent it to me. It was his fault. Them both.

He looked at me as if he wanted to strangle me.

"You didn't watch that video. Did you?" He asked after a moment. Why did it matter? Was he trying to tell me he did it to show me how sex was supposed to be like. That I was supposed to be on top and doing those moves on him?

"No. I'm not really into porn"

When he suddenly stood up I sank down to the

pillow thinking he was finally going to kill me or even beat me up. But instead he pulled his phone out pressed on it for a second and turned the screen towards me. It was Facebook and he was showing me the video.

"Watch" he demanded.

"Why? So I can see you have sex with another woman while you are supposed to be out on business? Do you hate me that much?" I yelled with my eyes closed.

"Just watch the damn video Thembeke" he demanded before his hand grabbed my chin and his fingers pressed on my skin "Watch the fucken video"

My vision was blurred by the tears but I still watched with him holding the phone on my face and his hand holding my chin so I couldn't move my head.

"Have you seen me look like this since you and I got married?" I found the question strange but still I stared at the video and then saw it. Nqubeko had

hair in the video. Short hair and the sideburns. He didn't grow his hair anymore. He was always rocking the shining head now just letting his beard and sideburns grown out before trimming it.

"It was over 9 years ago. Its an old video that got stolen when they hacked Sizakele's emails when she decided to be a politician. We were just being foolish. Her phone backed up the footage and then it saw stored on drive along with some emails the hacker was after. They found the video and stole it. We didn't know the hacker and we were watching out for anyone who will leak it. Then you did it for them" he let go of me put the phone back to his pocket before sitting down again.

"But she sent me messages. She answered your phone. She answered it more than once" I wiped the tears in my eyes

Nqubeko reached over and took my phone. It had a password but he didn't give it to me to unlock it. I watched him touch it before the sound of the video filled the room. He knew my password?

"Wait" he seemed to be thinking something before he looked at me "You said she answered my phone?"

"Yes. When I got injured the first time. My friends called you and she answered. They left a message. When you didn't call back I called and she answered before hanging up and then I called again"

"Answered my phone? No one answered my phone. When you called I was...." He seemed to remember something before he started making a call with his own phone.

"It's Patricia. Find Patricia" he demanded before he threw the phone on the bed in frustration.

"Who is Patricia?"

"The person who answered my phone in Cape Town. That's bitch" his fist banged the bed repeatedly before he buried his head on his hands.

"Why did Patricia answer your phone?" I wasn't following and he wasn't exactly explaining things in details.

He opened his mouth to speak but stopped as if debating whether to tell me or not.

"To set a trap and you fell right into it" the door opened and the nurse walked in with breakfast.

Nqubeko didn't move. When she left he pushed the tray towards me. I had no appetite but when he looked at me and plate I knew I needed to eat.

"So you were in Cape Town with Patricia. She answers your phone, send me messages about your relationship and then send me a video hoping I leak it. I leak it and now she is planning to sue me for it?" I asked while stabbing the egg with a plastic fork.

"You think i'm cheating on you?" He asked

"Are you not? She was in Cape Town with you"

"I was there for business. Patricia too but clearly her business involved ruining my life using my own wife because my own wife doesn't even trust me" he yelled

"What was I supposed to think? You travel a lot. I

call and a woman answers. Then she sends me messages saying you love her and you asked for her permission before marrying me. What was I supposed to think?"

"And you couldn't confront me? You couldn't wait till I was here and throw things at me. Yell, show me that you can have the barman at Club21, or the bouncer in that stupid club you girls love so much. You could have done anything Thembeke but not humiliate me over a woman you don't even know"

I chocked on the egg and coughed until he walked over to the bed and hit my back several times.

"You know about the clubbing?" I asked my voice in a whisper

"Of cause I know. You went to far and danced on the tables flashing those pink panties I burned the moment I bought the photos" he spoke like this was okay.

"You burned my underwear?"

"Yes. The leather shorts too"

"I don't own the leather shorts" he was confusing me with his side chick.

"You do but you just didn't get a chance to wear them" he sounded thrilled

"So the trips are a lie too? You stay in town and spy on me?"

"So you think any sane man would travel up and down while leaving his wife alone? His young wife?" He gave me the look that implied I was stupid for not seeing this early.

"So you think its okay to stalk me? Treat me like i'm some sort of a possession? Something you own?"

"Stalk? This is not stalking. Its a bad world out there Thembeke. Any smart man knows that you have to protect your family. If I was treating you like a possession you will be staying in that house and only coming out when I'm there. You have a career, well you had since I doubt you will want to go back to work after all this "

"Why wouldn't I go back?"

"You know I would find this cute and heart warming if it wasn't pissing me off. Do you really think life will be the same again? You are all over the newspapers. The poor wife whose husband made a sex video with his side chick. You ruined us both. And Sizakele and Swelihle wants to sue you for leaking the video. It will ruin her political career. Don't even start on me. I have to do some serious damage control. If only you waited and confronted me about a video. Even if I cheat do you really think I would make a video and risk you seeing it? You didn't even look carefully to see that it must be old. We were both dating and fooling around. If only her phone didn't back up the video"

"I didn't know. I'm sorry"

"I have to talk Sizakele out of suing. I need your phone to see if we can't find the person behind the messages. Trevor is looking for Patricia she is a link to whoever that's wants to destroy me or Sizakele or us both since they used you"

"So you are not sleeping with Patricia?"

"Of course not. Do you really not trust me at all?" He sounded hurt

"You act different with other people. You even speak different on the phone. You make jokes and laugh but you hardly look at me as if you find me interesting or even sexy. We don't even talk"

He laughed and it made me feel even more stupid. Of course why would he find me sexy or interesting.

"The first night after we got married I asked you if you are okay. You said yes. For three days since we got married you said three words to me. Yes, Thanks and Okay. even now the most I get from you is Okay, Yes and Thank You. Sure sometimes I'm exhausted and I want to go to bed early so I don't say much but even when I do say something I'm likely to get those three words or maybe the extra 'I see it too' once in a while. When you started having friends I saw a smile I've never seen before and heard you laugh so I let the lifestyle continue because at least I know you can laugh and do whatever with them even though you don't show that to me" he was no longer laughing.

"I was young when we got married. I was scared"

"I know that's why I didn't demand things from you. That's why I wanted you to have a career, make your own money and not be tied down with kids and this house"

"Since we are talking. Can I ask you something?" I pushed aside the plate and looked at him

"Ask"

"Why did you marry me? I know that my uncles were eager to have me off to someone else but you could have married someone else. Someone older with life experience"

"Because if I didn't marry you they were already negotiating with Bab' Ngcobo who wanted to make you his fourth wife. He can hardly afford the three he has but he wanted you and your family was willing so I said I'll rather you marry me and come to Durban than marry him and stay there with no education just giving him kids "

"I see"

"We are talking. Don't take this away now. Please no more Okay, Thanks and I see" he pulled the chair and sat down closer than he sat when he first arrived.

"I thought it was you. I wasn't aware it was me"

"Its us both. I used to think you hate me. When I first saw the video and it had came from your Facebook I thought it's because you hate me for making you my wife"

"I was feeling heartbroken. I didn't think and....." His phone rang

I nodded to him to answer.

"Trevor" he answered.

I stabbed the now cold egg and ate it.

"Are you sure?" He asked his voice sounding like it wasn't his. The person continued while he listened and then after a while he said okay and ended the call.

"What's wrong?" I asked not liking the face

"Patricia is dead. She was found hanging in her

house"

"What? So she hanged herself?"

Nqubeko looked at me before his hand reached over and closed around mine. I held his hand back. It was something new. Something we both weren't used to but we didn't let go.

"I think she was killed and the person who killed her is the same person who sent you that video and those text to you. They silenced her because they knew we will figure it out. She was our only link to whoever stole that video. Her answering my phone just to get you upset and then the messages confirming what she wanted you so suspect. Yeah, Patricia knew"

Chapter 6

They let me go home after the second day at the hospital. I felt different in so many ways. It was strange that after just talking to Nqubeko our relationship was now different. He held my hand when we left the hospital. I was feeling fine but that

didn't stop him from fussing which I acted like I didn't like but deep down I was loving it. He ordered pizza because none of us wanted to cook. We ate it straight from the box and drank juice while the TV was on but we weren't really watching.

"I can't believe I was so stupid" he smiled and looked at me.

"Stupid how?" I smiled too. I had longed for this even though I had taught myself to live without.

"Wasted time thinking you will automatically come to me. I should have seduced you a long time ago" he dropped his voice into a different tone. This tone was sexier and it made me want to giggle for no reason at all.

"And I was just so afraid and then got used to it"

"Okay. House rules, never ever fear me" his thumb touched my cheek. A foreign touch from a man and it made my skin tickle and a smell of his perfume made me want to curl up on his lap.

"I won't. I'm no longer that girl"

"You will always be that girl. My girl" he moved closer and kissed my forehead.

"I don't think I mind. Can I ask you something else?"

"Ask" he didn't let go of me

"Why didn't you get married early? I mean i'm sure you've met so many women before. Why pick me?" I was nothing special. I wasn't ugly just a normal person with insecurities.

"I did have someone before. Got engaged and set a date. But we both decided not to go through with it" he paused and moved a bit so we could face each other "She wanted a different life and I wanted something else. We ended things in good terms"

"So she is not going to rock up and want you back?"

He laughed and lowered his head before he kissed my lips. I thought it was a small kiss like we did at the hospital but it wasn't. He kissed me with such hunger and his hands gripping my into place. When he finally pulled back I gasped for air because I forgot to breath through the kiss.

"Even if she rocks up I'm no longer available. Loyalty means a lot to me MaKhumalo. So i'm very loyal to people who are loyal to me. So when I said death will do us apart I meant it"

"I also love loyalty" a memory of me dancing on the table flashed on my mind but he knew about it and it was out in the open.

"Good" he kissed my lips again and his hand was already traveling underneath my shirt. My head started going into places. Was the sex going to improve as well? It wasn't really bad but it wasn't like the sex I normally saw on TV.

When he finally pulled away my bra was lose and two buttons undone on my shirt.

"I hate that pallet" he whispered before he stood up and pulled me up "I'll clean this up and turn off the lights. Go to bed I'll be there just now"

"Okay" I grabbed my phone and left him.

"Do you have any clues about Patricia's killer?" I asked after he joined me in bed.

"Nothing yet and Sizakele is still planning to go ahead but we managed to make her see that your part in this was just uploading it. My biggest problem now is not knowing who is doing this and why"

"Do you have a lot of enemies?"

"Sadly in business enemies are part of the package. That's why I've been putting your safety first"

"Hiring security for me?" It was so strange that even my sixth senses never told me that I was being followed by someone.

"Don't make it formal. Just to keep an eye on you" he laughed

"It seems like I don't really know much about you. What exactly do you do?"

I could see his smile growing even more wide.

"Let me show you" he grabbed his phone and began

telling me about his business. I listened and asked questions where I didn't understand. When I yawned he put the phone aside and kissed me.

"I almost forgot" he got up and went to the closet before coming back with a little rectangular box "For the hairstyle. I saw this and thought it will look good with that new weave you had on the other day" he handed me the box.

It was jewelry. Nqubeko bought me jewelry every now and then but he had a habit of putting it in my drawer without saying.

"Its beautiful. Thank you so much"

"I'm glad. Now get some sleep" he kissed my cheek and took the box from my hand. I was too tired so I closed my eyes and slept.

The need to pee woke me up and I was sleeping alone. The passage light was on but the house was too quiet. I went to pee first before checking if he

was in his study. He wasn't but his laptop was open on the table. I went over pressed but it required a password which I didn't know so I left it like that and went to check the kitchen door just in case he was outside at the back. The door was locked and the key gone. It was the same with the front door which meant he locked me inside.

I went back to the bedroom and my phone was charging. I dialed his number and his phone rang once before he answered.

"MaKhumalo"

"Where are you?"

"Outside. Go back to bed I'll be back in a minute"

"What are you doing outside in the middle of the night?" I went look out the window and there was no one outside. He didn't reply.

"Nqubeko"

"Go back to bed. I'll explain when I come in" he ended the call after that.

I had no choice but to go back to bed and wait. It

bothered me that he was outside but I couldn't see anyone outside. Why would he be outside this late?

I sat there for a minute before my curiosity was pointing me back to the laptop in his study. I went back and tried to crack a password. I tried different dates and they didn't work. I was about to give up when something told me to try our wedding date. It was correct and I was in at last. It took me straight to emails and the last email had arrived over an hour ago. I was in so I read the email. It said "Next time I won't miss" and included an attachment. I clicked the attachment and froze when it was my photo being carried to an ambulance by two paramedics.

When the shock started wearing off I clicked another email. It was hours old as well. There was no message just an attachment. I clicked the attachment and it was my photo drunk at club21 with Nombuso carrying my shoes and handbag while Phumelele was supporting me. I remembered the day. I was just out having harmless fun and it got too much. Someone had taken a photo and now

sending them to Nqubeko. If he didn't know I would have been worried but it didn't matter now. Plus I was still shaken by the first email. Did it mean I wasn't injured by a falling pallet but someone did that on purpose and was trying to kill me.

The door slamming made me jump and knocked the glass that was on the table. It landed on my foot making me shriek in pain that blended with the fear.

"Thembeka" Nqubeko rushed in and found me sobbing on the floor. My foot wasn't even seriously injured but I continued to sob while he gathered me into his arms and held me like that on the floor.

When the crying died down he let me go and rubbed my foot like I was a small child showing the parent where it hurt and expecting them to take the pain away.

"I'm sorry"

"So it wasn't a falling pallet but a direct hit that

missed?" I hugged my knees and he stopped rubbing my foot.

"It wasn't. It seems someone is getting personal" he pulled something behind him and pushed it aside. When I looked again I saw it was a gun.

"You have a gun?"

"Yes" he pushed it further away as if he feared I might pick it up

"When did you buy a gun?"

"When I started the business and people started coming for me. I was forced to learn the rules of the game. I haven't killed anyone yet. But it does seem like someone wants to test me" I stared at him. Nqubeko did not look like someone who even thought things like that in his life. I couldn't even imagine him pulling the trigger.

"So I'm the target?" Even saying this felt so unreal.

"At least now I know who it is and no one is going to touch you" I looked at him and felt the tears burn my eyes. He was my husband and I had some faith

in him but I didn't see him go against people who could set up something to look like an accident.

"Who is it. What does he want?"

"When we bought four more trucks some people didn't like it and we started having these problems which turned out it was them trying to buy their way in. Three cargos were hijacked and it was a clear ambush. I guess now they want to be personal"

"So I'm in danger until you give up your business?"

"We will sort this out. We just have to be extra careful"

"Extra careful how?" The look on his face said it all

"No more going out?"

"Unless i'm there or you are escorted by security"

"And work?" I couldn't imagine working with someone just there staring at me.

"You have to take leave. If it gets worse you will have to resign"

"As in quit my job?"

"I will get you another one"

"But I like it there. I have friends there. My colleagues Nqubeko"

"You will make new friends when you get another job. You being safe is more important"

"So where is the security?"

"He will be here tomorrow. It's going to be okay" he kissed my forehead before wrapping his arm around me.

"Maybe I should have my own gun. Just in case"

"Yeah sure. I'll check if there is one light enough for these tiny soft hands" he joked before taking my hand to his.

I laughed but I wasn't joking. I wanted a gun too. If someone thought they could just come kill me then they to find me ready.

Chapter 7

"Morning" whispered Nqubeko when I opened my

eyes

"Morning" It was early. We didn't wake up this early since I wasn't working anymore and Nqubeko was home more because I was afraid to be alone.

"Did you sleep well?"

"No nightmares today" it was a week later and finally the bad dreams were starting to leave me alone.

"Good. I have to go to the office. Come with me"

I was taken back. Nqubeko never asked me to go to work with him ever since we were married. I doubt any of his staff even knew me at all.

"Office?"

"Yes. I have some things I need to do and I'll feel better with you around. Please. You will just chill in my office and no one will bother you"

I wanted to suggest inviting my friends over so we can catch up. It was over a week since I last saw them but I didn't, instead I nodded.

"Let me see what I'll wear"

"I'll go make breakfast while you get ready" he kissed my lips before getting off the bed. I watched him leave the room before reaching for my phone. I checked whatsapp first and I had two messages from Nombuso saying they were missing me and hoped I come back soon. I sent her a reply before checking Facebook. The video wasn't trending any more after people were warned with prosecution if they continued to share the video. That worked because they stopped sending me messages.

The drive to the offices didn't make me feel better but we talked and shared jokes because we were both trying to be normal around each other. I was nervous about embarrassing him in front of his staff. The dress I was wearing was meant to give me confidence but the moment he stopped the car in the parking lot I found myself back into a clueless child that I was when we got married.

"MaKhumalo. You look worried" he stepped in front of me making me stop looking around the almost empty parking lot.

"You have no security in this place?"

"I do. Don't worry we are safe here. Come on" he smiled and took my hand.

The lift opened before we even got to it which was something I found really weird. Weren't you supposed to press the lift first like normal lifts.

The moment we got inside it closed and again it started moving without Nqubeko pressing any buttons.

"So the lift operate it self?" I asked as it stopped and opened.

"No. The security does. Something we were playing around with. Come" he stepped out and I followed. The parking lot was almost empty and I assumed the offices would also be almost empty but to my surprise there were several people walking around. Some with coffee and briefcases, some greeting cheerfully at each other.

"Morning Thobile" said Nqubeko greeting the front lady who looked up and her eyes stayed fixed on me.

"Morning Sir" her eyes went over to Nqubeko for a moment and then came back to me "Mrs Mbonambi"

The moment she said that out loud the whole area went quiet and they all looked at us.

"Okay. Don't act all weird. This is my wife. Thembeke Mbonambi" he announced and others laughed before one lady walked over.

"Nice to finally meet you" she offered a hand.

"Me too" I smiled back feeling so strange that they were all watching me like there was something I'm missing.

"I'll bring your coffee and here are your messages" said Thobeka

"And some chocolate muffins for my wife" he took the messages from her took my hand before we left the area heading to what I assumed was his office.

"You have nice colleagues" I commented as he unlocked the office.

"Sometimes they act like siblings but they deliver" he also sounded like a proud parent.

The office smelled like Nqubeko and also resembled his study at home. The real surprise was the number of photographs of me he had on his wall. Some of them were pictures I took at school when the photographer came once a week. Some were taken before I got married.

"Where did you get these photos?" I asked while looking at them

"Your album at home. I looked at it and loved these. Especially that one" he pointed the photo where I was wearing a traditional outfit sitting on a rock near the river "Whenever it feels like I can't go on, I come here and look at this photo. Then remember why I need to keep going. For this person. My beautiful wife" he wrapped his arms around me before placing his chin on top of my head.

"Excuse me Sir. But Mr Kheswa is here to see you" said a man behind us.

"Thanks Thato" said Nqubeko not letting me go so I could see who this Thato was.

"And here is the coffee and the muffins" said Thobile

"Thanks Thobile. Before you go" said Nqubeko before letting me go. I turned around and my eyes met the face of the man I once flirted with in the club. I could tell he also recognized me because he looked surprised before recovering quickly. It wasn't a serious thing. I was drunk and we played some dare game. He was a dare.

I didn't even hear what Nqubeko said to Thobile but when they all stared at me I realized he was talking to me.

"Sorry" I turned to Nqubeko

"Thobile will take care of you while I deal with Kheswa in the boardroom. Sorry about this" repeated Nqubeko

"Its fine. I don't mind" I picked up the coffee and the muffin before waiting for Thobile to lead the way.

"T'll be done in a minute" he kissed my lips before handing me my phone.

Thobile was talkative. She hardly gave me a chance to ask anything at all. In less than five minutes she already told me who was cheating on who and who was gunning for a promotion and how they were all wondering why I never came around. This whole time I was just grinning like a fool because I really didn't know what to say.

"Thob'z. Can you please see this for me" said Thato walking over to Thobile's desk. She smiled so wide and I figured she had a crush on him or something. Thato was boyishly handsome. He looked like someone who wasn't going to age like normal people but was more likely to keep the baby face forever.

"Sure. I'll be back now now" she replied without any

hesitation and took the files before hurrying down the passage with them.

"Its a small world" he spoke as he walked around to occupy her now vacant chair.

"Meaning?" I replied without focusing my eyes on him

"Come on. We both know what happened when we met"

"Yeah but that was in a different place, different time and nothing really happened. It was a dare with my friends" I used a relaxed tone so he wouldn't think I was being defensive.

"Really? So the boss knows that you flirt in clubs?"

"Yes he knows. Just as long as no one tries to cross the line" I pushed the chair back when he reached for a pen across me.

"What if someone feels a need to explore more?" I wasn't expecting such a question. Why didn't people fear hitting on married people now? "Let's say what if the lines was already crossed" he

continued

"There is nothing to explore. I only talked to you because I was drunk and trying to act all cool with my friends" clearly he wasn't taking a hint.

"Well I liked the cool you. You were real fun to talk to"

I didn't even remember what we talked about but I simply nodded and hoped Thobile was coming back now. Hearing her gossip was better than this.

"MaKhumalo" Nqubeko's voice made me jump bit because I wasn't aware of him being so close
"Come meet Robert and Elise"

I stood up and made sure not to touch Thato as I walked past him before taking Nqubeko's extended hand.

"Thato" that's all he said as we walked away.

We walked in a long passage and I could see people in offices turning around to look at us because it was all glass. These offices didn't give people much privacy. Some didn't even find the need to pretend

not to stare as we walked past each office. When we finally reached the double doors he pushed them open revealing a very large boardroom and three people were sitting there with bottled water in front of them. The woman stood up first as we approached.

"Thembeke. At last. Wow" she was all smiley and seemed excited which was rather very weird.

"Hi" I offered a hand but she offered a hug.

"This is Elise, Mark and Robert" said Nqubeko introducing the others. The men offered a hand before we sat down and then Nqubeko spoke about me as if I was the most interesting person in the world. The men also spoke about their lives and how life was working out. Robert had kids. Elise was planning to adopt and Mark was raising his brother's kids. The conversation went on until they all started mentioning dinners and invites and then called it a day.

I smiled like a good person should and said goodbye with a promise to see them soon as they

all grabbed their bags and walked out.

"Who is Mr Kheswa?" I asked as Nqubeko pushed the door closed after his colleagues were gone.

"The head of security" he loosened his tie and undid the top button.

"I didn't see him at all" I went to stand near the window and stared at the city with the ocean so far away. This was probably the tallest building in the area and we weren't even on the last floor.

"He walked past the front desk while you were talking to Thato" when he mentioned Thato I turned and looked at him.

"I met Thato before. A while back"

"And you flirted with him. I know"

"You know?"

"Yes I know. Now stop being uncomfortable" he came to stand behind me as I turned and looked outside the window "I didn't like it at the time but I understood and I wanted you to be relaxed so what was a little flirt when drunk"

"Doesn't it feel like betrayal?"

"It does but that was before we got here. Now the problem will start if you do it now. We are in a better place and we have to act better so it's no longer allowed" his hands touched my shoulder and I looked at him on the glass.

"It won't"

"Good" he didn't break the eye contact. Not even when his hands left my shoulder and went down to rest on my hips. Not when he lowered his head and kissed my neck. I blinked and my hand held his shirt as I tilted my head further. He kissed me again and his hand gripped my hip.

"Nqubeko someone might walk in" I managed to get the word out even though everything inside me was saying "so what"

"They won't. I locked the door" he whispered before turning me around. His lips covered mine in a hungry kiss before his hand pulled up my dress.

I pulled back a bit just to breath and be sure I was doing this in a building full of working people. He

didn't give me much to think about before he was back on my lips again. My bra felt lose and I didn't even remember him touching it.

"Protection" I suggested. We never did it without protection before because we didn't want to risk me falling pregnant.

"I'll pull out" he whispered before he grabbed a chair and placed it near the window. I thought he was going to sit but it was for me as he kneeled in front of me. "Legs on the glass and don't take your eyes off the glass"

I did as told before took the panties I had on. I had worn them for a confident boast but now they were being taken off slowly.

My hand grabbed his shoulder as his tongue came into contact. My foot banged the glass a bit before I bit my lips. He didn't stop. Not when I was whispering his name and my foot digging his shoulder not sure whether I was pushing or pulling. He didn't stop until all I could was to let the feeling carry me away into a place I couldn't describe.

When he stopped I slipped from the chair and landed on him on the floor. He guided me on to his lap and held my hips as I sank on to him taking the whole length making both of us tremble. The memory of the video flashed on my mind and I stopped trying to move.

"I love you" he whispered before pulling my face into his face and kissed my lips. My moves were clumsy at first but when he held my waist and started matching them into his it was better. So better I held him tight as another violent pleasure ripped through me and kept going until he was done too. We both laid on the floor for a while the outside world forgotten.

"I love you too" I spoke before closing my eyes for a bit.

Chapter 8

I found love in you

And no other love will do

Every moment that you smile chases all of the pain away

Forever and a while in my heart is where you'll stay....

The song repeated and the words stayed in my head because I was tired but I waited patiently for Nqubeko to finish. The office sex led to more kissing and touching. He hardly let go of my hand when we finally got off the floor and put the clothes back on. I wasn't used to such behaviour and I felt like everyone knew but Nqubeko seemed okay but extra touchy. When we finally left the office we drove past a restaurant and picked up dinner. He didn't let me dish up or even work around the house touching this and that before he was pinning me on the kitchen table. I came while disgusted because it was our food table. The second time was in the couch and the third time was in bed and I was tired. I even started thinking about those who work in the porn industry. The two orgasms seemed okay but the third was exhausting and I couldn't imagine

continuing.

"Wow" he murmured against my ear before rolling over. We were both covered in sweat but I didn't see myself getting up to bath. Even my legs didn't want to move for a moment.

"That was exhausting" I spoke while my hands cupped my own breasts.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done it like this" I realized my mistake. I wasn't supposed to make it sound like I hated sex. I was just tired because it was too much sex for one day. We've never done it like this before.

"The sex was fine. I love it but doing it so much in one day. I had no idea it was this tiring" I tried to save the situation.

"So you like sex but not too much?" His tone made me think he wasn't offended.

"The office sex was nice. Weird but nice. The kitchen sex weird and a little uncomfortable. We have to eat there. The couch was good" I looked away when he looked at me.

"MaKhumalo you need to get used to this because it's not the place that matters. We could do it on the roof and its still perfectly fine" his hand removed my hand on the breast and the moment they got the cool air the nipple tightened "Yes. I need to see this as well" he took the nipple into his fingers and stroked it gentle.

"I see. So what about the condoms? At this rate I think I need to get birth control" I was bringing up the baby topic and it felt right. We were talking after all.

"We will get the pill at sunrise. Please remind me" he didn't stop teasing my nipple

"Why don't you want kids?" I decided to ask straight out because he wasn't being voluntary with the explanation.

"What makes you think I don't?"

"Because you told me you didn't want us to have kids" I still remember him saying so just was after we got married.

"Because you were young and still needed to study.

Normally when people get married kids follow but I didn't want to do that to you"

"So now we can have kids?" I held my stomach wondering how it will feel like to be pregnant.

"When you are ready"

"I am ready now" I was home after all so why not have kids and get it over with.

He nodded before kissing my lips.

"I guess the pill is not needed" he added after a moment. I nodded too before turning around so I could finally get some sleep.

He pulled me closer to him and placed his leg over mine before kissing the top of my head.

"Goodnight" I added before closing my eyes.

I don't know what woke me up but I was surprised to find myself sleeping alone.

"Nqubeko" I called out before turning the lights on.

There was no reply so I went to check his study. The lights were on but Nqubeko wasn't there. I moved to the spare bedroom and it was empty.

"Where are you?" I called out again before moving to the kitchen. It was also empty and the door locked outside. Clearly he was gone so I switched the lights off and sat on the couch waiting for him.

I was falling asleep when I heard a car drive in and then the key at the door followed shortly after.

He walked in and turned the lock without switching the lights on. I could hear him putting something on the table along with the keys before he walked to the kitchen and switched the light on. I stood up and went to the kitchen too. He was just standing there leaning against the cupboard clearly far away in thoughts.

"Where were you?" I spoke, making him jump a bit.

"What are you doing up?" He asked after recovering quickly

"I had a bad dream and woke up alone. where were you? "

"I needed to go somewhere. Let's go back to bed"

"Somewhere where? Its the middle of the night Nqubeko. Where were you?" He didn't look like someone who got dressed in a hurry. He looked like someone who has time to get up, get dressed and leave the house.

"I needed to go outside. That's all you need to know" he walked around me washed his hands on the sink. The moment he walked past I could smell a perfume that didn't belong to him. It was something sweet and clearly belonged to a woman.

"So she does exist"

He paused washing his hands and turned to face me. "What?"

"She calls in the middle of the night and you go running"

"Don't do this. At least not now" it made me angry that he was sounding so cool after doing this to me. The same man that assured me he wasn't cheating.

"When?"

He didn't reply instead he reached for the paper towel and wiped his hands. When it was clear that I wasn't getting a reply I turned and walked away. In the lounge I turned the light on and his gun was on the table with the keys and phone. I wanted to ask more questions but getting no reply was going to make me more angry so I went to the bedroom and grabbed my phone pillow before going to the other bedroom and locking the door behind me.

I don't know when I finally fell asleep but when I woke up it was way past morning. I sat up and remembered what Nqubeko did the night before. After he convinced me that he wasn't cheating on me. I felt like a biggest fool ever but I still unlocked the door and went to the kitchen. He was busy making coffee when I walked in.

"Morning" I greeted before washing my hands in the sink

"Morning. I hope you slept well" he placed the

coffee next to me before sipping his own.

"Not really but I'm sure you did after you went God Knows where in the middle of the night" I picked up the coffee

"Don't do that. I went to Bhekani. He called and needed my help with something. I didn't want to wake you"

"Oh please we both know you are lying. You were out there fucking some whore while you left me in bed" I yelled and I could see he was surprised

"You don't talk to me like that"

"Or what?"

"I'm sorry for leaving you in bed. I should have told you. Now can you let this go?"

"You think i'm stupid? Maybe I am because I trusted you. You looked me in the eye and said you are not cheating but you come back smelling like roses. I might act like an obedient wife Nqubeko but don't assume I can't also play the same game. I can come back smelling like a real man and....." I didn't

get to finish before the mug in my hand landed on the floor spilling the coffee all over my slippers. The pain in my cheek followed after a minute and then another pain come from my head after bumping it on the fridge.

"You want to repeat your words?"

I was in shock to reply and then after a minute the tears started streaming down my face.

"How dare you threaten me with another man after you've acted like a single woman behind my back for years. You wear skimpy clothes, dance in clubs, drink alcohol and then come to my house acting like someone else. How dare you?" He yelled and I didn't reply. I was too angry to say anything so instead I let the tears to continue falling.

"You are allowed to yell but never ever threaten me with another man. Not in my own house" he walked away after that.

I cried for a while before wiping the tears and then cleaned up the coffee on the floor. When I was done I went to the bedroom. He was there busy changing

the bedding.

"I want a divorce" I announced before going to the closet and pulled out my suitcases. I wasn't sure where I was going but I was going.

Chapter 9

"Divorce?" he asked after a moment.

I didn't reply. He heard me okay so I continued to pack.

"I'm sorry for hitting you. I shouldn't have done that" he added after a while. I still didn't reply.

"Thembeke. Come on. I'm sorry. Say something" he demanded after I didn't reply.

"I want out of the marriage. Just out" I repeated the words slowly this time.

"So I make one mistake and you want out? Just like that?" His tone sounded like he might start crying.

"A mistake is throwing away a recipe, Sweeping my earring on the floor, leaving the toilet seat up. But

hitting me is not a mistake. Don't confuse things" I yelled feeling like I was going to burst into tears again.

"I know baby. I know. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. Please give me a chance to fix this" he begged and I jumped up when he moved towards me. "I'll never do it again. Please"

"That's how it start. A slap today. A shoe tomorrow. I'm sorry but I can't wait for you to get worse" I went to get my toiletries in the bathroom and found Nqubeko busy trying to take the clothes out of the suitcase.

"Please. I'll tell you everything. Please don't leave. Not like this" he stopped and I took the clothes from his hand and shoved them back to the suitcase before zipping it.

"I'm no longer interested"

"Where are you going to go? It's still not safe out there" he asked and I stopped for a second before looking at him.

"I'm going back home. The same people you bought

me from"

He didn't reply after that. I picked up everything and took them to the car before leaving his ring on the bedside.

He didn't say anything as I opened the fridge and took some water and a fruit. I had a long drive ahead of me so I needed to eat something before stopping somewhere for a meal.

I drove for over an hour before stopping on the side of the road to cry. It was pain mixed with heartbreak. The disappointment because we were doing so well just before we went to bed. It felt so unreal that things could go from good to worse just like that. When the tears stopped coming I wiped my eyes and continued to drive. I was going back to nothing I knew but still I had no other place anyway. I couldn't go to my friends and risk their lives. If people wanted to kill me for Nqubeko then I was fine risking my no good family not my friends and

their families.

I made it to Ulundi Plaza after midday and went to buy few things at Shoprite before driving to Thwasane.

I made it home just after two in the evening and i could see people looking at my car as I drove in the little path that led to my home. It was going to be less than 30 minutes before people came over to see who it was. The area was a little behind but they had electricity now. Hopefully water was going to follow because only few people had jojo tanks.

"WeKhumalo" i heard my aunt yell as i opened the door and got ready to get out.

I had two uncles and both of them were married. Judging by their houses i could tell they were still living there just separetly. My grandmother's house was still there but i didn't need to go inside to see that it was unkept. There was a broken window and the curtain was dirty inside.

"Mama. It's a car" a young girl appeared behind the house before more smaller people appeared.

"Hello" I got out and looked at the dirty little faces.

"I thought we would never see you again" said Aunt Nomhle appearing at the door. She looked older but full of life. I didn't need to open their pots to see that they weren't starving.

"Hi aunt Nomhle" I smiled at her before taking the plastics bags out of the car. She yelled at the kids to stop staring and take them inside.

Two girls hesitated before they both ran off to the opposite direction and disappeared inside the other house. Clearly they weren't getting along, the parents not the kids.

"Come inside before they see you. We don't want the local news papers to start reporting" she rushed me inside the house before closing the door behind us.

"Local newspapers?"

"Your aunt. Mzwakhe married the local journalist" she rolled her eyes and I laughed a bit before sitting on the couch. She had these huge couches and they were clearly new because she rushed to cover

them with a shawl before her kids sat down.

"I see you guys are doing so well" I looked around. It looked nothing like I left it.

When I left we didn't have a large TV, let alone a coffee table or the stand. Now the dining room was complete with large vases, glass TV stand, tiled floor and gold and white ceiling.

"You thought we will starve or something?" She clapped her hands before she laughed. A loud and unnecessary laugh but I knew it was for the other lady.

"Not really. But you even have a tank. I'm glad though"

She looked at me for a moment before she stood up and left the room. I used this chance to check my phone. The battery was getting low and I had four missed calls from Nqubeko and three messages. Two from Nombuso and another from a number I didn't know. I checked the unknown number first and it was from Nqubeko's sister Nomasonto asking me to call her as soon as I got the message.

I didn't need to consult a sangoma to know she wanted to talk to me on behalf of her brother so I didn't bother. I didn't read Nqubeko's messages as well. Instead I called Nombuso back.

"Girl. Where are you?" She asked the moment she answered.

"Home. I went home for few days "

"Have you seen the papers?"

"No. Why?" I stood up and walked out for some privacy just in case she was listening in the kitchen.

"Do you remember Thato. The baby faced dare guy. We met him....." I stopped her before she started reminding me the history.

"I remember Thato. What about him?"

"He was shot this morning. They say it was a hijacking. It's front page news"

"Its a bad world girl. I hope he is okay" I didn't get why she needed to tell me about it. Thato wasn't the only guy we met and talked to.

"He is in a critical condition according to the

papers" she paused before she continued "Wait. So you know that he works for Mbonambi Logistics?"

"Yeah. I saw him yesterday"

"Wasn't it awkward?"

"Not really. He knew that we were just playing that day. He was fine when we talked" I lied.

"That's good. I mean that he knows. About the shooting that's just cruel. Hopefully he will pull through. So when are you coming back?"

"Not sure yet but I'll let you know. My battery is dying girl. I'll call you when I've charged the phone" I wanted to end the conversation now.

"Okay" she hung up and I went back inside before searching for my charger.

"Do you drink tea?" Asked Aunt Nomhle appearing with a tray

"Yes please"

We drank tea and ate some scones I bought. I made sure to send another plastic to the other house because I didn't want the kids to say they saw the

goodies but they never got them. I wasn't part of their drama.

I was grateful that she didn't ask why I was back. Instead she told me where to put my things before she gave me blankets and said I can fix my own bathing water. I smiled at her before sitting on the bed that didn't feel familiar and the room was nice but rather empty. There was just a bed and a large mirror in the corner. It was clean though and I couldn't wait to get some sleep.

"Thembeka" shouted uncle Jacob before he even walked in to the dining room. I thought about pretending to be sleeping but it was ridiculous because it was not even 6 o'clock yet.

"Yes" I replied before going to the dining room. Both uncles were sitting on the couch and they both looked at me when I walked in.

"Wow you've grown. I wouldn't have recognized you if I bumped to you down the street" said J acob before he had a coughing fit which allowed uncle J onathan to take over. They weren't twins just unfortunately to be born during the time when Biblical names were in style.

"Everything going well? You've never visited before" he gave me a accusing eye.

"I didn't know its wrong to visit this home" I replied before someone pushed the door opened. At last uncle J ona's wife walked in with a tray of food. She was younger than Nomhle and more beautiful.

"I made you some food before she start feeding you rubbish" she smiled and I could see both men look at each other.

"How dare you come to my house?" yelled Nomhle sounding like she was breaking the plates in the kitchen.

"Ignore her. I'm Charity. Eat up before it gets cold" she smiled and walked out before Nomhle could finish whatever she was doing in her kitchen.

"They don't get along. We've tried" said J acob lowering his voice.

I looked at the plate and it was dumplings and beef. The smell made my mouth water.

"You are not eating this. Here" yelled Nomhle before she slammed her tray on the table "I'll throw this outside"

"Please don't" I grabbed the tray "I'll eat both"

"Don't be silly. This probably taste like rubbish"

"I don't mind" I held the tray real tight.

"Nomhle. Must you act like a kid all the time?" Yelled J acob

I was about to reply when my phone rang.

"I'll eat both food. I really don't mind. Please let go" i begged while trying to see who was calling.

"Answer that phone" she let go of the tray and I reached for my phone. It was Nqubeko and i could see everyone waiting for me to answer.

"Hello"

"Please don't hang up. I'm at the gate. Can we talk. Please" he begged

"Okay" i ended the call.

"I assume Mbanambi outside" said Uncle Jona looking at me.

"Yes. I'll eat when i get back"

They all watched me walk out and closing the door behind me. It was already dark but I could see the car waiting further down the path. When he saw me leave the yard he flicked the torch and walked over to meet me halfway.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry" he spoke first before he wrapped his arms around me. "I'll never do it again. Please give me another chance. Please" he sounded like he was going to start sobbing.

"Then tell me the truth" I demanded before pulling off him.

"Let's go sit in the car"

I didn't reply but I followed him to the car and got in when he opened the door for me.

"The smell came from Thato's sister. We had to call her and take her to the hospital" he started to speak and I waited for him to continue.

"Thato got shot. He will live but it's serious. When we called his sister she didn't have transport so I went to get her and she hugged me. That's how I ended up smelling her perfume. It wasn't because of the cheating"

"You shot Thato and then said it was a hijacking?"

I could see the shock in his face.

"I thought you didn't shoot people Nqubeko. I thought your gun was for protection not shooting your colleagues and then covering it up"

"It wasn't like that. Turns out Thato has been sabotaging us for years now. He leaked almost everything. All this time we've trusted him. I didn't want to kill him. I just never thought it's him"

"And you couldn't tell me all that?"

"I shouldn't have hit you. I was wrong and I'm begging for your forgiveness. I don't want to live

without you. Please Mbulazi. Forgive me" i pretended not to see when he wiped the tears on his eyes.

"I promise to never ever raise my hand on you. No matter how angry i am i'll never hurt you like that"

"Once a person start hitting you then don't stop. I'm not that person Nqubeko. I refuse to be your punching bag"

"And you won't be. If I do it again. Take my gun and shoot me. I swear I will never ever do it again"

"When did you arrive?" I didn't look at him as he tried to discreetly wipe the tears on his face.

"I just got here. I didn't want to wait till tomorrow"

"I'm starving. The ladies here don't get along. They both dished up for me and I promised to eat both meals. They are so dramatic its almost funny to watch" I laughed a bit and he laughed too

"I bought some sandwiches when I left Durban" he reached over in the backseat and pulled up a plastic bag. He handed the plastic to me and i looked

inside.

"Thanks"

We both ate the sandwiches. I drank the juice while he ate the chips and we finished off with chocolate.

"One more chance to do this right. Please Thembeke. Let's start again and this time I promise to do it right"

Chapter 10

"Thembeke"

Nqubeko whispered in my ear and I opened my eyes to his face and my body aching from being uncomfortable. At first I didn't understand why I was feeling like that until I realized we were sleeping in the car.

"Morning" he smiled and kissed my forehead.

"Morning" I rubbed my eyes before trying to stretch my legs and arms "Why did you let me fall asleep?"

"I didn't want to go and you were so comfortable" he

rolled down the window and I opened the door. It was still early and the morning air was cold "You can't go yet" he stopped me when I tried to get out.

"Why not?" I still needed another hour in bed before getting ready to start a day.

"You are going to knock? Come on. Let's go home and sleep for a bit" he suggested.

"Why didn't you drive us and wake me up when we got there?" I closed the door and he started the car.

"I wasn't sure if you will welcome that suggestion" he smiled for a bit before his face went all serious.

"So you drive with a blanket in the car?"

"Not really. Your uncle brought it when he thought we were still talking. I didn't want to tell him you were asleep. He might have invited me in. After the two meals I didn't want to make the ladies uncomfortable"

I jokingly hit his shoulder. They were my family and as dramatic as they were they still kept my home standing.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't resist" we both laughed.

The drive didn't take us long because it wasn't far. When we arrived it was still quiet and we went straight to our room.

"Someone heard us" said Nqubeko locking the door behind us.

The room smelled like floor polish and bleach. The bedding was clearly washed and replaced recently.

Nqubeko opened the wardrobe and pulled out a blanket throwing it on the bed. I took my shoes off before crawling into bed fully clothed. He joined me soon after and we both cuddled. It didn't take me long to fall into dreamland only to wake up when I heard Nqubeko move.

"It's after 10 am" he smiled and kissed my cheek.

It was so warm under the blanket but I needed to wake up and go home.

"What do I do now? Do I sneak out or go to the

kitchen?" I wasn't sure. Nqubeko and I hardly came home and I wasn't sure about facing his family after waking up at 10.

"You are not a girlfriend. You can do whatever you like"

"Yeah but I left my toiletries at home. I can't go without washing up"

"Use mine. Let me go get you some hot water" he left the room and I made the bed. The room clearly showed that someone used it from time to time. When I checked the wardrobe some of the dresses I left behind were still there. The sheets smelled the fabric softener meaning they were washed just few days ago.

Nqubeko came back with hot water and a wide grin on his face.

"Yeah they saw us. So get ready for the full house. Turns out there is umembeso in Uncle Josiah's home and we have to be there. They are in the kitchen plotting something. You and I included" he mixed the water in the washing basin.

"Us?" I was surprised. People in this family were okay. Not too fussy or weird. Just okay and we weren't close enough for them to do this. All three brothers were married and then Nomasonto and her cousin Sbahle had kids. It was a real full house when they all got together which wasn't much because they didn't live that kind of life. Nqubeko hardly talked to or about them. We didn't even visit them in their homes. I didn't think they were close with each other.

"Yes. Us" he picked up a bucket and went to get some cold water. I started my bath before he returned and was almost finished before he got back.

"Will you stop pulling it down?" Said Nqubeko as I tried to tug the skirt I was wearing. It was the only outfit that still fit and I wore Nqubeko's t-shirt.

"Maybe I should go home and change quickly and come back to greet" I suggested. I looked ridiculous

and it made me feel weird about myself.

"No. Go greet and then I take you home to change and then we follow others to Josiah's" he took my hand. I quickly grabbed my phone and we went to the main house. I could hear laughter and the noise. Five women in one kitchen.

"Knock knock" said Nqubeko before he stood aside and allowed me in.

"Wow. Look at you" exclaimed MaMiya who was the oldest wife.

"Hi" I greeted

"Years later and you are still acting like a blushing bride. Come sit" said MaSbiya who was clearly pregnant and looked really good.

"Nqubeko. Why is she wearing your T-shirt? Surely you can afford some clothes" said Nomasonto before they all laughed.

"Watch it" replied Nqubeko taking Nomasonto's kid from her lap. The tiny baby let out a giggle and we all watched him stare at her with such love in his

eyes.

"You need to start making babies. He is a natural" teased Sbahle.

"Let's go outside my Angel" said Nqubeko clearly ignoring the baby topic. Hearing about the babies reminded me that I never bought the morning after pill.

"You look like you just saw a ghost" said Nomasonto poking my shoulder.

"Nothing. I didn't bring my bags over. They are at home" they all looked at me and I added "Former home. Nqubeko just brought me over this morning" it sounded weird just saying it but they all seemed to just nod before they started telling me about the ceremony and why we all needed to go. It was a little petty but I understood why they were like that. The story was that the ladies at uncle Josiah's home were into family competition. Sbahle and Nomasonto said the last time they went the ladies there treated them like shit because they were married. Those who weren't they had their baby

daddy's there and they showed off to them because Sbahle and Nomasonto were single mothers.

According to them it was an old family drama about who was more successful and Nqubeko and his brothers were losers and their wives didn't even attend these family gatherings.

"So we are going there to do what?" I asked after they were done speaking

"To show off. Show them we won this competition without even competing" said MaMiya not sounding like a grown up she really was.

"Yes. Wear matching outfits. Wear your ring. Wear a weave on that head before the scarf. They need to see it appearing underneath the head wrap. We are representing this family ladies" said MaSbiya.

"Yes ladies. We are already running a bit late" said Sbahle before she stopped talking because our father-in-law was walking in.

"Bantabam" he greeted

Someone replied with "Yebo" the rest of us went quiet.

"It's nice to see you all here. The noise is good for the family" he paused for a moment before he walked out. I released the breath I was holding.

"That's a message from mum. She is asking when are we going to get there" said Sonto getting up.

"She is already there?" I asked.

"Yes. She left early" said Sbahle. I nodded and excused myself. I needed to go get Nqubeko so he could take me home.

We didn't have the matching attire but I tried with the little I had. In the end we did look like a couple that made an effort. The drive to Josiah's was dusty and I was afraid that we will be dirty by the time we get there.

"You are quiet" said Nqubeko before waving at some people who were sitting under the tree enjoying a traditional beer.

"I didn't take the pill"

He seemed confused for a moment before he realized what i was talking about.

"Does that mean you are not divorcing me?"

"Unless you....."

"I made a promise Thembeke. I will never ever do that again" he replied quickly.

"That's why I'm giving you another chance. Don't make me regret this "

"You won't. I swear you won't" he actually stopped the car and kissed me until someone was yelling at him to keep moving.

I turned and noticed that we were followed by five other cars. The ladies weren't joking about making an entrance.

"Yeah one can't choose family" he murmured before starting the car. I laughed and looked at the people in the nearby homes. They were all looking at us probably thinking "Mbonambi family is full of weirdos "

The ceremony was underway when we arrived. The man went to other men while we ladies went to the kitchen.

"I still need to find my mother in-law" I whispered to Sbahle who offered to help me look for her. We left the others and started the task that had people looking at us as if we were part of the circus.

"ThembeKa" someone called out and I turned to a group of people I didn't even recognize but still waved back and smiled when they greeted me.

"You don't remember them much?" Asked Sbahle.

"Yeah. They grew up after school" I spotted my aunts. Both of them waved and then rolled their eyes at each other. I hurried off quickly before they fought and embarrassed me.

"MaKhumalo" called out my mother in-law in a group of older women under an umbrella.

"Now I'm off" said Sbahle before she hurried off before they could ask her anything. I smiled and watched her go before walking over to sit on the grass mat next to my mother in-law.

I greeted them and smiled at the "when are we seeing the little feet" questions but never answered them. The problem was that most of these women I grew up regarding them as my grandmothers but when I got married most of them moved to grandmothering to being like my mother. The poor Thembeke left with no one but her uncles and they all played a part in my wedding. From the talks of attending the husband needs to respecting my in-laws. Unintentionally they gave me a wrong idea of how marriage should work and for years I did it their way while locking out the person I was actually married to.

I stayed for few minutes with them before saying I needed to go help.

The kitchen was large and full of Mbonambi ladies. Some busy with the pots while others were busy talking making nasty comments about each other

while acting like it was no big deal.

"Anything else needed to be done?" I asked not sure what else was there.

"Nope. We have it all covered. We started early. You know some of us know what being a wife means. We don't act like kids" replied one lady with her nose turned up. I could see a huge ring on her fat finger.

"How is it all covered? I'm still dicing the tomatoes here" said MaMiya waving a knife.

"Maybe she is talking about another covering not this. It does happen when people aren't in the same page" replied MaSbiya sitting on the chair.

The others laughed a bit like we were missing a not so obvious joke.

"Yeah that does happen. Like that one lady who thought she was married while her husband was busy taking a second wife behind her back" said MaMpongo quietly. She was married to Nqubeko's middle brother and she didn't say much in all occasions and her husband was the same.

"No ways" someone said probably milking the moment so the story continues.

"I'm telling you. The poor woman lost a lot of money trying to bewitch the new wife. Shame hey" continued MaMiya clearly enjoying the moment.

"Did the wife ever leave? The second wife?" Asked Sonto

"Of course not. The first wife didn't leave as well. They stayed" replied MaMpongo before they all cracked up. I looked around the room and others weren't looking pleased.

"So Nobantu. Did your baby daddy come this time?" Asked Sbahle looking at the girl who was wearing a clearly expensive necklace that matched her earrings.

"No. He is working" she replied in a harsh tone.

"I thought he owns his company?" Pressed Sbahle.

"He does. So?" Asked Nobantu looking really uncomfortable.

"Well normally people don't have a problem leaving

work to support their other halves you know. Unlike us doing the mothering alone"

"Zola couldn't just take time off and rush her. Unlike some people we know. His company is legit and didn't come from blood money" she replied.

"Or kill the lion and marry it's cub" someone added. Someone gasped and the whole kitchen went quiet. I was about to ask what was happening when I inhaled Nqubeko's perfume.

I turned my head and he was standing there looking around the kitchen. The moment our eyes met he smiled extended a hand towards me.

"Ladies" he added after a moment. I took his hand and allowed him to lead me outside.

"It's very hot in there" I commented

"I know. We came and showed our support. Lets go home now" he suggested and I laughed.

"We just got here" i reminded him.

"And everybody is here. They represent us. You and i have a bed that needs some action. I feel like

taking off some buttons and seeing that birthmark on your back" he winked before his hand touched my back.

"You are just horny" I teased him.

"Its the dress. It reminds me what i'd rather do" he whispered

"Let me say bye to others "

"Forget them. Let's go"

"Oh okay" i started walking sway. We walked past a group of guy who were busy talking about this gangster guy who was acting all innocent but he was ruthless and greedy. Nqubeko did't even reply when they greeted us. He kept walking until we reached the car and he opened the door for me. I thought my aunts dramatic but it was clear that we had less drama than the Mbonambi family.

Chapter 11

Nqubeko stayed in the kitchen as I cooked dinner for the family that wasn't there. I didn't want them

coming back to empty pots because I had a feeling that food was the last thing on their minds. They were likely to come back starving and exhausted.

"What are you thinking about?" Asked Nqubeko looking at me.

"Why is your family like this?" I thought my aunts were dramatic but I was wrong. This family was far worse.

He laughed a bit before he walked closer and lowered his lips into mine. I went in thinking its a small kiss but he didn't stop or let go. We kissed until his hands was cupping my ass and starting to pull up the dress but I had to come back to senses. This wasn't Durban and I was sure that anyone walking in would be less impressed.

"Is this going to take long" he pointed the pots

"No. I'm almost done. Why?"

"Because I want to take you to bed and fuck you until your thighs shake and then you squirt all over me" he whispered the words slowly into my ear and I giggled.

"Really?"

"Yes really. Ass up and chest down" he replied his eyes looking real horny.

"You've never done that to me" my face was heating up

"And today i'm going to do it repeatedly. I'll even spank that ass" he licked his lips.

"Wow. Okay" I wasn't sure about part though. Wasn't spanking painful?

"It's painful. I see the worry in your eyes. It does sting but you will love it" he kissed my neck.

"If you say so. Let me see the pot" I turned away from him and checked the pots.

"My father and Uncle J osiah grew up together. My father was into farming. Not a real thing where you sell the market but he did sell to the others in the area. Chickens, Sheep, Goats, Mealies and fruits. We were doing okay you know. Then draught came. We lost a lot. My father couldn't recover much and things started going bad. Uncle J osiah was working

in Johannesburg. When my father was still doing well they were close. We used to give them everything. Shared everything we harvested. But when we lost it they stopped treating us like family. His sons got married and he came here to tell my father that we were never going to get married. Sifiso was still trying to save money for lobola and Mzwakhe was planning to do so but he lost his job so the talks needed to be postponed. They started spreading rumours about us. Saying we weren't going to be anything in this life. Saying my mother was bewitching them. They said a lot and we stopped going there. For years we didn't see each other until the parents started talking to each other again. Turns out they still don't enjoy having us there. They turned everything into a competition. When I started my company they said it was blood money. When Phumlani almost died in a car accident Uncle Josiah was telling everyone who listened that it was because we were killers and everything we had was blood money. It was such a mess you know but we moved past it. Now its all bark and no bite, with the kids. The adults tolerate

each other because we are family" he explained.

"That's hectic. So I guess they were taking a jab on us when they said companies made with blood money. So who married a second wife without telling the first wife?"

"Thulani. It was such a scandal when it came out. We didn't laugh at them though. I guess since the ladies have turned it into a competition now the gloves are all off. It's a mess that I want you to avoid"

"Well we hardly come here anyway so I guess they will only talk about me behind my back" I removed the pot on the stove.

"Yep. Someone people should be kept in a distance" he agreed before kissing my lips.

Nqubeko kept his promise and fucked me until all I could do was to moan his name and pull on the

sheet. When he was done we both collapsed on the bed exhausted but satisfied. He pulled me back to him before he covered us with a blanket.

"Did you like it?"

I turned my head over and kissed him before laughing. As weird as it was I enjoyed being spanked.

"I love it" I his my face on his chest and he laughed.

"I'm glad and I love it too"

"Do you think someone sleeps here from time to time?"

"Yeah. I think they use this room for visitors. Do you mind?" He pulled my face up so I could see his face too.

"We hardly come here and the room is clean. I don't mind"

"Okay. I love you"

"I love you more" I closed my eyes feeling the exhaustion slowly take over. I needed to sleep. The others were back and we could hear them laugh in

the kitchen probably still talking about what went down there.

"Nqubeko. Who killed the lion and married it's cub?"
I asked

"I don't know. Get some sleep now"

I woke up early the next day. Nqubeko was still asleep so I didn't wake him up instead I washed up quickly and went to the kitchen. That's what being married was all about for me. I was told to wake up early and go to the kitchen. To my surprise MaMiya and Sonto were up already.

"Morning" I greeted

"Did you sleep well?" Asked Nomas onto

"Yes thanks and you?"

They laughed and started telling me about what happened after we left. Someone's husband got

drunk and started yelling at everyone until they forced him to sleep it off. Some lady arrived and dumped the baby claiming the father was one of the brothers and to make it worse was that the brother had two more babies from other women. The wife was humiliated as well. We talked until we realized that it was getting late and we still needed to make breakfast for everyone else. Sonto and I offered to fetch water in the community tap because the tank was almost empty. We took two buckets and left.

"So do I call you squeezer too or MaKhumalo or sister or just your name?" She asked as we both walked down the path that lead to the tap. It wasn't far but it was a different story when you are carrying a 25 litre bucket in your head.

"MaKhumalo is fine and thank you for taking care of my house" I smiled to show I was cool with it.

"I don't mind" she seemed all shy about it.

"I'll buy some new sheets and pillows just to your man doesn't think we only have one bedding set"

We looked at each other and laughed. Nqubeko

needed to bring us here more often. Whatever was happening with family drama was not our problem. This was my family now and when we had kids they were going to belong there.

"Thembeke" someone shouted behind us making us both stop and turn. The face looked familiar but I couldn't remember where I saw him.

"Nhlakanipho. We went to school together" when he smiled I remembered him clearly. The funny guy who used to come and make jokes in our class.

"I remember you"

He hugged Nomas onto first before shaking my hand.

"Wow. Look at you"

"No. Look at you. You became all tall" he really was tall and looked like someone who was doing well for himself. I also noticed the ring on his finger. He was married.

"Wow. Just wow. The last I heard you were studying in Durban. Hoped to bump into you or something"

but never happened" we both laughed because Durban was a huge place for such.

"Yeah I was studying, graduated, did internship and got a permanent position. What about you? I know you had a bursary before we even passed standard 10" he was really smart and well mannered.

"Yeah. Now I work with Sbongiseni Zulu. He was in standard 10 while we were in standard 7. We are into property. With Zinhle Mbhele. She used to run tracks for the school" I nodded even though I didn't remember her.

"That's great. It's great seeing you"

We needed to keep going before people woke up and breakfast wasn't ready.

"Maybe you come see in Durban" he called behind us and I said okay before waving at him.

We continued to the tap and found it empty so we filled up our buckets and carried them back home.

"Sonto. Can I ask you something?" I spoke as we walked side to side

"Sure"

"Who killed the lion and married its cub. The ladies mentioned it yesterday and I'm wondering what it means"

She didn't reply at first and I had to stop to look at her.

"They are always starting some rumour and press on them until people start to believe them. I don't know who they are going after this time. Don't worry about it" something about her face made me think there was more to this lie if there was even a lie.

"Its a bad lie. Could really hurt someone" I added before we continued quietly until we got home.

The others were already done with breakfast and everyone was awake. Nomasonto continued to serve it while I went to check on Nqubeko.

He was awake and the bed done. I stopped when I saw the bags.

"We are leaving?" I asked

"Yes. Get dressed" he pointed the dress on the bed.

"Why? Did something happen back in Durban?" I was confused. It seemed so sudden.

"Yes. I need to be there. Please get dressed"

"Then leave me behind. I came with my own car after all" I suggested and he stopped tying his shoes and looked at me.

"I don't think so. Get dressed. I'm going to say goodbye to my parents. When I come back be dressed and ready. We will go pick up your car and be on our way" he didn't even wait for me to argue before he walked out.

I stood there for a moment before his phone made me snap out of it. It was a text message and it flashed briefly on the top part of the screen before the phone wanted a password to see the whole text. All I saw was "out, right now"

I tried to guess it twice and gave up when I feared it will block him out and he will know.

I changed the dress and checked if he wasn't forgetting anything behind. He seemed to have packed everything and put away what we were

leaving behind.

When he returned he loaded the bags in the car.

"I need to go say goodbye to the others"

"I'm coming with you" he carried the bags to the car and held my hand as we walked back to the main house. I was surprised to see Josiah and his wife having breakfast with my parents in-law.

"MaKhumalo. Why do you look like someone leaving already?" Asked the mother in-law clearly surprised. I didn't blame her. I was still shocked too.

"Yes. We are leaving already. Just came to say goodbye. We will call when we get to Durban" said Nqubeko not even allowing me to sit down.

"So soon?" Said Josiah looking at Nqubeko.

"Yes. I'm needed there. We will talk on the phone" he actually took my hand before I could even say anything.

"The kitchen. Just for a second. Let me say goodbye" I asked

"Already did for us both. Let's go" he opened the

door for me and I got in before he slammed it shut and hurried to his side.

By the time the ladies came out to wave we were already past the gate and he didn't even give me chance to wave.

He didn't even slow the car down as we drove past a group of men who tried to wave him down.

"Aybo Nqubeko" I shouted.

"They probably want a lift. Someone will offer. I'm in a hurry" that was his reply and I noticed that we weren't driving towards my uncles home where my car was.

"And my car?"

"Someone will come for it. I don't want you to drive" that was his reply and I didn't need a sangoma to tell me, I was being taken away so I don't see or hear something.

Chapter 12

The trip took us less than 2 hours because Nqubeko

was flying. It was a miracle that the car didn't go down hill in Ndundulu area because he was driving like those curves aren't scary. I didn't say anything until we arrived and to make the matters worse was that he accidentally unplugged the fridge and it defrosted all over the kitchen spoiling everything in it and giving the kitchen a really bad smell. To avoid him I focused on cleaning and throwing everything out while he made some excuse about going shopping and driving past the office. I only nodded before focusing on the task at hand. When I was done cleaning I went to take a bath trying to pass time for him to come back with something to eat. I stayed in the bath until I feared falling asleep so I went to take a real nap in bed with only a towel wrapped around my body.

A gentle tap woke me up just as I was having this weird dream where I was watching a woman cry while sitting on the grass mat in the corner of the room. I couldn't remember her face and I didn't remember what she was crying about.

"Are you okay?" Asked Nqubeko before he sat down
"I'm just tired. It feels like I ran a marathon" I replied
before getting off the bed.

"Marathon? Why?" He obviously didn't get what I
meant with that statement.

"I don't know. I'm hoping you can tell me why we
had to run away like we were chased by an angry
mob. I'm still gasping to the after effects of your
driving because I was holding my breath the whole
trip" I went to the closet and picked a dress to wear
not bothering with a bra or even panties.

"That's why you were so quiet? You were holding
your breathe?" He laughed thinking I was being
funny.

I decided to ignore him and leave the bedroom
altogether because he was making me angry.

"So we are not going to talk to each other?" He

asked after I had silently fried some sausages and baked beans before serving him with bread and coffee.

"After you've told me the truth" I replied before going to get my own food and returned to eat.

"What truth?"

"Why did we run away. I know you didn't have an emergency at work. You didn't even let me say goodbye to everyone" I made sure to look at him when I mentioned his shady acting and he didn't seem moved at all.

"I did have an emergency. Why would I run away?" He asked his voice sounding all cool which made me even more angry.

"I'm not stupid Nqubeko"

"I didn't say you are. We came back early because I had an emergency. That's the truth and I don't know what else to tell you" he sat back on the couch and looked at me like he was pleased with himself.

"And the lion and cub story?" His face changed the

moment I mentioned the story.

"Not this again" he stood up and left the room before I heard him slam the plate on the sink.

"I guess there will be no talking until you tell me exactly what it means because I hate having to investigate this" I shouted before turning up the volume on the TV.

He didn't reply and I finished eating before going to wash the dishes in the kitchen. He was still there sipping his coffee.

I washed up quietly and left him alone before going back to bed. The house remained quiet until I dozed off.

When I woke up it was already dark outside. I was under the blanket and I was sure that I wasn't when I slept. I woke up and walked barefooted to the lounge but stopped when I heard Nqubeko's voice

coming from the spare room. He was clearly on the phone.

".....And?" He asked after a moment of silence. I held my breath to listen some more.

"Absolutely sure about it" I wasn't sure if he was asking a question or telling. He said something else I didn't hear before I heard him say "That's much better. Thanks man" then footsteps approached door and I hurried back to the bedroom. When I heard the door close I pretended to be only waking up now.

"Finally you are awake"

I didn't reply since we weren't talking to each other instead I went to the kitchen. Judging by the pot on the stove it meant he cooked.

"They say food is a way to man's heart. I hope it's the same for women" he joked and I forced myself not to laugh.

"I cooked some mutton curry. I hope you will like it" he went to open the pot.

"Thanks " I replied

"A word at last" he sounded pleased.

I dished up for myself before going to the lounge. He followed with his half eaten food and we sat side by side before eating quietly.

"Is the salt okay?" He asked and I knew it wasn't about the salt. He wanted to talk.

I nodded and turned my head back to the TV.

"What about the taste? I used chicken spice" he added after a moment.

"Its fine" I replied.

"And the rice? Is it okay? This rice is a little tricky"

This time I didn't reply at all. I continued to eat and he stopped trying and turned down the TV making us sit in a quiet house like it was empty. I reminded myself that if I wanted Nqubeko to treat me like his wife not a pet then he needed to respect me.

The quiet meal followed by me washing the dishes and him locking all doors and then I turned the lights off in the kitchen before going to the bedroom. I was still changing into a nightdress when he walked in and stared at me for a moment.

"Have you seen the spare charger?" He asked

"No" I replied before getting into bed.

"I wonder where it is" he complained before leaving the room. I didn't reply instead I reached over and turned the bedside lamp off before covering myself with a blanket. When he returned I heard him mumble something before he sat on his side of the bed and then after few seconds he was in bed.

"You can't be sleeping now" he whispered in my ear before his hand rested on my hip.

"I'm not. I'm thinking about home" I replied and didn't slap his hand away when it reached for my upper body making the nipples harden on contact.

"What about it?" He asked as his thumb continued

to tease the nipples through the fabric of my sleep wear.

"I'll tell you about it when you and I are talking again. When we have no secrets and in this together" I replied with such bitterness even my voice trembled.

"What are you saying?" He asked as he removed his hand from my breasts.

"I'm saying, as long as you are keeping secrets from me and acting all weird about it then we might as well go back to the old us. Where you were the husband and I was the wife. We both feed each other in a manner we were told"

I heard him take a deep breath before his hand was back on touching my breast again.

"What do you mean by feeding?"

"Cooking and serving you my vagina when you want it"

His hand froze before he slowly withdrew it and pulled down my nightdress.

"Wow. All this because?" He asked after a moment

of silence

"Obviously that's what we are doing and good at. Since you and I began talking everything is going wrong. When we didn't talk and we both stick to the end of our deal we didn't have any arguments. Clearly you want that again since you don't want to talk to me" I explained.

"Okay" he sounded bitter and I thought it was end of the conversation but after a moment he shifted and I could feel him poke my bum. When we didn't talk much whenever he was horny he pulled me back to him or I would feel him standing firm before his hand would touch my thighs and his lips on my neck. I knew that it was his way of saying he wanted it and I would allow myself to get into the mood and respond to his touch. Then sex would follow. Some days he did it slower and slower as if he wanted to make sure that I feel it too but some days it was shorter and quicker. Whenever he was quicker and short he was always tense about something but I never asked I just did my duty as the wife.

The poke in the butt followed by the kiss in the back of my neck before his knee went between my legs allowing his hand the access to where he was reaching.

"Some years ago. I was a security guard in one of the stores in Johannesburg. I was young. Not too young but not old enough for the decision I made that time" he paused as his hand started touching my sensitive part making my nipples tighten even harder.

"There was a pregnant woman. She walked in just as three guys had entered the store making them the last shoppers for the day. I didn't suspect a thing and I was preparing to leave because my shift was ending. One of the guys went straight to her and grabbed her by the neck. When I reacted someone already had a gun in my head and the third guy was pulling out his bag demanding cash from the till" he paused before his hand squeezed my breast making me let out a moan and his lips kiss the sensitive spot in my neck.

"It happened so quickly. Theo opened the till and

pulled the money before the guy hit him with his gun so he could take over loading the cash. The pregnant woman was crying silently while I was trying to think of something. When you think about it you see a lot of options and then all succeed but when faced with that situation no idea comes to mind. It took less than five minutes and then the sirens approached. It made the man curse before he threw the pregnant lady on the floor. The guy carrying the money ran out first but the police had arrived" the hand went further down before he removed it and his knee as well and then he pulled me back to face him. He didn't look me in the eye instead he kissed my lips fast and hard. I kissed him back for a moment and then he pulled away.

"They started firing. Not sure how many shots but the glass broke and people screamed. We screamed I think and there was so much running around all of us covering our heads while trying to get down to avoid being hit. I heard a scream and then more shots coming from the store now and it seemed to encourage the police because they fired

back hitting everything and us on the floor trying to crawl into safety" when he paused again he claimed my lips again and this time he rolled over until he was between my legs. We both stared at each other before he slammed inside me making us both gasp in shock. His thrust were deep and hard.

"When the shooting stopped there was so much blood. The woman laid there in a pool of blood. Two bullets had hit her chest and she died instantly according to the report" his hand grabbed my hand and pinned them above my head before he was back into deep thrusting with each word.

"Her baby?" I whispered which was followed by a moan because it felt that good.

"She died instantly as well. But the most heart breaking thing was when this girl came running towards the shop. She was calling out for her mother and the moment she saw her she screamed in a most painful way. Her mother was dead just like that"

The deep thrust went even deeper and I found

myself desperately moving my waist trying to match him. I was so close and I wanted to know the end. Who the girl was and what happened next.

"More please" I begged

"I quit the job and left Johannesburg after that because I couldn't get over the girl and her scream. Years later I meet this woman and we fall in love. The girl is long forgotten. I propose and she says yes. We are happy and I take her back to my parents and plan on sending my uncles. Everything is going so well until I see her mother. The photo of her with her mother and suddenly I'm transported back to the scene in that shop. She is the girl and that woman was her mother" I came. Harder than I've ever come before and Nqubeko collapsed over me his body also trembling. When he let go of my hands I held his tight against me as he did the same.

"I was shocked. I told her what I had seen. We both cried about it. We both tried to heal each other. Me for being a witness and her for losing a mother. My mistake was telling people about it and also that I received payment when I resigned suddenly the

story was narrated differently back home. Suddenly I was the part of the robbers and I had killed her and then searched for her daughter before making her fall inlove with me just to ease my guilt. When the romours spreads and we started fighting more and more we both sat down and decided it was too much so we both ended things. That's how the lion and the cub thing came about" he finished before rolling off me.

Chapter 13

Nqubeko's ringing phone woke me up and woke him up as well. He complained before answering. I could tell it was bad news because he got out of bed and while cursing and threatening to kill someone. My phone said the time was after 3am. There was no way I could go back to sleep so I sat up and waited for him to finish the call and tell me what's wrong.

"Okay, okay. I'll do it" he ended the call and threw the phone on the bed.

"What's wrong?"

"One of the missing truck was found in Kimberly. Now I need to fly to Kimberly and get them back. The authorities are refusing to release them unless there us absolute proof of ownership. I need Davin and Sandile with me. Damn" he kicked the bed.

"Right now?"

He looked at me like he was going to say I was stupid. I realized that I had asked a stupid question but hey, I was still half asleep to process my thoughts.

"At sunrise" he replied after a moment and then sat down.

"So is it a hard process to get them to give you back you truck?" I asked after a yawn.

"It's early. Go back to sleep"

"It's fine. I don't mind. You seem worried. They found it. Shouldn't you be happy?"

He stared at me again before he laughed and then leaned over to kiss my lips.

"Yes. I'm happy. Its the travelling that's I'm not thrilled about"

"Why?"

He seemed to hesitate a bit before he continued "I don't want to leave you alone. Even if its for one day. Its safe with Thato exposed but still. Us, we are slowly making this marriage work and now this"

"I'll be here when you get back. This is our bread Nqubeko. You can't neglect your duties" I encouraged. As much as I wanted him with me most of the time but still I missed being with my friends and have a wine or two.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes I'm sure. I really don't mind. How long will it take?"

"I'm hoping it's one day. But its possible that it might take longer. I need to call Sandile" he picked up his phone.

"He might still be asleep"

"They need to wake up. I'm already up and I pay

them a lot" he went ahead and made the call while I stood up and went to the bathroom. When I returned he was done so I crawled into his lap and kissed him lip with my arms around his neck. I was going for a small kiss in the lips but he clearly wanted more so we continued to kiss until he stopped.

"We need to talk about something before I leave"

"Sound serious. What's wrong?" I tried to get off but he stopped me.

"It's the attitude Thembeke. The tone you use when you are not satisfied with something. I don't like it. I'm not sure if you notice. I don't yell much but it doesn't mean I don't get angry. I do and it's not pretty. When you get angry you tend to react badly on things" I wasn't following and I think he noticed before he continued "The video. You uploaded it because you were angry. You looked me in the eye and said you can go out there and fuck a real man. Then last night you threatened to block off everything in this marriage beside food and yourself because you wanted to know some story people

keep telling about me. That's not how you fix things"
I almost laughed but stopped myself because he
didn't look like he was joking.

"I'm sorry"

"I know you are sorry. But next time think before you
say something like that again" he gave me a hard
look that made me want to nod my head like a child.
"Let's not have this conversation again" he added
after a second.

"Are you going to start beating me up?"

"No. That was a mistake and I made a promise to
never do that again. But there are many ways one
can punish someone"

"Such as?"

"You don't want me to show you" he kissed my lips
and his hands started rubbing my thighs. One thing
led to another before we made love and then he
started to pack while he ordered me to get some
sleep.

He was dressed when I woke up. I washed my hands and went to make him some breakfast and my own coffee.

"Do you have plans while I'm gone?" He asked as he sat down on the kitchen chair.

"Such as?" I sipped the coffee so he wouldn't see my whole face.

"Going out with your friends?"

"Maybe. I'm not sure" I lied. I knew for sure but I didn't want him to get all worked out about it.

"Okay" He went back to eating. I waited thinking he was going to continue but there was nothing.

"So you are giving me instructions? Like I shouldn't leave the house or something"

That made him raise his head and look at me. I couldn't help myself so I laughed and then pretended it was a cough.

"Don't worry about that. Its completely safe now. You can leave the house and go out with your

friends. Just be careful. No drinks from strangers and no flirting with random guys in those places" this was a real surprise. He never mentioned that the threat was gone and I could have gone back to work already.

"You didn't tell me it was safe now"

"I'm sorry. I should have said something but a lot happened in the past few days MaKhumalo. I forgot"

"So I can go back to work?"

"If you think you really should. I mean it was nice to have you around" he shrugged.

"I'm going back. I love working"

"Okay" that's all he said. I decided to let this go before we started having an unnecessary fight.

When he finished eating I washed the dishes before offering to drive him to the airport. Sandile called and said he was going to pick him up which meant my driving was no longer needed so I kissed him goodbye when Sandile arrived and waved goodbye

as the car left the yard.

I called Nombuso first and she said she was available later. When I called Phumelele she said she was off work and said she was heading to Nanda to visit her aunt but promised to be back later. We agreed to meet in my house at 6 and then drive together to the club. Having to wait for them made me realize how much I missed being at work. The house was quiet and I had nothing else to do because I didn't feel like doing any spring cleaning so I decided to sleep instead and woke up when my phone was ringing nonstop.

"Hello" I answered

"Are you sleeping?" Asked Nqubeko in the other end.

"Not anymore. Are you there yet?" I sat up and looked at the clock. It was after 4:30 and it was odd that the girls didn't call not even once to say they

were still on.

"Yeah. We are in the hotel. Me and Davin, Sandile went to the police station. Its not that easy" he sounded annoyed.

"I'm sorry. I wish I can help" I didn't know what else to say.

"It's fine. So beside sleeping. What are you up to?"

"Nothing. I might go out for dinner. I'm too bored to cook" I tested the water.

"Dinner? Alone?"

"Is that a problem?"

"Of cause not but wear the ring. We don't want people seeing a hot woman having dinner alone. Its an invitation for trouble"

"Don't worry. I won't do anything that will disappoint you" I could hear someone speaking on his end which meant he needed to go and I also needed to get up and start getting ready.

"That's all I ask. I love you"

"I love you too"

"I have to go. Sandile is back. We will talk before I sleep. Okay?"

"No problem. Bye" I ended the call and dialed Nombuso's number. It went straight to voicemail. I tried to Phumelele and someone answered saying Phumelele was still in Inanda and she was going to call me back. I said okay and hung up.

At six o'clock I was dressed and ready for them but Nombuso's phone was still off and Phumelele never returned my call. When I tried again it went unanswered so I decided to go for dinner for real and forget clubbing.

Eating alone wasn't funny but it felt really good to be out. I ordered my meal and ate slowly because I wasn't going anywhere. I was still enjoying it when I spotted a familiar face. The man looked back at me and I remembered where I knew him from. His name was Kwanele Mthembu and I used to have a

mad crush on his in high school. When I tried to steal another look at him he was looking back at me. I looked away first before pretending to be searching for the waiter but he was clearly looking at me and telling the people he was with something about me. Thinking about it now made me want to laugh out loud. When I was young and this guy was in standard 7 he used to walk around with his shoes shining and his hands buried in his pockets. I used to fantasize about him every day until I accepted that he was never going to see me. How could he when my shoes were barely shining. My hair was hardly combed neatly because I wasn't a fan of the comb. My shirt weren't white because I used wear old shirts until they were completely torn on the collar and cream white I colour. Looking back now it seemed funny but those days he made my heart skip a beat.

"Thembeke Khumalo" the voice above me stopped my train of thought down the memory lane.

I looked up to him standing there looking down at me looking more handsome than he did those years

ago.

"Kwenele Mthembu. Hi" I stood up to show politeness and of course it felt weird to be looking up at him.

"Wow. I almost didn't recognise you" he offered a hand and I gave him mine and for a moment he didn't let go "Wow. I can't believe it"

"Small world. I guess"

"Yeah it is. I was at home three weeks ago and I drove past your home. It made me think of those day you know" he laughed and I remembered why he used to make my knees go all weak. Kwanele had two dimples on one cheek and when he smiled his lips remained pressed and then he raised his eyebrows when he did. Now it was worse because he had a beard and sideburns and a moustache which made him look really good. He smelled good too. Almost like money and I knew how money smelled like since I was married to Nqubeko.

"So you still live there? I mean your family"

"Yeah they do. You know old people and roots. They

don't want to leave" he laughed

"I know" I looked at his table and they were talking about us. They kept pretending not to look but they weren't winning.

"So you are having a meal alone or husband is on his way?"

"Alone. He couldn't make it" he nodded and looked at me before smiling like he was remembering something.

"Wow. I think today is the happiest day of my life. Seeing you has made me really happy MaNtungwa. Look at you"

"It was a real surprise for me too"

"Why don't you come sit with us. You are eating alone after all" he suggested and I knew it was a bad idea. His friends were already talking so I didn't want to ruin whatever they were doing in their table.

"I'd love to but I need to get home. Besides, I'm sure you had other plans and i'm tired. Its been a long day" I lied and hoped he wasn't offended.

"No problem. Can I at least get your number. Maybe we can have coffee and catch up" he suggested already taking out his phone.

"No problem" I gave him the number before waving the waiter over asking for the bill.

"It was nice to see you Thembeke. Enjoy your evening" he smiled and walked away. I was still smiling like a fool as the waiter came with the bill. I paid and gave her a tip before leaving the restaurant. I was approaching my car when I heard Nombuso's laugh. I knew my friend and I knew he laughing tone it was definitely her. I waited for a second before they appeared. It was Phumelele first then Nombuso behind her and then two other girls I didn't know. They were talking and laughing they didn't even notice me. I opened my car and got in before pulling out my phone and called Nombuso's number. I could see her searching her bag for the phone while the others stopped and paused for photos Phumelele was taking. She stared at the phone before putting it back in the bag. I ended the call and tried Phumelele.

"Hey girl" she answered and walked away from the girls after placing her finger in her lips asking them to keep quiet.

"Hey. Is everything okay?"

"Yes girl everything is fine. I'm still here and i'm sorry I totally forgot to return your call. I couldn't come back" she lied and I could feel my eyes filling up with tears.

"Its fine. Have you talked to Nombuso? She is not answering"

"When I spoke to her she had a headache. Maybe she came back from work and took some pills" she lied without even hesitating.

"Its okay. I'm also heading home now. For an early night. Enjoy"

"Bye girl. Next time I guess" she ended the call and I watched as she said something to Nombuso who laughed before they vanished from my view. I deleted both their numbers on my phone and drove back home. When my phone vibrated it was a text message from an unsaved number saying,

"It was nice to see you. And you look gorgeous as always, from Kwanele"

Chapter 14

"So you are not coming back!!?" I yelled even though I didn't really mean to. It was four days already and he was saying he isn't coming home tomorrow. I hated being alone in the house.

"You miss me?" He asked sounding like he was laughing.

"The house is quiet. I've cleaned everything already and i'm tired of sleeping" I laughed too avoiding having to say it. I really did miss him.

"No one will kill you for admitting that you miss me" he laughed and I laughed to before saying yes I missed him.

"Can't you go out with your friends?" He asked after we stopped laughing.

I told him what happened and that I didn't think the friendship was going to continue after this.

"Just like that?" He asked after I was done explaining what I saw.

"Yep. She lied just like that and they laughed. I felt like a big fool"

"That's strange. You didn't have a fight or any silly argument?" He asked

"No. We haven't seen each other much since the accident"

"And you didn't say anything that might have offended them. Even if you said it jokingly?"

I thought about it and nothing came to mind.

"No. I don't like offending people so I always make sure that I don't do or say something that might offend anyone"

"I know. Look, I'll send someone to see if they can find something....."

"Don't. They don't want to be my friends anymore. I don't think we should bully them into being friends with me if they don't want to anymore. I'll be fine. Boredom never killed anyone"

"But we can try to find out what happened. It doesn't make any sense for them to just stop wanting your friendship"

"I know but i'll be fine. I did nothing wrong so if they want to walk away I say its okay. I've already deleted their numbers "

"That was quick MaKhumalo" he laughed.

"I was hurt"

"Okay. Maybe I can call the office and have someone coming...." I didn't even let him finish because I knew whatever he was suggesting wasn't going to work.

"No. This isn't work. We can't involve your colleagues. I'll be okay. Just come home soon"

"Its nice to know i'm being missed. I miss you"

"I miss you too"

"Maybe you should come here. It's nothing fancy but we can find a nice place and have some time away from home"

"Nope. You still owe me a proper vacation not your

work trip"

"We will go month end. Where do you want to go?"

"Overseas" I replied quickly and expected a laugh but he didn't laugh.

"Okay. I'll sort out the documents and we will go"

"Can we afford it?"

"If we can't i'll make a plan" There was someone else speaking in his end which meant he needed to go.

"Thanks. Is that Sandile?"

"Yes. I'll call you in an hour. Go to a spa or shopping. Anything to fight off boredom. I love you" he suggested.

"I love you too and i'll go do my hair and do some shopping"

"Buy something sexy for my eyes only" he added before ending the call. I was left with a goofy smile on my face.

To avoid bumping to anyone I didn't want to talk to like my former friends I decided to visit a different hair salon and asked to for long braids. Two ladies said they will do it because I wanted to finish early. The whole place was loud as the ladies laughed and gossiped about someone who had a boyfriend problem. Some were saying they would have left the man a long time ago. Some were saying the money was worth it. Some saying it was better to cry in an Audi over crying in a shack somewhere. I wasn't sure if I agreed or not. Before being married I was a child where my only worry was fetching water in community water pump, sweeping the yard, cleaning the house, cooking, washing the clothes and being sent here and there. I was a child and those were the normal things I did without complain. Here in Durban girls weren't dealing with all that. Some of them were dealing with dating abusive boyfriends who made up for it by buying them expensive clothes. If someone had to deal with that at the age of 17 then that person was more likely to

be exhausted in the age of 25 and no longer seeing their self worthy. I couldn't judge them though. Not when Nqubeko had slapped me and I forgave him. Judging them would have made me a hypocrite.

The topic went on until they started talking about men who marry other women while sleeping with other people. One lady told us how her then boyfriend said there was a funeral in his home while he was getting married. When she mentioned how she baked two buckets of scones and bought vegetables she laughed and cried at the same time. I felt bad for her. No one deserved something like that at all.

"It also happened to me" another lady spoke up and we all turned to look at her because she was very quiet.

"You lie" said one of the ladies doing my head.

"I wish. Well, we were seriously dating" she raised her head and I caught her face in the mirror. She looked like someone I've seen before but I just didn't know where.

"So he went and got married just like that?"
Someone asked.

"He actually went and picked this young girl in the Bundu's and married her. Witchcraft is real I tell you"

"Was he aware that you were seriously dating?
Sometimes men think we are just friends with benefits" someone said and others laughed.

"That's exactly what he said when I asked him why he did something like this. At the time I used to hate him but now i hate his wife. I used to want to confront her when she came to the places I was in. Some days I would call him and insult him because I felt he broke my heart but He thinks he found what he wanted he went for it but i know the truth now. She bewitched him" she sounded sad

"So you've seen his wife?" Asked the lady above my head.

"Yes. I saw her photos in his office" she replied and went back to doing her nails.

"Damn girl. Is she gorgeous? More than you?"

This time I turned my head and looked at her. She raised her head and looked at me. I knew her because she once came to greet us in the club. When she left we were left wondering what was that all about because we didn't know her.

"You look at her and compare" she pointed her long nailed finger right at me.

The whole place went quiet. So quiet you would have heard a pin drop.

"Okay. What just happened?" A brave person spoke and snapped everyone out of the trance.

"This is Nqubeko Mbonambi's wife?" Someone asked while poking my shoulder.

"Yes. That's Mrs Mbonambi. He left me for her" she replied

"This girl right here?" Another lady spoke while pointing at me.

"Yep. Now you decide who is more beautiful. Me or her?" She replied and rolled her eyes.

"But you are 10 times better. No offence girl" she

said to me before she turned back to her "I mean. Look at you and then her" when she said that the others laughed. I could feel the tears fill my eyes but I wasn't going to give them the satisfaction.

"Come on guys. He picked her for a reason. I guess he wanted more than just beauty" someone spoke. I didn't look up just in case they saw the tears filling my eyes.

"Girl please. She bewitched him. I cooked and cleaned for him. I travelled with him and i motivated him when he was having trouble with work. No one wakes up and decide to get married. Not men like Nqubeko after his fiance left him. He told me he never wanted to get married. I helped him heal and when he felt better she seduced and bewitched him" she was no longer talking but more like yelling and with each word she was getting up and walking towards me.

"Come on Nobuhle. Leave the girl alone" someone yelled and she paused before she reached the chair I was sitting on.

"Why not? She is here now. I've been watching her while smiling like a stupid girl living the life she has no idea how it came about and getting drunk in expensive alcohol. I've been dying to tell her exactly how I feel. I worked so hard to help Nqubeko continue to run that company. He used to call me in the middle of the night because he was exhausted and nothing was working out. I would sit there and listen to him while he spoke about the plans, the trips he needed to take. The competition and people who hated seeing him be successful. I was there through all that. When she left him I was the one listening to him moan about how heartbroken he really was and how much he had trusted her. I didn't know i was doing it for you. Today you sit there and spend his money because that's all you are good for. A gold digger who thinks life is about friends and getting drunk" she gave me a hard look like she was going to slap me.

"Well I'm spending his money not yours" I replied

"Because you bewitched him" she yelled

"No. He picked me because he wanted me" the

ladies doing my hair both stopped at the same time and I used this chance to stand up just in case she tried to hit me.

"He didn't want you. If he wanted you he wouldn't have called me the day you got married. If he wanted you he wouldn't have fucked me in his office and the large boardroom that overlook the city. Yes baby girl. We used to fuck like rabbits in your house. All over the kitchen and the lounge. The man has an appetite. I should fly to Kimberly and go give him what he is always craving for. A good fuck" the other laughed and someone was looking at me with judging eyes. In their eyes I was a witch who witched a man into marrying her.

"Come on Nobuhle. You know Nqubeko won't like this. Your nails are done. Leave please" a new voice spoke at the door. The working ladies started getting busy some even picking up nothing pretending to be busy.

"Why should I leave? I've been your client for years now. You can't possibly pick her over me" she yelled like a mad woman.

"Tumi. Are you done with her hair?" She asked before walking further in.

"Almost done" replied the girl pushing me back to the chair. I sat down and they both started finishing my hair.

The place went quiet and my phone picked this moment to ring. When I finally managed to take it out of my bag it was Kwanele. The last person. I wanted to talk to but everyone was looking at me probably thinking it was Nqubeko and ignoring him was going to make them speculate even more. So I answered.

"Hey. I was starting to think maybe I offended you" he sounded cheerful for someone I was ignoring. I didn't reply to his messages and I wasn't answering his calls when he called.

"Why?"

"Because you haven't answered my calls. Are you okay?" He asked.

"I'm fine. I've been busy" I lied. I could hear the ladies starting to go back into chatting amongst

themselves but I knew I was the topic.

"Okay. So are you okay?"

"Yeah i'm cool"

"Hey Nqubeko" I heard Nobuhle speak and when I looked at her she was holding the phone in her ears while trying to open her wallet with the other hand.

"Are you still in Kimberly?" She asked.

"Thembeke. Hello" said Kwanele in my ear.

"Yes I'm still here" I replied but I wasn't listening to him. I was looking at her.

"Can we have coffee? Just to talk. Catch up"

"Okay. Send me the details. I'll go pack right now" said Nobuhle before she giggled like a child locked in a candy shop.

"Yeah sure. I'll let you know" I replied to Kwanele even though I didn't fully register what he was saying. I needed to hang up "Bye" I added before ending the call.

"That's the thing about black magic. It does run out at some point" said Nobuhle before she actually spit

at me but her spit didn't reach me. The other ladies gasped some laughed some clapping in shock while some saying it was true that any marriage built on witchcraft and tears doesn't last. Nobuhle walked out and I blinked several times to clear my eyes the tears that filled up.

"Done" the lady announced before she stepped away from me. The second lady also finished. I paid and thanked them before leaving. I could hear them laugh as I exited but I kept walking and only finally broke down when I reached my car.

Chapter 15

I don't know how long I sat in the car just crying and unable to stop. I think I doze off at some point before being awoken by a ringing phone. My head hurt, my eyes felt like they were swollen but most of all my heart was in physical pain. I stared at the phone until it stopped and then it showed that I had 7 missed calls from Nqubeko, 3 from Kwanele, 11 from different unsaved numbers and then 12

messages from Nqubeko, Kwanele and Nombuso. Yes her number was no longer saved but I knew it by heart already.

A knock on the window made me just and the phone started ringing again. It was an unsaved number and the person on the window wasn't giving up. I lowered the window just a bit and it was the lady from the hair place.

"Hey. Are you okay?" She seemed to be wet on her face like someone covered in dripping sweat.

"I'm fine" I lowered the window some more and then noticed that it was actually raining. She was wet because of the rain not sweat.

She gave me the obvious look and it made me cry even harder. My phone had stopped ringing and it started again.

"Answer him. Sitting here crying won't make you feel better. The person on that phone is the answer to your questions"

I nodded before wiping the tears in my face. The phone stopped ringing and her phone started

ringing to. She looked at it before answering.

"She is here" she replied after answering and then pushed the phone towards me. When I didn't take it she pushed it inside the car and it landed on my lap.

"Thembeke" I could hear Nqubeko yelling in the other end but instead of the voice coming out it was a sob that came and I continued to cry.

The woman banged on the window again. I lowered it again before returning her phone.

"Child. You are going to have to make a decision at some point. Sit here and cry while the man is going crazy over there worried about you" she was no longer speaking in a gentle tone.

"She called me a witch"

"And you are not a witch. Are you practising witchcraft?" She yelled and I kept quiet.

"Look. I know it hurts. She was being bitter and you cannot let her get you like this. People in pain say whatever they want just so the other person is in more pain. She was trying to hurt you. Talk to your

husband. The man is desperately trying to reach you. Someone recorded the video and posted it on Facebook" that explained the calls and messages.

"I'll call him back as soon as I get home"

"He said you don't drive when you are crying. That's why I came looking for you. He wouldn't stop calling me saying he is sure you didn't leave. Sounds like someone who knows and cares for his wife. Hear him out" she sounded like she was begging.

The phone started ringing again. I pressed the button and placed it on my ear.

"Thembeka"

"Yes"

"Thank God. I'm going out of my mind here. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine"

"Forgive me. I know you are not okay. I'm coming back home. Okay" I didn't answer because I was crying and my nose running.

"Everything she said is a lie. I know her but we

weren't dating. We were just friends. We had weak moments and that's it. Thembeka!!" He yelled when i didn't say anything.

"Come on. Say something. Please"

"Okay" That's all i could say.

"Khethelo will come take you home. I'm at the airport already. I'll be there soon"

"Okay" I replied again before ending the call. The woman looked at me in the window before she gave me a weak smile.

"Go home, have a long bath, have some comfort food and then get some sleep. When you are calmer you will see that it's not the end of the world"

"Thank you" I replied and watched her go and then Khethelo arrived. I couldn't talk to him instead i move and allowed him to drive me home. He respected my silence until we got home and I thanked.

"I don't mind staying until Nqubeko get here" he offered but i didn't want him here. I wanted to be

alone.

"I'll be fine. Thanks for driving me" i was kicking him out and he got it.

"Okay. If you need anything. J ust call" he offered as he walked to the door.

"For real. I'll be fine. I'm going to sleep for a while"

"Okay. I'll call someone to pick me up. Lock the door behind me" he instructed before walking out. I followed him out and waited until he was out of the gate before going back inside.

The bath didn't help at all. The headache was back and i could still hear her calling me a witch. Being accused of witchcraft was something we took very serious back home because being accused of witchcraft meant you were evil. You didn't wish anything good for others. You were capable of killing. She was calling me all these things for what?

For a man that came to my home and asked for my hand in marriage. Maybe if I had gone and asked him to marry me maybe I would have seen my error but I didn't. She was accusing me of all these things and I didn't do any of them.

The more I tried to shut her voice out of my head the louder she became and the more painful my head felt until I was sleeping on the floor just listening to my own heartbeat as it matched the throbbing of the pain. After a while my body grew cold and I pulled the cover off the bed and covered myself while sleeping like that.

"Thembeke" I heard the yelling. It was far at first and then it grew louder and louder before the blanket was pulled off me and I remained shivering on the floor.

It was Nqubeko and he was wet. When he noticed my eyes looking at his dripping bag that was going to ruin the carpet he went to drop it in the passage because we had tiles there.

"Flat tyre and the driver didn't have a spare and I couldn't wait for emergency services so I walked. Two streets away" he explained while stripping.

The clock on my phone said it was after eight at night and that explained the hunger. I wasn't sure of the last meal I ate and I was really hungry.

"Where are you going?" He asked when I walked to the door.

"To make something to eat. I'm hungry" he nodded and continued to get dressed in dry clothes. I left him alone and went to the kitchen. The table was there and I imagined her on it with Nqubeko between her legs. I looked at the sink and wondered if they did it there at some point.

"Hey" whispered Nqubeko behind me and I jumped because I didn't hear him come in "Sorry. I didn't mean to" he placed both hands on my side and held me there.

"I need to make something to eat" I wanted to get out of his grip. I didn't want him to breath on me and I didn't want him to touch me.

"It can wait. Nobuhle is just bitter. She us trying to get back at me and I'm sorry you happened to be in the firing line"

"So you never slept with her after we got married? In your office? In your car? In cape town or wherever else she travel with you" I didn't mean to shout but I couldn't help it.

He didn't reply and I knew it meant they did. She wasn't just bitter. She was telling me the truth.

"It was a long time ago MaKhumalo. It was a mistake and"

"She called me a witch. Said I bewitched you so I could stay in this house have all this because i'm a gold digger"

"You know that's not true. I'll deal with her and sort this out. She had no right" he let go of me and I quickly moved away so he wouldn't touch me again.

"You gave her that right. When you did whatever you did with her you painted me as a gold digger who has no brain. You made her hate me" I grabbed a glass and without a second thought I threw it

against the wall. He didn't even flinch and I wished it had landed on him.

"Please calm down" he walked closer and I grabbed a knife.

"Don't you dare. I don't want you to touch me" I screamed and held the knife tight in my hands.

"Okay, okay" he raised both hands and stepped back.

"She knew you were in Kimberly. She called. She was planning to come to you. You spoke to her and told her you were in Kimberly"

"I had no idea she was up to something. When she called we spoke and I mentioned that I was there. I didn't know she wasn't just making a conversation. I'm so sorry Thembeke. Please put the knife down"

"I never thought it would hurt this much" I threw the knife in the sink before leaving the kitchen. He didn't come after me and I went to the spare room before slamming the door shut.

The tears didn't stop coming no matter how hard I

stuck my palms in the eyes.

"Thembeke" he knocked once and pushed the door open "I made you some sandwiches" he was holding a plate in his hand. When I didn't reply he put it on the pedestal.

"How many times have you had sex in your office?" I asked and he pauses for a moment before he came to sit down. When he tried to touch my hands I moved them. "Surely you remember"

"Do we have to do this right now?"

"Why not? Are you going somewhere?" I yelled and stood up.

"Not recently"

"The trips. Does she pay for her own ticket or you pay for her?"

"I only paid for it once. The other time she just happened to be in Cape Town" he explained and just looking at him made me hate that he didn't understand my pain. He had no idea how I felt like.

"Thembeke....." He started to speak but stopped as

my hand connected with his cheek. I could see the shock on his face and the throbbing in my hand feeling like I just hit a concrete wall. After few seconds he rubbed his cheek.

Chapter 16

I woke up in pain. At first I didn't get where the pain came from but when I tried to get out of bed it felt like someone was ripping something in my stomach. I couldn't stand up straight and my legs were refusing to carry my body.

"Nqubeko" I called out before kneeling on the floor while holding my stomach even though I didn't know what this pain meant.

"Nqubeko" I cried harder before pushing the door wide. The lights were on in the passage but the house was quiet except for the rain that kept hitting the window. "Nqubeko" I tried again and there was no reply. I needed to call for help and I needed to crawl back to the bedroom in order to do it. It took me a while to reach for my phone and I dialed Nqubeko's

number but his phone was off. When his record voice started speaking I ended the call and tried Phumelele. Her phone rang to voicemail. I laid down and listened to the throbbing pain hoping it will fade away even just for a second so I can call for help but it didn't stop. My nightdress was already stained and I didn't need a doctor to tell me I was losing a pregnancy I didn't even know was there.

I tried Nqubeko and it still went to voicemail. I thought about calling the police and asking them to call an ambulance for me because I didn't know the number by head. The phone rang once before someone answered.

"I need an ambulance. Please" I spoke while sobbing.

"This is the police....." He started to explain.

"Please. I'm home alone. I don't remember the number. Something is wrong with me. Oh God. Please" I begged while another intense wave of pain seemed to grip my inside and squeezed.

The man asked for my address and I gave it to him

before he promised to call an ambulance for me.

"Hello" his voice came on again after a few minutes of silence.

"Yes" I said through my teeth.

"They are on their way. I need you to stay on the line for me. Can you do that?" He asked

"Okay"

"Hello!!"

"I can hear you" I replied a little louder so he wouldn't think I hung up.

"They are coming. What is your name?" He asked.

"Thembeka" I replied before the phone slipped from my hand and landed on the floor and that was it.

"Thembeka. Can you hear me?" The person asked repeatedly until I opened my eyes and stared at her.

She placed something on my face when I tried to speak.

I stared at her for a moment before closing my eyes again hoping to wake up feeling better.

It didn't happen, when I woke up again I was in a hospital bed and the doctor confirmed what had happened. I was pregnant. According to him I was over 8 weeks pregnant and I didn't get how because it wasn't over twelve weeks since Nqubeko and I had unprotected sex. The other times he wore a condom because we didn't want a kid yet. To be over 8 weeks was a real shock.

"Mrs Mbonambi" said the Doctor looking at me because I wasn't showing any sign of hearing him.

"Can I sleep for a bit. I'm feeling tired" I didn't wait for a reply before closing my eyes. The Doctor yelled at someone and I felt like there was some movements around me but I couldn't focus. I was tired and wanted to sleep.

I think I slept for a very long time because when I woke up I was even more tired and in more pain. It

was even worse when I saw Nqubeko sleeping in the chair. When he started to move I closed my eyes and pretended to be still sleeping.

"Thembeke" he whispered and I almost replied before realising he was testing if I was awake or sleeping.

"Hi" someone else greeted and I heard Nqubeko reply before footsteps faded away.

"Hey" she touched my hand and I opened my eyes. It was a nurse and she was smiling at me.

"Hi. Does pain go away?"

"It will. You just need to get some rest. I'll get you something for the pain" she smiled and left. Nqubeko walked in soon after.

"I'm so sorry Thembeke. I should have been there"

"But you weren't" I replied before closing my eyes.

"I know. I know" when he touched my hand I yanked it away.

"Please leave me alone"

"Please don't talk like that"

I didn't reply. When a moment passed the nurse came back with pills. I drank them before thanking her.

"Could you get rid of him for me. I'm too tired to talk or listen to him apologize" I told the nurse before she looked at Nqubeko with apologetic eyes.

They didn't speak but she waited until he walked out. I nodded a thank you before closing my eyes hoping to fall asleep soon.

The doctor explained that I had lost the pregnancy. He explained that it was possible for a person to be pregnant and not know until a missed period. They went to further to explain that they needed to operate because of the rupture since it was an ectopic pregnancy. When I mentioned that we only began planning for the baby about a week before he

said I was already pregnant by then. Even when I argued that we were using protection all the time he brought up some speech about how the condoms aren't exactly 100% and that it possible for them to leak. It didn't make me feel better. How can I not know I was pregnant. How does one go to eight weeks without knowing that they are pregnant. I even had my period just fine. The doctor had answers about all those things. He went as far as saying I would need some therapy and that it wasn't my fault. I nodded and yawned before he left me alone.

The hospital stay was four days before they said I could go home for recovery. Nqubeko was there and I managed to shut him out. He didn't say he was sorry anymore. He came and sat there until visiting time was over and then leave. When they said I could leave he came to get me and we left the hospital in silence. When we reached the house he opened the door for me but stopped himself when

he almost touched me. It was like he knew how I didn't want him to touch me. Even when he looked at me I felt like screaming at him. I wanted to curse, yell, cry and break things. I wanted to do everything just so I wouldn't have to deal with the pain in my heart and body.

"Watch the step" he spoke before he took the bag from the car.

Walking was painful but the nurse said I needed to force myself to walk straight so body could get used to being upright even though it was painful.

The house didn't smell like home. It was clean but it didn't feel like home and I wasn't going to collapse on the couch and ask for a blanket. I went straight to the bedroom and stare on the floor where I passed out. The carpet was clean and the bed changed but the photo was never going to leave my head. The memory of Nqubeko sitting there with his hand on his cheek after I slapped him. When he walked out after saying he was sorry, again when he came back and I was under the covers telling him not to dare think he was going to share the bed

with me because I was feeling so raw inside. He didn't reply instead he said goodnight and went to sleep in the main bedroom. God knows how long he slept if he even slept or he waited for me to sleep and then went to her. I had no idea and I didn't want to figure it out. I just wanted to take the pills and sleep.

"I thought you will want to sleep in our bedroom" he spoke when he found me sitting on the bed.

I wanted to reply but I knew that opening my mouth was going to make me say things I was going to regret so I didn't reply.

He walked in and went to put the bag in the closet before he returned with the blanket. I stood up and went to the bathroom to give him some space. I didn't need to pee so I sat on the seat for few seconds and only went back when I heard him close the door. I went to the main bedroom and picked up my pyjamas, the charger and my normal pillow.

"I made you some soup. I was just warming it up.

Its chicken" he spoke when we met in the passage.

I nodded and went to the bedroom. I changed quickly and avoided looking at the bandage. It was going to be a permanent reminder of everything.

He walked in with soup and placed the tray on the pedestal.

"I'll get your pills and water" he announced before he left the bedroom. I stared at the soup for a minute before picking up the bowl and the spoon. I could tell he was surprised when he found me holding the bowl in my hand and the spoon in my mouth. I took few more spoons before putting the bowl down and picked up my pills.

"Thembeke" he started to speak and I shook my head. I wasn't read yet and I wanted to sleep.

He picked up the tray and left. I covered myself with a blanket and closed my eyes hoping I could be drunk in painkillers and not have to deal with anything just for a little while.

That wish wasn't granted because Nqubeko came back and sat on the bed.

"I know you hate me. I should have been here with you. I'm"

"Unless you are telling me where you were please don't speak. I don't want to know how sorry you are. I don't want to hear how its not my fault. I don't want to hear anything unless you are telling me where you were" I replied while holding the blanket tight over my head. I didn't want my mind to overpower my hands and pull it back because that was going to mean I needed to see his face and then listen to anything he was saying when I didn't want to hear it. Unless it was the truth about where he was.

"I needed to go somewhere....." That wasn't the answer I was looking for so I stopped him.

"I wish I had died so you would have returned to my cold body lying on the floor" he didn't speak after that and I closed my eyes hoping the silence could last long enough for me to fall asleep.

Chapter 17

Someone speaking in a loud voice woke me up. It sounded like my mother-in-law but why would she be yelling in the kitchen so early in the morning? I waited for few seconds before she spoke again sounding like she was coming closer.

"I know" Replied Nqubeko before he pushed the door wider. It was really her.

"Oh Mtanami" she rushed to hug me and I hugged her back.

"I made you some breakfast. You were still sleeping when I finished" said Nqubeko standing at the door.

"Bring that food Nqubeko. She needs to eat" she instructed before she went to open the curtain and the window "The air is a little sharp so I'll close it soon"

I nodded and got out of bed. I needed to pee and brush my teeth.

"I know it hurts but you need to be strong. The body will recover" she encouraged while giving me a smile.

I went to bathroom and did my business before going back to the bedroom. The breakfast was there waiting and she was done making the bed. I went back to bed and picked up the plate before eating.

"You are eating. Good" she spoke when she walked in followed by Nqubeko who carried a hot water bottle "Put that bottle under the blanket. She needs to keep warm. It's going to start raining soon"

Nqubeko did as told and I continued to eat because I wanted to take my pills and sleep. When sleeping I thought less about this and I didn't have to see Nqubeko's face or hear his voice.

She closed the window and started complaining about how bad the weather was in Durban.

Nqubeko stood there for a minute before he left saying he needed go shopping for few house things like milk. She nodded before she started giving him the list of things she needed.

"Do you need anything?" He asked while looking at me.

"No" I replied before putting the plate down.

"I'll be back with lunch" he told his mother before he left. I took my pills and laid down again.

"Let me take these to the kitchen" she announced before she left with the tray.

I laid there and listened to my own heartbeat along with the throbbing of my pain.

"Makoti" she spoke when she walked in. I didn't want to listen to her but I needed to show her some respect so I lowered the blanket and looked at her.

"You haven't said much" she sat down on the bed "I know you are in pain but I get a feeling that there is more. What's going on? Nqubeko won't say and you don't even look at him. What happened?"

Tears filled my eyes and I didn't even get a chance to blink them away when they started streaming down my face.

"What did he do?" She looked alarmed before he picked the glass of water and handed it to me.

I sipped and swallowed before telling her everything.

The video, the accidents, the disappearing, Nobuhle, being called a witch, his admitting the cheating and then losing the pregnancy alone in this house while Nqubeko was out there doing his normal disappearing acts.

"Aw kodwa Nkosi. How could Nqubeko do this to you?" She clapped her hands together before she stood up and paced the floor three times and then sat down again while she continued to ask how could he. I had no answer for all that and he also had no idea because he never told me.

"So you called the police and asked them to bring an ambulance over?" She asked she was done being shocked.

"Yes. The doctor said the pregnancy wasn't going to be long anyway because it wasn't where it was supposed to be. I get it. But I was in so much pain. I thought I was dying while in this house alone. I can still feel the pain and see myself bleeding on the floor. I can't get it out of my mind and he wasn't there. He won't say where he was and I think it means he was with her. That's why he won't tell me

where he was"

"How could he do something like this" she yelled and for a moment I thought she was yelling at me. "I told him over and over again that he shouldn't marry you if he knows he can't take care of you. I told them every day that nothing says failure like a man that fails to protect his wife. He is supposed to love and care for you. He is supposed to worship you and treat you good not hurt your feelings like this"

I didn't reply instead I closed my eyes and tried to sleep.

The mother in-law stayed with us for four days before they called and said she needed come home. When she came to tell me she was leaving I couldn't help it. The tears I thought they were finally drying out came back.

"I want to go home too" I finally said it out loud and I

could see she was surprised but tried to hide it.

"That's good. You are not well yet. You still need to get some rest and it will do you good to be around family" she smiled and held my hand.

"I meant my own home with my aunts and uncles" I added after a moment.

"MaKhumalo" she let go of my hand and looked at me "I know this can't be easy on you. I've talked to Nqubeko. He is willing to sort this out. If you go away you might not be able to work it out again. With time it will be harder and harder"

"That's the problem. We can't work it out" I didn't want to be left alone with him. Having her around made it easier but she was leaving and I didn't want to stay behind.

"But you don't know that. You haven't given yourself enough time"

"I don't need time. I just want to go home!!" I yelled at her "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scream. I just want to go home"

She nodded and left the room without even looking back at me.

I stood up and went to the closet before taking out my suitcase. Some clothes were still unpacked from the last time. So I threw in the remaining ones not even bothering to fold them neatly.

My heart almost stopped when Nqubeko walked in. He looked at the bag and then back at me.

"So you are leaving?"

I didn't reply.

"So that's it? You are just leaving. Just like that" he walked closer.

"At least you get to see me. I don't sneak out on you" that came out sharper than intended.

"I said I'm sorry Thembeke"

"Yeah I'm sorry too"

"One of my drivers was arrested for drugs smuggling. When they caught him he revealed that he had been doing it for a while and that he was recruiting more drivers for this. I had no choice but

to help the police catch the person behind the operation. That's why I've been meeting them late at night. I was with them when I left the house. I made a big mistake and forgot to turn my phone on. I couldn't tell you without risking everything these men have worked on for months already. It's a big case"

If Nqubeko told me all this before everything else I would have gladly believed him. In fact I would have admired him for helping out but now it had no effect on me. I couldn't even tell if he was telling me the truth or a lie.

"So you won't say anything?" He asked when I continued to pack my things.

"About what?"

"Come on Thembeke. I just told you the truth!!"

"You told me you've never cheated on me before. But you were sleeping with Nobuhle even after we got married. Lying is your thing. How do I know that you are not lying to me right now?"

"Nobuhle was a mistake. I know I messed up but I

can fix this. A chance to fix this is all i'm asking for" he could have went down on his knees and cried but I knew it wouldn't have changed my mind at all.

"Fix what? What exactly are you going to fix Nqubeko?"

He didn't answer and I picked up the shirt I had dropped on the floor and placed it on the suitcase.

"The thing is. With each lie you feed me I keep building this happiness inside my head and then you take it away in a blink. I can't wait for more than this"

"What do you mean?" He asked

"I'm going home Nqubeko. I'm not cut out for this"

"You are not coming back, are you?"

"That's the only truthful thing you've said to me so far" I zipped up the suitcase.

Chapter 18

Nqubeko

I waited until the car was out of my sight before walking back to the house. Everything was quiet like the house was telling me what it meant to have no wife. I wasn't used to this quietness anymore. Before I got married it was my life and I loved it, after getting married it became her home and she was never silent. The house was never silence again. I wasn't sure if she was aware but when it wasn't the radio on it was her humming quietly to some song in her head. For years it was like that and then it died down so quickly after Patricia answered my phone in Cape Town. Then it never came back even after we were back into talking and acting like a normal couple. It was like someone had gone inside her and switched a certain button off. The attack from Nobuhle killed the light in her eyes and the miscarriage killed everything in her. My mother said she will heal and come home but something about the way she spoke that said she was wrong. I'm not a woman expert but there is a tone that woman use when they are testing you out

and a different one when they are done with the bullshit. Thembeke's tone said she was done with the bullshit.

"I want out" I spoke the moment Craig answered his phone.

"We've been through this Q. You can't pull out now. Not when we are this close" he answered carelessly because he wasn't the one losing his wife.

"Thembeke left. The miscarriage was hard on her and she left!!"

"You can't put that on me. I told you to tell her the truth. But you on some 'I want to protect her' mission you chose to hide it" I wanted to strangle him.

"She is my wife. Do you tell your wife everything that you are involved in?!!"

"Ah, well. She knows this is my job so I don't need to tell anything. You on the other hand knew the risk and I told you repeatedly that tell her the truth. You know if you spoke up she wouldn't have believed Nobuhle confession. She would have called it a

bluff because you are too busy to be cheating" he replied rudely before he hung up.

I wanted to punch him. Punch the wall and break something but most of all I wanted to punish myself for ruining my own marriage. Craig wasn't lying about all this being my fault. I was the one calling Nobuhle and thinking she is going to keep her mouth shut about the affair. She had no business attacking Thembeke. That's the problem with women. You sit them down and tell them the rules so they don't ruin things. But no, women will do exactly what you told them not to do.

I tried her number and it rang twice before she rejected the call. She was ignoring me on purpose. I tried Thembeke's phone and it rang to voicemail. It didn't surprise me. I was just taking a chance anyway.

My next call went to Khethelo and he answered after the first ring like he was ready.

"I have a bottle that need opening. I'm coming there" he offered and I almost laughed because he knew

exactly what I needed.

"Thank man"

"Sharp" he hung up.

Khethelo arrived after an hour with Mzamo, Thuba and Vusi. I thought it was just going to be us but he brought a team.

"Gents "

"We heard the wife left. We are here to help you drown your sorrows" said Thuba raising a case of beer.

I looked at Khethelo and he murmured 'sorry' I thought gossiping was for women not men.

"What did you do?" Asked Mzamo already holding a glass

I looked at Khethelo because it was his fault that this was happening. He had no business telling

them my problems.

"It was a misunderstanding" I replied before going to the kitchen. For a moment it felt like I would see her standing near the sink washing dishes while humming some song I couldn't make out.

"Nobuhle is not a misunderstanding. You cheated and she chunked your ass" said Vusi sounding like he was already drunk.

"Gents. Come on" said Khethelo

"But its true. He cheated and she left" pressed Vusi.

"Don't you think I know that?" I asked while walking back to them

"I known you know. I was just saying we shouldn't act like you had no idea it was coming to this. You cheated with your eyes wide open"

"Stop it Vusi" said Mzamo probably fearing that I was so close to hurting Vusi.

"Didn't I warn him? When you woke up and decided to get married to a girl half your age. I warned you Nqubeko. I sat you down and told you don't do it.

Sorry man. You are not getting any sympathy from me"

"I wasn't expecting one" I replied before sitting down with my own drink.

"Good" he needed to have the last word in. I decided to let it be. He wasn't exactly lying about it being my own fault.

"What exactly happened? I saw the video Nobuhle spitting on her" asked Thuba clearly not wanting to let this go.

Khethelo didn't come to the rescue this time. In fact they all looked at me expecting me to continue.

"Doesn't matter. The point is she packed up and left" I replied

"Didn't she leave before and you ran after her?"
Asked Mzamo. I looked at Khethelo again. Was there anything he didn't pass on to them behind my back.

"You know he is a gossiper. He told us everything. Even the drug issue at work. We know" said Thuba

like it was no big deal.

"And you didn't pass it along to other?" One word to wrong people I was ruined big time. It was meant to be a private thing.

"What do you take us for? I told you to put an end to it but you and 'i'm married now' speech. Craig and his pet wouldn't be treating you like a ying yang" said Mzamo.

"What's a ying yang?" Asked Khethelo. We all looked at him expecting an answer.

"I don't know. It sounds like something you pull and push at will. That's not the point. The point is, we could have helped you sort this mess quickly before you were forced into some undercover shit with a bunch of boys"

"I told you it wasn't easy. The last thing I want Thembeke to think of when looking at me is murderer" even saying it made my blood run cold.

"She lost the baby after your side chick attacked her. You are already a killer man" said Thuba.

"It was an ectopic pregnancy. We didn't even she was pregnant" I explained

"Ectopic? Damn. When my sister went through that she almost died. If the pregnancy ruptured it a matter of life and death" said Vusi shaking his head.

"And I wasn't there. She was alone when it happened"

"Where were you? Don't you dare lie and say you were with Craig. Don't tell me you were with Nobuhle"

I didn't see the need to answer that one.

"Aw come on man. Why are you sulking? You made this mess. How could you?" Shouted Vusi

"I didn't do anything with Buhle. She wasn't even there. I forgot my phone and Thembeke called" I wasn't even that far when I saw the ambulance and the police flying past me. If I had known they were rushing to my own home I would have followed.

"What did you tell her when she asked?" Asked Khethelo. I gave him an annoyed look but he didn't

back down.

"I came clean about Craig and the drugs. The clean version"

"And she didn't buy it?" Asked Thuba.

"No" I didn't explain that she didn't buy it because it came late and I've lied before.

"So what now?" Asked Vusi no longer picking up his glass.

"I need to sort out this mess with Craig then go get my wife back"

"You think she is coming back?" Asked Thuba.

I shot him a warning glance and hoped he took a hint.

"You won't kill me with that look and you know it. Do you really think she is coming back?" He pressed

"I love her" admitted and Khethelo slowly turned his head towards me

"Since when? Don't lie to us. We know you didn't marry her for love. That's bullsh*t you fed everyone

who asked"

"I love her"

"Before or after she danced on the tables showing her panties. We know you love them wild" said Mzamo before they laughed.

"Its a miracle you didn't burst a vein that day. I kept waiting for your call saying you've beaten her to a coma" said Khethelo still laughing

"When she came home she felt so guilty I couldn't even bring it up. I decided to let it"

"Because you were screwing Nobuhle on the side. Her flashing her undies is nothing compared to you fucking someone behind her back" said Vusi as if he was enjoying reminding me how I was responsible for this mess.

"I know" I stood up and went to the kitchen. I tried Nobuhle and again she rejected the call. I tried MaKhumalo and it went straight to voicemail. I tried my mother and she answered after a while. We spoke for a while because she was still in the car and she said Thembeke was asleep. I promised to

call after an hour hoping she would have convinced her to stay with them and not end this marriage.

"Nqubeko" said Vusi behind me.

I turned and looked at him.

"If you love her as much as you say you do. You need to get up and sort out this mess before someone else replaces you" I didn't tell Vusi that I went through her phone and there was Kwanele sending messages. It was only a matter of time before she started returning his attention.

"Thanks man" that's all i said before my phone vibrated.

I waited until he went back to the lounge before returning the call.

"Nombuso"

"Thembeke is not answering my calls or returning my text" she spoke without greeting

"Because she saw you and Phumelele after you lied about being sick and she lied about visiting family"

"Oh, i had no idea" she sounded shocked and she

had every right to be shocked. Their behaviour meant the end of payment.

"Yeah now you know. The friendship is finished" Part of me was still vindictive that Nombuso told Thembeke about someone answering my phone. She had no business saying anything about that.

"But can't you talk to her?"

"No. I'll transfer half of the payment. You ladies will split it in half or whatever way you like. I won't be needing your services anymore"

"Just like that?"

"Yes. You ladies forgot what we agreed on. I only asked you to befriend her but you did more than that. She won't be needing the friendship anymore"

"Does she know that you were paying us to be her friends?"

"No and you won't tell her because we both know you enjoy being alive. I'll send you that money and then you forget we ever spoke behind my wife's back" I ended the call.

"So you paid those girls to be her friend?" Asked Thuba looking at me with such judgement in his eyes.

"She was lonely and not making friends" i sent the money before putting my phone back.

"So you bought them?"

"So she could have a life beside being just a wife" it annoyed me that he was judging me. I did what needed to be done at the time.

Chapter 19

"So she is sleeping?" I asked my mother on the line. They were home already and I had given her enough time to settle down before I called.

"Yes. It was raining and cold when we arrived so I begged her to at least stay one night here and tomorrow she can go home" replied my mother sounding tired.

"Sonto is there?" I didn't want her to be sleeping alone.

"Yes. She will sleep with her. I don't know why you care about her sleeping alone when you've been leaving her alone all this time" she snapped and my heart sank because she was right. I did leave her alone several times while meeting with Craig. The problem was that now she was convinced that I was out cheating.

"I'm sorry ma" that was all I could say.

"Nqubeko. This is not how I raised you. You promised to treat her better than this. You promised me and everyone else. God knows what else you've been doing to the poor woman" she sounded so bitter it made me feel even worse.

"I made some mistakes Mah. But I can fix them. All I need is some time. Please" I begged hoping she can try to convince her to stay at least with them. If she was home with my family I stood a chance.

"Fix what? There is nothing to fix Nqubeko. I'm disappointed in you. She is beyond broken. I never thought you of all people would do something like this" I could hear that she was starting to cry.

"I'm going to be a good husband to her. I'll do better. I promise"

"Doing better won't matter Nqubeko. You ruined a good person. For what? For a woman who has no problem Insulting another woman. I saw the video and I can't imagine the kind of pain she is feeling and then you disappear to go to the same woman leaving her to deal with that pain alone. Is that what you call being a good husband?!!" She yelled

"No"

"You only have yourself to blame Nqubeko. You failed now let her heal and move on with her life" she hung up after that.

She didn't have to tell me about it. I knew damn well it was a huge mess and I wanted to fix it. All I needed from them was to keep her there with them for a while. I tried her phone again and it was off so I tried Sonto.

"Yes" her tone told me she was also pissed.

"Is she still sleeping?"

"Yes but if you keep calling you will wake her up and Mah says she does nothing but cry" she was rubbing it in.

"So you haven't spoken to her since she arrived?"

"No. She went straight to bed when they arrived" she was snappy and I needed to end this call before she started telling me my business.

"Can you make sure she eats and take her medication. Please"

"Sure"

We both went quiet for few seconds before she spoke first.

"Bye Nqubeko" she hung up and I threw the phone on the bed before going to the kitchen. There was nothing I needed specific but this was the part of the house she was always in. The first time she went out with Nombuso she came back and danced in the kitchen. For the first time ever I saw what was missing in my little wife. She needed to experience the outside world away from me and I did that. Vusi and Mzamo said it was cruel but Khethelo

understood why I did what I did. She wasn't making friends on her own and she needed someone to do things with. I did what I felt was right at the time.

I tried again and the phone actually rang before the call was cut off and then it went to voicemail.

"Hey MaKhumalo. How are you feeling? Been trying to call you and I figured you are probably sleeping. Please send me a message when you can talk so we can talk. I miss you and again i'm sorry" I paused for a second and for that moment I really wished she had answered my call. A little bit of hope was what I needed.

"Be okay Thembeke. I was a fool and I hate how you paid the price. I love you" I ended the call after that and placed the phone on the pillow before staring at the ceiling. When the phone vibrated I jumped up hoping she was finally sending me that text but it was Nobuhle calling.

"What do you want?" I asked

"I'm outside. Please open the gate for me" she sounded impatient.

"I don't think so. What do you want?" I didn't move. She was done hiding after this mess she created.

"If you don't open for me i'll start making some noise and have your neighbours call the police. I'm sure they would be interested on wanting to know why I was standing outside your home almost freezing while dressed in a trench coat"

"We will tell them you are insane" my body reacted to the thought of her in a trench coat but I didn't let that destruct me.

"Nqubeko. Open up" she screamed loud enough for me to hear and probably someone else in the neighbours.

I ended the call before getting up and went to the open the gate. She walked back to her car and drove in before I closed the gate again and went back inside. She walked in after a minute and she was really dressed in a trench coat which she began to take off the moment she closed the door.

On a different day I would have jumped her because she was really fine but I was too raw to even move.

"I heard you were looking for me. I saw the missed calls as well"

"The only reason why you are still alive is because if you turn up dead I'll be the first suspect. You are aware of that right?" I asked before turning around to walk to the kitchen.

"I guess so. We both know I love danger" she followed

"But if you have a car accident say in the next five minutes after leaving this house and they do some tests on you and they find something they don't know in your system no one will be a suspect after all you died from drug use and lost control of the car. Drugs and driving doesn't even rhyme"

She didn't have a come back and I opened the fridge before taking out the juice and reached for the glass in the cupboard.

"You wouldn't dare"

"Let see. There is a video of you insulting my wife while looking like you are high. Who will deny that you are into drugs when they see the proof right there?" I poured for us both before pushing the glass towards her.

"Killing me won't help you. She isn't coming back" she replied before she picked up her glass.

"That's where you are wrong. You and I are done. Drink up and leave my house"

"Done? We can't be done Nqubeko" she swallowed a mouthful and I turned before pouring my own juice down the drain.

"Yes we are"

She looked at me and then back at the glass that was now half empty. She rubbed her eyes and held the table for support.

"What did you do?"

"We agreed that you will respect me and my marriage Nobuhle. You had no right to call my wife a witch. She didn't bewitch me. I went and picked

her. How dare you humiliate her like this? If you had gone and exposed me for cheating I wouldn't have cared but you attacked her. She was there for her head. Wanted to have these long braids on her own head and you decide to go and ruin it for her. For what?"

She didn't answer. Not when she was gasping for air and struggling to stand up straight. I folded my arms and looked at her. The attitude was gone, replaced by fear.

"I didn't lie when I said there is a line you are not supposed to cross. And you crossed it"

She opened her mouth and tried to say something but the voice didn't come out.

"I'm off to bed. I'll bury your body in my backyard before sunrise" I walked around her and kept walking when she was whispering something.

I stayed in the bedroom for 10 minutes exactly

before going back to the kitchen. She was still there already starting to look pale and her lips turning blue.

"The way you are going. I might not even need to wait till morning. I think I need to start digging already before you rot all over my kitchen"

"Ple.....aseNquuubbbe....ko. I....won't won't eeeeevvvveeeeeerrr..."

"Of cause you won't. Dead bodies don't speak. They stay dead and buried"

She couldn't even cry and I wanted her to never forget this moment. Ever.

"You spit on other people Nobuhle. You did it because deep inside you are bitter and you couldn't stand to see her happy. So you wanted to humiliate her. Break her heart. You are lucky I didn't find you that night. I was ready to break your neck. And you thought why not hide for few days and turn up in my house half naked. I still want to break your neck but this will do too"

Her eyes closed and few drops of tears exited her

eyes and ended on her cheek. This was the time for me to get the blanket so I left her alone and returned with the blanket just in time when she was starting to drop. She shivered her body breaking out with sweat. I made sure she was covered up before turning the lights off and I went to my own bed.

She looked so beautiful. She was walking up straight and walking towards me. I picked up the pace wanting to reach her quicker but suddenly she stopped walking and the beautiful smile was gone. I called out but she was facing away from me. Someone else was calling her. I tried harder but my voice didn't even reach beyond my own face.

"You failed" someone snapped and I woke up almost falling off the bed.

My head throbbed and my eyes felt like they were full of dust and stones but I still forced myself to go check on Nobuhle just in case she died for real

while I was sleeping. She was still there snoring a bit under the blanket. She was going to live but it was a lesson just in case she tried to double cross me again. I filled a glass with water and placed it on the floor next to her before going back to bed.

The clock said it was after 4 am so I reached for my phone hoping to at least have a text message from her but there was nothing. I tried her number again and this time it rang and her voice came on.

"Hello"

"Thembeke" I was so surprised my heart was slamming painfully against my chest.

"What?"

"I'm glad you answered. Baby, i'm so sorry. I know I've said this before and it's probably starting to annoy you but I can fix this. All i'm asking for is a chance. Another chance MaKhumalo"

She didn't reply and I waited because the call was still on. At least she didn't hang up. Another second ticked by and there was still silence in the other end.

"Thembeke. Please talk to me" I begged and waited. After several seconds I listened carefully and heard her breathing. She was sleeping. She probably answered the phone in her sleep and went back to sleep.

"Baby" I tried again hoping to be wrong. Again I was met by her breathing and then Sonto's snores next to her. I didn't bother continuing to talk because I was going to drain her battery out anyway so I ended the call and closed my eyes to sleep.

"You bursted" cursed Nobuhle when she finally came back to live and found herself alive on the kitchen floor.

"Drink up. It will make you feel better" I pushed the glass of water closer to her. She looked at it and back at me "You are still alive. If I meant to really kill you, you will be dead"

She seemed to think about this before she reached for the glass and drank the water in one go.

"What did you do to me?"

"I wanted to show you that I am capable of silencing you. You keep talking and I'll close your mouth permanently" I turned and washed my hands on the sink before preparing my breakfast. She stayed silent on the floor while I moved around and only stood up when I was done and heading to the dining room.

She followed after still covering herself with the blanket. It was going to take a while before she was back to her old self.

"So I should walk away and never look back?" She asked before she sat down.

"Why did you do it?"

"What exactly are you blaming me for? For the confrontation? I didn't cause the miscarriage"

"Yes. The confrontation. Why did you do that?"
When I looked at her she quickly looked away.

She didn't reply.

"I told you repeatedly that I didn't want you

anywhere near her. You were fine with this Nobuhle. I told you I was marrying her and you told me you didn't want to be married anyway. You were supposed to be matured. But you went and acted like a child. For what?"

Again she didn't reply and it made me even more angry because she had gone and ruined my life for no clear reason.

"For what?!!" I shouted and she jumped a bit

"Maybe I realized I didn't want to be in the shadows anymore. She was busy bouncing around like life was all perfect while it wasn't. I was tired of being a glorified side chick" she replied quickly

"And you couldn't dump me? Why bring my wife into the affair? It was between us. If you were tired why didn't you tell me to get lost and leave her alone?"

"Because I love you. You knew I loved you but you still and went and married her anyway!!"

"So you thought if you attack her I'll suddenly stop loving her and love you instead?"

"You love me Nqubeko. We both know this and for whatever reason you want her too. I was fixing what you couldn't fix. Now she knows I exist and if she comes back we can try to work it out somehow. At least we will all be in the same level. She will know about me like I knew about her" I stared at Nobuhle and for the first time I ever I saw why Khethelo told me she was stupid. Take out the beauty and you are left with a fool.

"No. You have it twisted. I love her and because i'm selfish I just wanted to keep fucking you on the side"

"You keep telling yourself that" replied arrogantly

"Yes. You were a great fuck because Thembeke wasn't experienced and I didn't want to scare her off with my sexual appetite. You on the other hand you were willing and ready whenever. I was so stupid. I should have focused on her lack of experience and spend all my nights teaching her how to fuck like a pornstar"

She didn't say anything and I remembered my food

so I focused on that for a moment. She sat there and watched me. I knew Nobuhle enough to tell if she was thinking about a way to get back at someone. If she was physically strong she would have attacked me already but she knew it wasn't easy so she was going for the emotional target.

"What?" I asked after she kept looking at me and then back to the TV but she wasn't focused on the TV.

"I wondering about something. Have you seen my phone?"

I pointed the table where her things sat waiting for her. She stood up slowly partly because of the muscle pain and also so I could see her naked body as she walked over to the table. I was too pumped up to be horny.

I stood up and took the plate back to the kitchen before coming back to find her still standing there and looking at her phone.

"Don't forget to take your coat and call for transport to avoid driving. We don't want you causing and

accident and drugs taking the blame" I added before taking my own phone. I needed to go meet up with Craig and maybe he had good news for me.

"Already requested a ride. There is something I remembered last night while shivering on the floor thinking i'm dying. Looking at you now I think it does make sense"

"What?"

"Do you remember that night when you suddenly had this bad dream. So bad you were actually talking in your sleep and you woke up and decided you wanted to come home to your wife?"

I nodded but I didn't remember at all. I had so many bad dreams that made me want to see my wife's face and touch her body.

"You were actually saying something in that dream. I don't remember the exact words but you mentioned Thembeke and how sorry you were. Now it makes sense. The story going around in your village. The lion and its cub. Thembeke is the lion and you are whatever animal that killed the lion and

married the cub. Am I wrong Nqubeko? My ride is here" she grinned before picked up her coat and opened the door.

Chapter 20

"I can't take that chance" I told Mluleki as I ran to the car. I couldn't have Nobuhle blackmailing me about this. The story was growing back home. It was only a matter of time before someone connected the wrong dots and ruin everything. I couldn't let Nobuhle even get a chance to dig deeper or whisper this to anyone else.

"So what are you going to do?" He asked sounding like he was eating popcorn. Did he really have to chew while speaking?

"I'll talk to you later" I ended the call and threw the phone on the seat. I couldn't let her do this to me. Not now.

It took me exactly 15 minutes to get to her apartment and I made sure to go up using the back entrance. The security camera was broken and it

was going to take that lazy pig months to fix. The guy was sloppy but every disadvantage of the situation is always an advantage to someone. This time it was mine. I casually walked past the first staircase before pretending to be coming back from a jog. The passage was empty and I went to Nobuhle's door before pushing it open without knocking. She was sitting on the couch with a bottle of wine on the coffee table. She was clearly drinking straight from the bottle.

"Ah. I knew you will come running" she grinned before put down the phone.

"You wanted me to come" I sat down across her "So you won't pour a drink for me?"

"Why should I? You tried to kill me"

"But I didn't. You were out of line and needed some punishment. Its harmless" I smiled at her but Nobuhle wasn't Thembeke. I couldn't fool her with a smile.

"But the cub thing. We both know it's not a harmless rumour" she raised her eyebrows.

"Am I getting a glass or not?" I avoided her question. I could see that her phone was recording the conversation.

"Well. A glass won't do any harm" she stood up and grabbed her phone. The moment she went to the kitchen I pulled my my gun and put the silencer in place before placing it under the cushion. She came back with a glass and made sure to pour the wine for me before holding the glass towards me. I looked at her and she smiled.

"Why don't you taste it first. One sip" I challenged.

"You think I poisoned you? That's more of your style not mine" she rolled her eyes but didn't drink the wine.

"If it's safe then why not drink it yourself? Have a sip"

"You really need to stop being uptight. I'm not a killer" she laughed but I didn't. I was done laughing.

"Then drink it" I pulled out my gun and her eyes went wide.

"Nqubeko"

"I said drink it" I demanded

She raised the glass slowly but she dropped it before it could reach her lips. That was enough confirmation that she was trying to drug me.

We both looked at the broken glass on the floor.

"Its not anything serious. I just wanted to make you feel what I felt. You drugged me Nqubeko. I slept on the floor because of you" she yelled trying to remain calm but her mask was already slipping.

"Sit" I pointed the couch. Her eyes glanced at the door calculating if she could outrun me but we both knew she couldn't. "Sit" I repeated.

She sat down slowly and crossed her legs.

"You want the truth?" I sat on the coffee table to make sure she was there in front of me.

"If you feel I need to know. I mean, I was just bluffing earlier" she faked a laugh.

"Didn't sound like a bluff to me"

She looked at the table and then her eyes went over the opposite couch before she glanced towards the kitchen.

"You forgot your phone in the kitchen"

"Can I go get it? I need to text my sister first" she lied. Nobuhle was a bad liar. She and her sister weren't even talking to each other.

"She can wait. You want the truth?"

She nodded.

"I didn't just wake up and decided to kill Thembeke's parents. In fact I shouldn't say parents because at the time I had no idea who they were and I met them in different places under different circumstances"

"Okay. I know she is 20 years younger than you"

"When Thembeke asked I lied and said the cub was my ex and that it was a lie. Something people twisted together because they didn't know the whole story. They still don't because there is only one person who knows this beside me and I know

he will never sell me out"

"Who?" She asked and I laughed.

"My friend Mluleki" she knew his and I could see the surprise look on her face.

"Then there is me. After you tell me then I'll be in on the secret" she winked and I smiled at her.

"Yeah there is you. Anyway the clean version is that there was a robbery and a pregnant woman got shot and her child saw her. But the truth is, there was a robbery but there was no girl. There was a pregnant woman and then there was me in a wrong place at a wrong time"

"I don't follow"

"Thembeke's mother was shot and killed in front of me. Well she didn't die immediately because I held her hand as she waited for help. She was bleeding but somehow held on because she wanted the baby to be born. She was born on the side of the road after one of the paramedic insisted that they help her give birth instead of rushing to the hospital. She wasn't going to live anyway. She died shortly after

after learning she had given birth to a little girl"

Judging by Nobuhle's face I could tell she didn't believe me. I didn't blame her. Mluleki also had a hard time believing me when I first told him. I continued anyway.

"After that shooting my life changed. I was a good person. Well not a saint but good. I tried to do good mostly. But seeing a woman lose her life like that scarred me. For months I couldn't function well and I was angry. I was struggling to make it in Johannesburg. No one was hiring me and I was pissed that I had seen a woman die right on front of me leaving a new born baby. Fast forward to four years later. Finally I had managed to escape Nqubeko the good guy and I was embracing what I was becoming. I forgot about the child and her dead mother. But life sometimes it just doesn't give you a break you know. It has a way of bringing up these things. First, the family decide to move to a new area. Everyone pack up and we all go. At the time it didn't mean anything until I was back to Johannesburg doing what I was now doing"

"Which was what? Robbing banks?" She asked her tone sharp

"I didn't rob banks. Robbing a bank is not child's play and people die" I replied and she rolled her eyes. I knew she was impatient because she couldn't record this conversation. Nobuhle was calculating. I used to admire her ethics but now it was clear that she was dangerous and stupid, deadly combination.

"So what were you doing?"

"Stealing. We were stealing cars. Not just any cars whenever. We were told which car to steal and where to take it and then get paid. It was really that simple and people didn't die. Well, at first"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning we stole empty cars in parking lots or drive ways. But then we had a competition. Some gang got involved it was war. We had to learn to shoot not just carry guns. If they found you in a car they wanted you killed you and take the car. They were brutal. So brutal you would think they were

trained in a war camp or something" I could still see it. The blood. The body and then having to escape it all.

"Continue" she spoke when I had gone quiet.

"Then one day I stole this car. There were bags in the back seat. Four large bags and I thought it some clothes and I'll dump them along the way. As I was driving out a man jumps the car. This man is injured, bleeding and he is begging to get in. I stopped and he literally got in through the window and told me to drive. He directed me where to drive and I did as told because I also wanted to know what was going on. We reached this abandoned house and he told me to get the bags in the house and set the car on fire. I did as told while he sat there watching me.

When I was done another car came around and took us to another location. The guys wanted to kill me but the man stopped them. I guess he was some sort of a ring leader. They complained but left. Leaving me with him. He pointed three bags in the corner and told me to load them in the car. I refused at first but he made it clear that I didn't have a

choice. I didn't know where my guys were and I was sure they didn't care about me. If someone died it was hardly acknowledged unless you were important to more than one person. So my disappearance didn't mean much to them. I wasn't important to any of them. I was a Natal boy in Johannesburg and they thought they were better than me. So I did as told and he handed me the keys"

"Who was the man?"

"He also handed me this photo. A young girl in a coloured dress with shy eyes. Told me she was his daughter and he wanted me to look for her and make sure she doesn't suffer"

"That would be Thembeke?" I nodded before pulling out my wallet to show her the photo.

"You walk around with it? What if she opened the wallet and saw it. How would you explain having her old photo?" I could tell she was yelling 'stupid' in her head.

"I'm not stupid. I use her recent photo to cover up" I

closed my wallet and put it back.

"So her father asked you to take care of her?"

"Yes. He told me where she lived and who was with her. Then I asked where was her mother. That's when I found out it was the same girl born on the side of the road. Her father shipped her to Ulundi to his family but they sent her to her mothers family. You know how families are. I told the man I was from there too and he told me he knew. Well he was older so it made sense that he knew me and I didn't know him. I asked him why he didn't go back home to his daughter. He laughed and said he doubts he will even make it. My mistake was forcing him to try. She was his daughter and she deserved to see her father even if he was a criminal who robbed banks. I think the idea grew on him because he started talking about her. How much he would like to spend time with her. How she was growing up without them both and how he was trying to make it but it was just so hard. His dream was to start a truck company. Have offices in different provinces. Have his daughter educated and working. Make sure she

never cried and kill anyone who breaks her heart. I told him it was all possible. We called this guy who supplied them with medicine. He patched him up but advised against travelling long distance. We said he was bluffing and left Johannesburg five days after. He said goodbye to his team and they weren't impressed but they had no say. We left and three hours in the trip he started seeing his dead friends. Talking about how he can't go any further. We looked for any health care facility but he stopped breathing before we could get there. So in panic I dropped him on the side of the road and continued home. I really thought he was dead. But he died on his way to the hospital after someone picked him up. The story was on radio but I couldn't confess to anything without going down for murder"

"Oh my God!!!" She stood up but I was quicker so I pushed her down.

"Sit. You wanted the story"

"I need some water. You can't tell me this and deny me some water for the shock" she tried again so I pulled out the gun to show her I meant business.

"I said sit"

"Okay"

"The first I did was to remove the money in the car. Then stripped the car in the middle of the night. Bits by bits so they would think someone was doing it. I never told anyone about the money. Months went by before I approached Mluleki to help me clean it and then I started the company slowly at first until it is what it is now"

"And Thembeke?"

"I forgot about her and moved on with my life"

"With her fathers blood money?"

"With the money he gave to me"

"To take care of her"

"And I'm doing so, am I not?" It annoyed me that she felt the need to ask the obvious. I a me up that I didn't do the right thing early. I didn't need her to add to it.

"You ran away. So why wait till she is a teenager before wanting to do what you were supposed to

do?" She totally ignored my warning face.

"Because I couldn't go to her home and say I was the one who left her father on the side of road thinking he was dead. Admitting that would have landed me the jail and the money gone. They were going to hang me out of bitterness that they couldn't catch him. There was no easy way for me to do anything without exposing the truth"

"So you thought marrying her was a better idea?"

"I didn't just decide to marry her. They decided that when they started negotiating marrying her off to that old man. But before that, I was planning to get married as well. Proposed my ex and she said yes. We planned the wedding but Thembeke's father started appearing in my dreams. First saying nothing until he started asking me why I didn't keep my promise. I tried to cover it up. Lying about my lack of sleep but the truth was, I started fearing seeing him in my dreams because I was living this life with his money and his daughter was there suffering. I befriended her uncles and offered to help with things like groceries but it wasn't going to

last. You can't borrow someone money every month and not have them seeing your real motives or questioning them. It wasn't easy and it got worse when they started talking about marrying her off to a man old enough to be my own father with wives and kids already. So I told my ex that I wanted two wives. Her and Thembeke. She threw a fit and said over her dead body. I said it was rather them both or Thembeke only. She packed up and left. So I married Thembeke instead" I could feel the heavy load in my shoulder get lighter. Mluleki did say talking about it was going to help but I couldn't go fancy things like therapy and not risk jail so I decided to carry my own load.

"So she doesn't know that you knew her father?"

"No. In fact no one will have known if those losers in Johannesburg didn't try to trace me. They finally made it to my home town but of course the narrative of the story was different according to them. They said I killed him and married her. But I didn't. Well, at least not intentionally"

"Wow. I've always known there was something

about you and that girl. But never this "

"Yeah well now you know"

"So you married her to keep your promise of giving her a better life?"

"At first. Now I know for sure that I love her and I want her back and I'll kill everyone who tries to hurt her"

She laughed. A nervous laugh before she jumped up but I grabbed her neck and pushed her back on the couch. When she tried to scream I squeezed harder

"I never wanted to kill you Nobuhle. You pushed me in the corner and I was forced to fight back"

She looked at me with begging eyes and I let go of my grip before she coughed.

"She will never forgive you"

"I'm aware but all this time it's been me trying to make her life easier in some way. She doesn't know the real me. The real me is loving and kind. And the real me wants her"

"How are you planning to do all that?" She held her neck

"That's none of your business" I stood up and walked to the window.

She stood there for a moment before she followed and stood behind me.

"Thank you for telling me the truth" her hand reached for my pants and I didn't stop her. Instead I encouraged while looking for a right angle to let her drop.

"Can you borrow me your phone" I asked and she paused her seduction before she let out a frustrated breath and went to the kitchen. I quickly unlocked the window and waited.

"You are no calling her" she added before she pushed the phone to my hands.

"No. I'm calling the police. You are suicidal and I fear you will jump"

"What....." Before she could finish I gave her a hard shove before she slammed the window and it gave

in allowing her to push past. It happened so fast she didn't even scream.

"I need help. My girlfriend is....Nobuhle!!!!" I yelled before going over to see.

"Hello?" Asked the woman in the other end.

"My girlfriend just jumped over the window. Please help" I faked a cry while muttering 'no no no'

I could see her body laying on the road in a pool of blood.

The woman was still speaking in my ear but I wasn't listening. How could I after witnessing my girlfriend killing herself because I was choosing my wife over her.

Chapter 21

Giving out my statement about Nobuhle's death too longer than I expected and it annoyed me because I needed to act like a grieving boyfriend. The video of her insulting my wife played a big part in proving that she was bitter and unstable. When I mentioned

how I had tried to talk her out of doing anything stupid I could tell that the man bought it. Hours later they let me go and I went home to shave and shower. The story of a woman committing suicide was already trending and it was only a matter of time before they put her face into the story so I called Thembeke first. Her phone rang until it went to voicemail.

"Hey. I hope you are getting better. Nobuhle committed suicide this morning. She was asking me to pick and I said I'm picking you. She didn't take it well and jumped out the window. I didn't want you to see the story on TV or hear it on the news first. I'm sorry MaKhumalo. I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me. Be okay. I love you" I waited for a few seconds before ending the call.

Her absence made me realize how much I had taken her presence for granted. I thought she would always be around. That I would always walk in to a warm house with something cooking in the stove and her handing me everything I needed without having to ask for it. I missed her so much. Even hearing her

voice was going to make me feel a little better.

I tried her again and still got her voicemail.

"I miss you. I'm so sorry for everything. I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me some day. Have a good day MaKhumalo" I ended my message before calling to Craig to confirm that I was coming.

Craig was in his office drowning in the mountain of paper work. He was snappy and everyone around him was walking in eggshells.

"We almost had him" he yelled the moment I sat down.

"You had him. What happened?" I was too pissed off to be hearing this right now. I wanted him out of my business so I can get back my business back in order.

"He got away last night. Slipped past security at the airport. It's mess Q" he barked

"Tell me all the red tape around me is off Craig"

He started scratching his greying beard. I knew the look. The look of failure. The look of disappointment and I knew I didn't need it right now.

"Unfortunately nope. We still think he has someone in your staff. Someone feeding him off and they could still be working together"

"Dammit Craig. I'm trying to run a business here. I can not afford to have these delays. You had a chance!!" I wanted to grab him and shake him a bit. Their incompetence was killing me. It was ruining my business.

"Calm down" he looked alarmed and his eyes fixed on my clinched fist.

"Don't tell me to calm down Craig. You are ruining me" I yanked the papers threw them across the room "I want you and your lazy staff out of my fucken business. You failed. Let him flee. If he comes back I'll kill him myself!!?"

He opened his mouth to speak but stopped himself. His lucky stars told him it was bad idea.

"I'm going home for few days. By the time I get back I want your balls out of my business before I kick you out myself" I warned before grabbing my phone. No one spoke as I left their offices and drove back home to get my bags.

Craig was supposed to catch Danny for his drugs. When I told him to leave him to me he decided to remind me the rules. Danny was a greedy swine who was using my trucks to smuggle drugs into other provinces. His brother and Thato were in on it and Thato went as far as hitting on my wife. I think deep down he wanted to show me that I'm nothing and I can't touch them. What they didn't know was that I was capable of killing and playing dirty. If it wasn't for Craig and his ego, wanting to catch the most wanted lowlife criminal in Durban I would have sorted him out fast. The swine even had some nerve of threatening my wife. Showing me that they could get to Thembeke whenever they wanted. They crossed the line and I wanted to kill him with my bare hands but Craig and his work ethics. Just

thinking about it made me angry. They failed which meant they needed to give up and allow us to take care of Danny.

"So you are going home?" Asked Mluleki on the phone.

"I have to talk to Thembeke face to face. I'm hoping she will allow me to" I replied after opening a can of energy drink so I wouldn't fall asleep behind the wheel. It was late and I was actually exhausted but there was no way I was staying another night in the house alone.

"Should you drive late while angry?" He asked sounding like a concerned brother.

"I'll be fine. I just know that Danny got away" I handed the money to the petrol guy and added a tip. Tipping was Thembeke's thing. She loved tipping people.

"Thank you Sir" said the guy before walking away. I nodded and got in the car.

"So you want me to take care of Danny?" Asked Mluleki sounding like he was more alert now.

"How? He left the country already. But if he dares come back i'll give him the attention he wants "

"Nqubeko. I can find Danny. Even if he turned into a scorpion and his under a rock. I'll find him. Just say so" he laughed. A cool laugh that many had mistaken for kindness. Mluleki was far from kind. He was cold and heartless. He was the type you want in your corner no matter what. It was shame he couldn't fix my marriage.

"Well Craig, is being all professional on me so I say let's wait on him. One wrong move we jump in and fix this "

"You are the boss "

"Yeah. Let me go. I need to get there before midnight" I started the car and he laughed.

"Nqubeko. When you get to Thembeka. Don't forget

to tell her the truth. It will ease the blow when the truth comes out"

"What truth?" For a moment I feared he was talking about her parents.

"Nombuso and Phumelele. Tell her and explain your reasons. She might surprise you"

"You think?"

"Not really sure but if she has to hear this from someone else it will be worse. I say confess. Sharp" he ended the call.

I took a deep breath and continued with my trip. Whatever happened I was going to have to face it.

I finally made it home after midnight due to bad weather. My father used to say the road after ULundi to Dlebe is haunted because of the fog. Its not your normal fog. Its thick, so thick you can't see someone walking towards you until they are right in

your face. For that reason I drove slowly until I finally made it home and they were asleep. I called Nomas onto and she gladly opened up for me before saying she was going back to the main house because she wanted to catch something on TV. I didn't ask much instead I made sure she was inside safe and went in my room before locking the door behind me.

Thembeke was sleeping on her side of the bed. The heater was on and she was wearing her warm pyjama top. I decided to change and wear a long sleeved cotton T-shirt and long pants so I wouldn't have to touch her with my cold body.

She didn't protest as I got under the blanket and pulled her closer to me. A moment passed before she held me tight and moved even closer. My heart jumped because I could now put my arms around her.

I was just settling in when she started making a sound deep in her throat. The sound grew until I could tell she was crying in a dream.

"It's okay. It's okay" I whispered and rubbed her back. She didn't settle instead her cry grew louder until I needed to wake her up.

"Nqubeko" she whispered before pulling away from me.

"It's a bad dream"

She looked at me for a moment her eyes shining with tears and sleep.

"It's after midnight. Get some sleep" I encouraged and for a moment I thought she might protest but she didn't. She laid her head down and her hands grabbed my T-shirt before she closed her eyes again.

I waited for a while before she was back to snoring gentle and her hands closed around my T-shirt. It broke my heart because she was crying about monsters in a dream. She was crying because of me. Whatever the dream was I was the reason behind it.

I woke up alone the next day. At first I thought she was probably in the kitchen because it was after 9 already and her phone was on the bed side. The curious man in me wanted to see if she was talking to Kwanele or not. The password was still the same so I went to check the messages first. She had four messages from him and three from unsaved number asking for a call back because she wasn't answering the calls. I took my phone and dialed the number.

"Hello" answered Phumelele.

"Phumelele. Why are you trying to reach Thembeke? I thought I told Nombuso that the deal is off"

"Sorry" she hang up after that. I tried again and it went to voicemail. Clearly Phumelele wanted this done in a hard way.

I read Kwanele's messages and most of them were normal conversations asking how she was and wishing her well.

I checked her whatsapp and she had no recent

messages beside Kwanele again. This time he was sending her some funny photos and jokes. I blocked the funny man and for pettiness in me I reported his whatsapp as well.

"Let's see if he will enjoy that joke. Ha ha. Nx" I put the phone back before making the bed.

It surprised me to see my father and uncle Josiah talking under the kraal. It was too early for any family drama so I waved and hurried to the kitchen like there was something chasing me.

Sonto was alone.

"Morning" I greeted her and she replied with a nod before she continued to feed her baby. She little princess smiled and raised both hands to me.

"Eat first and we will spend a day together" I negotiated but obviously it wasn't going to work out.

"Where is MaKhumalo?" I asked and Sonto stopped trying to force her daughter to eat because she was now only focused to me.

"She took the first taxi before sunrise"

"First taxi to where?"

"Home. She didn't want to see you so she left" her tone was snappy.

"But....."

"But what? You thought you should drop in and all will be forgotten?" She raised her voice.

"Sonto. Watch the tone" I warned

"Or what? You don't get it. You didn't just hurt her. You hurt me too. You stopped being someone I brag about because you love your wife and treat her well. You've become like all the others. A cheat pig that all women hate. Hit me, apparently you do that too!!" She yelled and the child assumed it was a sign to start screaming too.

"Aybo. Who died" yelled my mother walking.

"I'm sorry" I looked at my sister and felt really bad. I had no idea it was like this. When I tried to take the crying baby she buried her face to her mother while clinging to her shirt. Even someone as young as her didn't want to deal with me.

I decided to leave the kitchen and head back to my room before going to her home.

"Mbonambi" said uncle Josiah stopping me on my tracks.

"Yebo Malume" I replied and went to them.

"We need to solve this before it goes to far" he spoke without even giving me chance to sit on the unoccupied stone that leaned against the kraal.

"Yes. I agree. Things like these shouldn't be ignored and Makoti needs to know that running away doesn't solve any problem" added my father.

It was too early for this and I could tell I was going to say something that I would regret but I hoped to be wrong.

"Meaning?" I asked like a fool.

"We understand that all marriages have problems and those problem need to be solved. She can't run away. If you take another wife now she will be angry while she left you alone" said Uncle Josiah.

"I don't want another wife" I replied while looking at

my father. Was he really thinking this is okay or he was letting Josiah poke his nose where it wasn't needed.

"Then go get her. She needs to be here or we are going to ask for Lobola back and ask her to cleanse this family" pressed Josiah.

"Like you asked Sipho to cleanse your home after he brought more than one child from his mistresses while his wife is staying put in your family?!"

"Nqubeko!!!" Warned my father.

"Thembeke and I will fix this in our own way. I don't need help" I ignored my father.

"You are being ridiculous. She needs to be....."

"With all due respect Josiah. This has nothing to do with you or your family. My wife and I will fix ourselves just fine" I raised my voice to show that I wasn't backing down.

"You are disrespectful!!!" He shouted and raised his stick towards me.

"I dare you"

He seemed to have a second thought about it.

"This is not how I raised you" said my father sounding bitter.

"You raised me to be a man in my own house baba. As a man in my own house the problems in my house are mine to fix. I'll fix them in my own way. I wronged my wife and I have to beg for her forgiveness not force her to come back. Allow me to do this my own way" I tried my best to be polite.

"Okay Ndodana. We hear you" said my father but Josiah was complaining quietly.

"Thank you" I stood up and my phone started ringing. It was Sandile.

"What's up man" I answered already bracing myself for bad news.

"Heads up. Thembeke wants a divorce. She sent me an email asking to meet to discuss it face to face as soon as she is back in Durban. I've been trying to call her but her phone just ring"

I stopped walking and felt like someone just

punched me in the gut.

Chapter 22

I parked the car on the side of the road before calling two boys who were walking to a little path that led towards the Khumalo home. One of them came while the other stood there as if ready to run. Growing up we were all taught to never approach a car or anyone standing near the car. These kids were still taught the same thing.

The little guy kept a distance from me as I greeted him and asked his name and surname. He told me and I politely asked him to call Thembeke for me. He said okay and too off. The second boy followed and I watched them disappear in the house and then coming out after few seconds. Someone else came out probably to check if they were telling the truth. I waved before they went back inside. The boys continued with their journey and I waited.

Thembeke appeared after over 30 minutes of waiting. I waited patiently until she reached me.

"Hi" she greeted without looking up.

"Hi" I stopped myself from reaching to touch her
"how are you feeling?"

This time she looked up and I could see the dark circles under her eyes and the haunting look in her eyes before they filled with tears.

"I'll pay you back your lobola. Just give me few months to save up" that surprised me because I didn't mention anything about wanting the lobola back. As far as she knew I knew nothing about her asking for advice regarding the divorce process.

"Lobola?"

She exhaled loudly and seemed like she was shrinking into a small size.

"Your family will want it back or demand that I come back. My uncles are busy talking about how they have no money to pay it back so I have to do it myself. Just give me few months and i'll make a plan" she wiped tears with her jacket sleeve.

"Can we sit in the car. I don't want you to stand for

too long" I offered. She looked like she might refuse but after a moment she nodded and I walked over to open the door for her before getting inside myself.

"I don't want the lobola back. Tell them I said I don't want it back"

She seemed surprised before she nodded and stared right ahead.

"Beside everything else how are you really feeling?" My eyes landed on her midsection so she knew what I was asking.

"I'm fine" there was no fine in her eyes.

"You need therapy" I suggested

"You think therapy fix everything?" She snapped before she looked at me and then looked out the window again.

"It won't but someone to talk to at least"

"Talking won't give me a home Nqubeko. You took me from my home now I have nowhere to go. Do you know what its like to hear people say you are no longer a member of your family. Will talking make

me belong somewhere!!?" She yelled

I felt like such a fool. Obviously I didn't see the bigger picture right in front of me. Thembeke was now a Mbonambi and her uncles were doing what they grew up seeing. Divorce weren't common in our area. Unlike the city where it was normal to pack up and go back home. Here things were far from that way of living. Here people expected the woman to stay even if she has nothing to stay for. Their option was to leave the village and move to the city and be known as failures because they couldn't stay married.

"I'll talk to them" I offered even though this wasn't how I planned this conversation. I came here to convince her to give me another chance. To allow us to try again. I came to beg but now I was taking a different direction. The pain in her eyes made me want to fix this for her and forget me for a moment.

"And say what? That it's my fault you cheated? That I'm overreacting, that I should have carried the pregnancy to term because women have been having kids long before me and none of them have

almost died due to miscarriage? Will you explain all that to them?" Her tone was mixed the so much pain I bit my own lips and said nothing to make her worse.

"Can I drive?" I asked instead and she shrugged but said nothing. I took that as a yes.

I stopped the car on the side of the road before pushing the seat back. She also leaned back and closed her eyes.

"I came to try and convince you to forgive me. To give me a chance to fix this but now I see i'm being selfish. We can get divorced"

She opened her eyes and looked at me.

"For real? I read on Google that uncontested divorce are quicker. We can have it done in 4 to six weeks"

"I think so too. Well there will be terms and conditions"

The little spark I was seeing in her eyes for a moment vanished quickly.

"Don't panic. I meant terms regarding who gets what and what" I spoke quickly hoping the spark can come back again.

"We got married out of community of property. I think I remember that part clear"

"Yes. I did that to protect you from any financial ties. With the businesses things can be risky. I didn't want to burden you with that risk should anything happen to my finances" the idea came from Sandile before we signed the marriage contract. At the time I thought it was making me greedy but after he explained I understood. Getting a divorce was not something I saw happening to us but it was my fault.

"So you want to give me things even though i'm leaving you?" She seemed surprised. Was I heartless in such a way she thought I would let her walk away with nothing at all.

"I'm heartbroken but not bitter. I would never do that

to you" I replied and I think she smiled a bit before she looked away.

"Thank you" she spoke softly.

"I saw your mother" I spoke after a moment of silence.

She turned her head and looked at me like she didn't fully hear what I was saying. I needed her to show some curiosity about this because I wanted to come clean. If we were walking away from each other we needed to the truth out in the open.

"My mother?" She asked her voice sounding hoarse.

"Yes. The day she died I was there"

"What were you doing there? With her?" She asked her eyes looking curious now.

I continued to tell her the whole story and how heartbroken I was after witnessing that. She listened silently until I was done then she broke down. I sat still while she sobbed and her cries turned into hiccups and then she calmed down after that.

"So that why you married me? Because you saw her die?" There was no accusation in her tone so I figured I might as well just tell her everything.

"No. It was your father who made me want to marry you" I came clean.

"My father?"

"Your father was Bra B. Some called him Bra Bizza. A known robber in Gauteng. He robbed everything and everyone who had something he wanted" I laughed just thinking about the stories that came out about Bra Bizza after his death.

"What does Bizza mean?" She asked sounding like she wasn't sure if to listen more or not.

"His name was Bheki Sibisi. They lived in Danny Dalton before his parents died and the last time I heard there was only a daughter left. She got married at some point"

She seemed to think about something before she looked at me.

"If my father is not a Khumalo that means i'm not a

Khumalo?" She asked and I nodded.

"Your mother was a Khumalo. Your father sent you back to his family and his family sent you to your mothers family because your grandmother was still alive. After her passing you remained with your uncles" as much as it wasn't my place to say all this but I couldn't tell her the truth and leave her hanging.

"So you saw him?"

"Yes. I saw him. Well I stole from him"

Her eyes grew wide and wondered if she never suspected that I was far from sainthood.

"Stole what?"

"The money I used to start my business"

I expected her to get angry and yell at me but nothing came. She remained quiet for a long time before she took a deep breath.

"You married me out of guilt?" She asked before turning her head to look at me.

"Yes. I married you because I heard your uncles were planning to marry you off to that man. I

couldn't let it happen and I couldn't tell them I've seen him before he died. He was still a wanted man and confessing seeing him would have meant me going to jail and being accused of being an accomplice. So I asked to marry you instead. They said okay without much questions because they wanted money much more" I was bitching but I didn't care. She was their child and they shouldn't have told her she wasn't their child anymore. No parent should do such to their kids. My family was angry at me but they weren't telling me to never regard them as family. Her family was wrong and I was setting them up for that.

"And the respect that comes with me being married to your family. I knew that already" she added after a moment.

"I understand if you are angry about this but I thought you deserve the truth" I felt even more lighter after saying this. I wasn't done but it was better than before. The hard part was done.

"So Bra Bizza. How was he like?"

"You've never seen even his photo?"

"No. At home they only talked about my mother. Nothing about him except he died at some point and that's it" she shrugged.

"He gave me this" I took out my wallet and pulled out her photo.

Her hands trembled as she held the photo and then the tears started. This time I reached over and squeezed her hand. She didn't pull away in disgust and my heart jumped a bit.

"He loved you. Made me promise to give you a better life"

"That's why you sent me to school?"

"Yes. That's why I made some bad choices thinking I was making your life easier"

She looked at me with confusion.

"When you weren't making friends at school and you were always at home I approached Nombuso and Phumelele and offered to pay them to be your friends"

She didn't speak for few seconds before she laughed. A weird laugh that turned into an uncontrolled cry.

My own eyes filled with tears but I managed to blink them away.

"So they weren't my real friends?" She asked after a moment before wiping her running nose.

"No. I was paying them to give you some experience because I felt guilty that you had gone from teenage to wife with no experience of having working friends and parties. I'm sorry for ruining your life like this"

"How much were you paying them?"

"It's not important" I replied quietly.

"I think I deserve to know how much i'm worth" she raised her voice.

"R2000 per person"

She laughed a bit before she opened the door and got out. I did the same.

"I thought I was helping"

"Because i'm helpless I can't even make my own friend!!" She yelled.

"Because you seemed to keep to yourself a lot. I didn't want you to feel lonely and have no life beside being my wife"

"You didn't do it so you can cheat with Nobuhle in peace?" That felt like a sharp knife in my chest.

"No. I didn't do it for that"

"You should correct me. You weren't really cheating with Nobuhle. You love her and I was the inconvenient case you had to deal with in your life"

"That's not true. I was cheating with her because I was selfish. I was cheating with her before you even married me" she seemed to think about something and when she looked at me I suddenly remember the lie I told her before.

"Yes I lied. My ex is not the child. You are and when the story of your father's death spread his friends in Johannesburg came looking for me because they thought I had killed him. The stories started coming out when we got married. That I killed him and

married you because we worked together"

"Why did you lie?" She asked and looked at her.

"Because I was afraid you will leave me if you found out the truth"

We both remained quiet. I could tell she was confused and processing this in her own way. I told myself at least I told her myself. I left out leaving her father on the side of the road because it was going to paint me a murderer in her eyes while she was already resenting me.

"So what are you giving me in the divorce agreement?" She asked before she leaned against the car.

"What exactly do you want?"

"A place to stay. I have to go back in Durban. Get a job and try to live my life so a place to stay will be nice"

"A flat or a house?" I asked already thinking about a safe place where she could stay without anyone bothering her.

"A flat will need rent" she pointed out.

"So a house. Somewhere you can create new memories. Anything else you want to add?"

"You have connections. Maybe you can help me get another job. I need to earn a living"

"I understand" She nodded and looked at me.

We both stood side by side silently for a long time. When I looked at her she was looking at me as well.

"Do you forgive me?" I asked unable to remain quiet any longer.

"I forgive you. Thank you for letting me go" she smiled and I smiled back.

Chapter 23

Three months later.

Thembeke.

"I think i found it" I told Nqubeko as I stood on the side of the road and stared at the hills and trees around me.

"I should have came with you" he sounded like he was rushing somewhere.

We were finally divorced and I was no longer his problem but I appreciated his help. He made sure that the divorce was smooth and kept his promise about giving me a house to stay. His ego also made him give me an allowance saying I needed it before starting on a new job. I didn't refuse it because I was facing my reality. I had no job yet and I was leaving the Khumalo home because they were refusing to accept that I was divorced. I was okay with people gossiping about me but when it was those who are supposed to be family its even harder. So I needed all the help I can get in restarting my life. Finding my family was part of the deal.

"I'll be fine. Thank you for the help"

"Its cool. Don't forget the interview next week" he

added.

"I won't. Thanks again. Bye" I ended the call before getting back to the car before it made people start wondering what was going on.

The little path leading towards the direction I was given clearly showed that no car had driven past so I drove carefully until I was parked in the yard.

There were three mud huts side by side. One of them had smoke coming out while the other two were closed.

I took a deep breath before getting out and approached the house.

"Hi" someone inside spoke before I could even knock. The smoke made it impossible for me to see the person but still I went inside and a young girl pushed a brick towards me before putting a towel over it for me to sit.

"Hi" I greeted before sitting down. When sitting, the smoke wasn't so bad and I could make out a woman chopping a cabbage on a tray near the fire.

"Mahlase you are finally home" she spoke before she looked up. Even in a smoke filled house I could see her smile.

I didn't know what to say so I did what I do best and that was to cry. She allowed me to cry for a while before she sent the girl to go call someone named Dabula. The girl got up and left.

The smoke cleared and I could finally see the house. There was a table in the corner. An old two plate stove with one dark pot on it. Three buckets under the table. An empty vegetable rack next to the table. Different lunch boxes were stacked on the table and dishes on the washing basin on top of the bucket under the table.

"How long did it take you to find this place?" She asked after putting the pot on the fire.

"I got lost a bit. Drove past the school twice before

seeing where I should turn" I laughed at my silliness.

"It happens" she went quiet after a moment. The silence was starting to get to me when she finally spoke "My mother used to talk about you before she died. She tried to look for you but the Khumalos said you were married and living in Durban. They didn't give us anything more"

My uncles weren't happy with me wanting to find my family. They only wanted me to fix things with Nqubeko and be a strong woman. It was strange that according to them my strength was me remaining married to someone who cheated and admitted only marrying me because he was feeling guilty. Nqubeko told me the truth. They didn't care about me but only cared about what they could gain with me being a wife there. That motivated me into looking for my real family.

"I'm divorced. I was but not anymore" I replied before biting my thumb. I was nervous now. If they rejected me as well it meant I was going to be all alone.

"But you are still young. Someone else will come along. Do you have kids?" She asked before she stood up and emptied the little bit of cooking oil on the pot before placing it on the fire. Looking at her I could tell she wasn't that old. Two young kids walked in and stared at me for a moment before they went to sit next to her.

"Unfortunately no. I had a miscarriage" I replied before the memory made me cringe repeatedly. I was healing, physically it was the scar left but emotionally and psychologically it was a different story. I couldn't sleep for over three hours without waking up from a nightmare that reminded me of that day. The pain always felt so real even in a dream. To avoid the nightmares I slept just for a bit and wake up only to sleep again for a bit to stop myself from dropping down out of the blue.

"Sorry about that. But you are still young. You can have another kid when you want" she spoke cheerfully and I nodded not wanting to tell her that the miscarriage left me more than just scarred but with a possibility of never having a kid again. It was

something I never fully confirmed but the possibility was there just waiting for the man in a suit to confirm.

"So are they yours?" I pointed the kids.

"One is mine and another is Dabula's. Then the girl is mine" she turned and pointed the first child "This is Awethu. His mother left him and went to Johannesburg when he was only 3 months. This one is Ntethelelo he is mine. They were the same age" she pointed the second child.

"Hello Ntethelelo and Awethu" I greeted them before offering a hand for a handshake.

They both rushed to shake my hand before they went back to sit down. I didn't need to ask to know that their life wasn't really good. The house was old and had so many holes on the roof. This meant the room was like the outside when raining. The windows had some missing glasses which meant it was really cold in the evenings. They had no kraal which meant they had no livestock. But still it was home and I was glad to be there.

Dabula arrived after a while already carrying a coca cola bottle. When he walked in the boys shrieked in excitement and started calling him uncle Dabula before he could even take his hat off. When he finally did sit down and looked at me he smiled.

"Wow. You look like Aunt Ncengi. Doesn't she Philelwa?" He asked the lady and she agreed before she walked out.

"Please rinse the mug Celiwe. She must be thirsty" he told the girl before he stood up from the other brick and offered a handshake.

"Welcome home Sisi" he added still shaking my hand.

"Thank you" I replied before I started crying again.

"Don't cry anymore. You are finally home" he squeezed my shoulder before letting go.

I really wanted to stop crying but I couldn't. I was

crying because they were my family. They were excited to see me and all this time I didn't even know about them.

"Forgive me. Some of the photos are really old" said Philelwa walking back in with a photo album. She handed the album to me and I looked at it.

Dabula moved closer and started pointing out who was who. Most of them were dead but still he pointed them and explained how they all fit the family tree. When we came across my father's photo he took it out and held it to me.

"This is your father"

I took the photo and looked at it. The man starring back at the camera was a stranger but somehow I wasn't angry at him for not seeing me. I wished he was okay wherever he ended up.

The girl handed me the drink and I thanked her before putting the mug down because I didn't want to make a mistake of ruining the photos.

"I totally forgot. I bought some bread on my way over. Let me go get it" I stood up and placed the

album on the brick before walking outside. The boys followed me and I was grateful because I needed them to carry the plastic back to the house. Buying something was Nqubeko's idea saying it wasn't a good idea to arrive empty handed in someone's home. I bought bread, large pocket of Simba different flavors and a bag of oranges and apples. I gave the boys the lighter plastics and carried the rest myself before we went back in the house.

Philelwa cooked and dished up for us her cabbage and pap. I ate like I haven't eaten in a while before Celiwe washed the dishes and then Dabula left saying he needed to see a friend.

"Are you sleeping with us tonight?" Asked Awethu surprising me because they hardly talked and I even thought maybe they were too young just taller.

"Yes i'm staying tonight" I replied before looking at

my phone. It was after 6:30 and I had a message from Nqubeko asking if everything was going well.

"We should go to the room before gets too dark. We don't have a candle" said Ntethelelo probably not wanting to be the only one not saying anything.

"Don't embarrass me. We have a small one left" replied Philelwa quickly sounding like she was really embarrassed.

"Is the store close? We can get more" I asked while looking at the electricity meter on the wall. The lightbulb was there as well. Why did they need candles.

"There is a store but they were out of stock earlier" she replied.

"Doesn't the electricity work?"

"It does. I'll load the numbers tomorrow after receiving the grant money" she replied.

"I can load it now. Give me the meter number and I'll buy it online" I offered already taking out my phone. She seemed to hesitate a bit before she called the

number out for me. I dialed on my phone and bought the token before calling out the numbers to Celiwe. The boys screamed when the light came on and I couldn't help but smile too.

"Thank you" said Philelwa not looking at me.

Having the light encouraged the boys to start playing and Celiwe pulled out her books and began doing homework while Philelwa polished their school shoes saying the next day it was going to be easier to get ready for school. I asked her questions about the area and the neighbours. She told me a lot of things about the place even the people I didn't even know. The family was divided like most families. They were left to take care of themselves and Dabula had passed his Matric with flying colours but he couldn't study further now he worked in a farm and carried the responsibility of being the head of the family. Philelwa also passed her Matric but it wasn't really good marks. Celiwe was her first child and she had her when she was doing grade 10. The boy came after she was done with school and she thought loving someone else after getting over

Celiwe's father. His father was also gone leaving her to take care of the kid alone. She didn't sound bitter though. She sounded like someone who had accepted her life and was making the best of it. The family turned their backs on them soon after her mother had died. They were left alone and relied on each other. While Philelwa raised the kids Dabula was out there working so they could eat and see another day. I admired their strength but I didn't say it out loud just yet instead I smiled and looked at the kids and the sister I never had before.

"Everything is going well. Thank you so much Nqubeko" I sent the text to Nqubeko.

Chapter 24

I woke up in a weird place and it took me a moment to remember that I wasn't in a familiar place. I slept on the thin sponge on the floor after having the springs poke me all over on the mattress Philelwa offered for me. After saying ouch louder than intended she asked what was wrong and I told her

the springs were sharp and ready. She felt bad wanted to give up her sponge to put over the mattress. I refused and moved the kids to the bed before sleeping on the floor. At least them were lighter in weight so it was going to help. After we did that I slept so well with no nightmares.

"Morning" said Celiwe above my head. I rolled over and looked at her. She was dressed in her school uniform looking really good.

"Morning. What time is it?" I asked because Philelwa told me it was dangerous to sleep with the phone under the pillow so we left our phones on the small table above our heads.

She looked at the phone and said it was almost 7. I nodded before getting up. The sun was out but the morning cold was still there. The Nhlazatshe mountain was still covered in fog which meant we needed to enjoy the sun while it lasted. Unlike some places this place hardly had good weather all day. You wake up to blue skies but it could be cold and drizzling before 10 am. I stood outside for a moment before going back inside just in time was

Celiwe was busy folding the blankets.

"I'll do it. You are ready for school" I stopped her.

"I don't mind" she protested sounding so innocent.

"I do mind" I smiled at her before taking over.

When I was done the boys walked in all dressed and their hands in their pockets. They felt great without them having to say it.

"Morning Aunt" they greeted at once like they were trained.

"Morning gentlemen. Ready for school?" I asked still admiring their energy. They were so cute and so innocent it made me want to kiss them but I didn't want them to think I'm weird.

"Mama won't hurry with my backpack" complained Awethu

"I heard that. You broke the zipper" replied Philelwa walking in with two backpacks.

Both kids cheered before they turned their backs to her so she can strap their backpacks on them.

"You slept well?" She asked while smiling at them.

"Very well. Thanks" I replied and continued to fold the blankets.

"Celiwe I asked you to do it" she looked at her accusingly.

"And I stopped her. I'm almost done" I replied and saved Celiwe from her mother's accusing tone.

"No back pains?"

"Nope. I didn't even have bad dreams"

She nodded and said nothing until the boys said they were ready to go. I opened my bag and searched for coins before giving them R2 each and gave Celiwe R5.

"And what do we say?" Asked Philelwa looking at them.

"Thank you Aunt Thembeke" they all said at once.

I nodded and tried not to get all emotional about it. Philelwa argued that it was still early but other kids were already walking up the path that led to school so her argument was rejected.

"Celiwe if i'm not back by the time you get home please don't let them play in their uniform. I'm going to Plaza and be home when I get back. Okay?"

"Okay mama" she replied before looking at me "Will you be here?"

"I'm going to Plaza too. If it's not crowded we will be here" I replied and I could tell they were happy.

We stood outside and watched them go until they disappeared in our view. Dabula's hut was locked outside and Philelwa said he left early on busy days. When standing outside started getting to me I went back inside and swept the floor before going to the kitchen.

"So you get nightmares?" She asked out of the blue

"Yes. Ever since the miscarriage"

"What are you dreaming about?"

I started telling her all my bad dreams. The miscarriage, the pain that I can literary feel even in a dream, Nombuso and Phumelele laughing at me, my uncles yelling at me because I failed to remain

married. I told her everything and by the time I was done we were both crying.

"So all these things happened to you?"

"Yes. I see all of them. Like they are happening over and over again" I wiped the tears

"Have you tried therapy? It seems like these are the things you are reliving in your sleep. For the miscarriage Dabula will need to do something. We will have to go see Uncle Fezela and ask him what needs to be done to acknowledge the child. Plus you still need to be welcomed here properly" she started chewing her lips like she was thinking about something big.

"Welcomed how?"

"Ceremony. Hopefully they paid the damages to your uncles. That would make things easier. We will need to save for the goat though. If they were paid. If not, then we will need to find a way to sort it out. It might take some time but we have to do it" she sounded so matured and I could feel myself just shrinking smaller and smaller.

"I'm not comfortable with talking to someone about this. It makes me feel like a fool" I came clean.

She looked at me clearly surprised.

"My fake friends issue" I explained

"Why?"

"Because I was so stupid. I should have seen it. Nqubeko controlled everything in my life. He even bought me friends!!"

"Why would his actions make you feel stupid?" She asked like she didn't really see how this meant I was a big fool.

"Because I should have seen it"

"Not knowing a secret is not being foolish. This means nothing about you. It's him who needs help not you. Who buys friendship for his wife?"

We looked at each and laughed. Me at her reaction and her at my reaction to hers.

We left home after 8 and arrived in a very crowded Plaza. I managed to talk her out of lining to receive her grant at the store and we withdraw on the ATM. She was convinced she wasn't going to receive it all but she did and i made my own withdrawal before we went to shopping.

"Thembeka!!" Someone called out my name making us both stop pushing the trolley.

It was Sonto and My ex mother in-law.

We greeted them and I introduced Philelwa to them. They were very pleasant. I was divorced but they didn't seem bitter about it.

After making small talk and watching my ex mother in-law being so friendly to Philelwa we said our goodbye and continued with our shopping.

"Are you sure they are related to that weird man you married?" She asked while picking up washing powder.

"Maybe he was adopted" i replied and we laughed.

Shopping took us hours. We even bought new backpacks for the boys. New shoes for Celiwe and underwears for all. When we drove back home the weather was no longer warm and pleasant. It was cold and the fog was completely covering the mountain. I was glad it wasn't raining. I hated driving in the mud worse red mud because the place had red clay all over.

"Dabula is back" said Philelwa as we saw the smoke coming out of the kitchen.

The place wasn't behind. Our home was very behind. Many people had large homes built by bricks and proper roofing. They had jojo tanks, satellite tv, some more than one cars parked outside and proper fence with locking gates. There were those slowly making their way there then us stuck in the bottom but still Dabula and Philelwa didn't show any frustration.

Dabula helped take the things out of the car before he served us tea saying we needed to keep warm.

Philelwa cooked while we sat around the fire and

talked about our growing up. They didn't grow up nice. When their mother went to work in Johannesburg the family didn't treat them well so they became loyal to each other. When she passed away and the family left them they both promised each other to make the home stand and give the kids a life of home over homelessness. I was proud of them but still i wanted him to get a license and get another job that was going to pay him more. If he wanted to get married he needed a better job. Philelwa needed to go back school and improve her matric before she trained for any skill. But i didn't say it out loud just in case i couldn't do it all.

We were still talking and laughing when my phone reminding me that there were people who knew me outside this home. It was Kwanele and the last time we spoke i told him i was getting divorced. He didn't hide his happiness because that meant i was available for him now.

I went outside to speak to him so i wouldn't need my cousins to keep quiet.

"So when are you coming back?" He asked when i

told him i was still at home.

"In a day or two. I have to start work next week"

"Great. I can't wait to see you" he sounded cheerful.

I was also looking forward to seeing him, being at work but i hated leaving this place.

We spoke about few more things before we said our goodbyes and ended the call. I stood against the wall and took a deep breath before i realized i could hear them.

"So she needs some cleansing?" Asked Dabula

"Yes. I think a goat will do. But you have to ask Uncle Fezela" she replied.

"But we can't do a cleansing ceremony before welcoming her first" he added after a moment.

"Which means we need to know if damages were paid. If it goes wrong it could mess up her life"

"I'll go ask him tomorrow. So you think we can save for a goat? I can ask my boss to sell me one with half price" said Dabula.

"We can try. Maybe i'll go ask Madam if she needs extra hands around the house. Grant will have to cover food only" she suggested.

My eyes filled up because they were talking about helping me. As struggling as they were but still they wanted to help me. After blinking the tears away I coughed to announce that i was returning. When i walked in i found my tea next to the fire to keep it warm.

We continued to chat until Philelwa finished cooking and she dished up for us. I did the dishes after and Dabula left leaving us alone.

"I want to pay for my welcome ceremony. I'll save up and cover the costs" i needed to let her know before she went to look for work in a farm.

"We don't even know how much it will cost. You are yet to start working. Plus i'n sure living cost are more in Durban"

"They are but we make it work. I want to contribute more. Dabula is already taking care of the family. We have to share the costs" i argued.

"Let's find out what's needed first and then we will argue about the costs"

"Fair enough" I agreed and laughed.

"I'm glad you came Thembeke" she added after a moment.

"I'm glad I came too" she smiled and her hand reached for mine before we squeezed each other hands.

Chapter 25

"Congratulations on your first day" says someone above my desk. I look up and there is a lady standing there with a huge bunch of red roses. She is reading a card and smiling at me. I should remember her name since she welcomed me with such a warm attitude while others were looking at me like I did something wrong but for now I stick to being friendly.

"Are those mine" I return a smile

"Yes. Someone is in love with you" she hands me

the floors and they smell good. I take the card after and look at it. It's Kwanele. My heart does a double take and I can't help but smile.

"Thanks girl" she has to go away so I can look at the roses and not think I don't deserve them.

Leaving home was hard. I cried until Philelwa threatened to call an ambulance for me. When I finally made it to Durban I called and cried some more after hearing their voices. I missed them a lot. Kwanele was someone I went out with after my interview and for the first time ever I understood what it meant to go out on a date and go back to an empty house.

"Do you like them?" He asks sounding like he is sitting back on the office chair. I imagine him smiling and he still has the dimples in one cheek and I noticed he likes touching the back of his neck when he speaks. I imagine all this and smile to myself like a silly love struck teenager.

"I love them. Thank you"

"You deserve them. So how is it going?"

I think about the question for a moment. Earlier I called home and told Phili how my day was going. She was so excited for me and it made me feel better about having my colleagues look at me like I stole their position.

"It's okay. Few more hours then I'm heading home" I say in a lowered voice just in case someone is listening in and they start saying I did something wrong.

"Early night?"

"Yes" I have so many reasons of wanting an early night. My house is empty. Nqubeko bought me a beautiful house in Dalbridge. It's a three bedroom house with two bathrooms, a garage and a pool. The area is quiet. It's closer to work and closer to the city. I love everything about it but I haven't bought enough furniture because I came back a day before my interview and I was called to start after four days. I did not have enough time for shopping but I bought food and some essentials.

"Okay. Can we go out tomorrow? I know it's not the

weekend but I'm sure you do eat even during the week"

"Yes I do eat" my face heats up. This has never happened to me before. I went from having a crush to being married to someone older and never asked such questions.

His laugh stop the silly thoughts in my head. For a moment I wonder if I've said something inappropriate.

"What?" I ask

"This will sound silly but I used to have this mad crush on you in high school" he confess and I'm almost knocked off the chair by this.

"For real?"

He laughs and start telling me about how he used to watch me but afraid to approach me because I once snapped at some guy and threatened to tell my uncles if he dare touched me again. This is funny because I used to spend all my time day dreaming about those silly meeting at the back of the classes, remaining in school when all the others were gone

because you are busy kissing in empty classes and all that other things the kids did at school.

We speak for few more minutes before saying goodbye. My day just went from weird first day to way better day and I'm feeling these butterflies in my stomach.

The day ends and I leave the offices after the first batch of people have left. I wanted to leave first but it's first day so I have to act like I don't mind adding few more minutes.

The security guard waves at me as I drive out and I wave back. They are nice and I want to remain as friendly as I can be.

I get home after 15 minutes and kicked off my shoes before turning the TV on so it can keep me some company.

Sometimes I do miss my fake friends and stop

myself from calling them because even though I deleted their numbers but you can't delete them from the mind. I miss sharing a bottle of wine and laughing about everything we had seen at work and then laughing because we see how stupid we are. Those memories are now shoved in some cabinet at the back of my head but there is no lock so they keep popping up every now and then.

To stop myself from getting all weak and miserable I call Phili instead.

"Hey Cuz" she sounds cheerful and I hear Celiwe teaching Awethu to spell his name in the background.

"I miss you guys" I sit down and turn down the TV so we can talk like she is sitting across me.

"You are not going to start crying are you?"

"I won't" I lie. I'm totally tearing up already.

"Good. We don't want your new bosses calling the doctors thinking you are insane. We will be here when you visit" she is trying to cheer me up and I have to step out of it before she starts thinking I am

unstable somehow.

"And I'm counting days. What are you guys eating tonight? I want to cook the same for myself" I expect her to laugh but she doesn't.

"Its chakalaka and sausages"

"I have a tin in the cupboard. Let me make some. Kiss the kids for me"

"Kiss yourself for us" she laughs before say our goodbye and I get up to cook.

The meal is all good and I'm eating while watching TV when my phone rings. It's Nqubeko and he is the last person I expect a call from but I answer anyway.

"Hello"

"I hate myself for hurting you.... I really miss you MaKhumalo" He sounds drunk and in a crowded place because I hear music behind him.

"Nqubeko" I ask just to be sure even though it sounds exactly like him. Since when does he drink in the middle of the week.

"I should have loved you better. I mess....."

Someone else is speaking and it sounds like they are trying to get him to end the call. I hear some arguing before the call is dropped and I'm left not sure what just happened. I think about calling him back but Nqubeko is a grown man. If he wants to drink in the middle of the week he is allowed to do so, so I don't call back and continue eating until I'm done.

The phone rings again just as I'm about to get into bed. The screen says it's Kwanele and I settle under the blanket before answering.

"Did I wake you?" He probably thinks he woke me up because I took forever to answer.

"No. I'm in bed already but I wasn't asleep. Are you sleeping?" He did not sound like someone who was in bed.

"No. I'm standing at the door wondering if I should

or shouldn't"

"What do you mean?" I did not get it.

"It's you Thembeka. I can't stop thinking about you. I want to drive there and kiss you goodnight"

More butterflies in my stomach and I laugh nervously.

"That laugh. Damn girl. I need to hear it some more"

"It's late and there is work tomorrow" I whisper for no particular reason.

"I can come back early and change before going to work"

The shy girl in me wants to say no but the divorcée in me is saying what are you going to lose so I go with the adult in me.

"Call me when you are at the gate so I can open up"
I reply

"See you just now" he ends the call and I jump out of bed because I'm wearing a T-shirt not a beautiful nightdress. I'm not sure if it's okay so I change it and wear a nightdress with a matching gown and

brush my teeth before remembering that I brushed them already. What else does a person do in these situation. I'm clueless so I call home hoping Phili won't think I'm crazy and she isn't asleep yet.

She answer in a first ring. I can still hear Awethu in the background. I tell her about Kwanele and she laughs before telling me to relax.

"Do you have condoms?" She asks and immediately my excitement vanishes.

"Condoms? Why?"

"To blow them like balloons. For protection silly. Surely you don't think he just wants to kiss and say goodnight" she makes it sound like it's an obvious thing.

"I don't have condoms" the whole sex thing is making me uncomfortable. How does it work when it's someone you are doing it for the first time with. Do you ask him if he was condoms and if he doesn't do you give him some money and tell him to get them or you say 'Oh well your loss' i'm not even sure if I still want to continue with this.

"Okay. Relax and if he is smart he will bring them. If he is a fool he will come empty handed and you will have to tell him no glove no love. Okay"

"Shouldn't I call him and cancel? It's too soon anyway" I suggest instead

"Too soon for what? You are single and you like the guy and you are alone. Live a little and it's not a marriage proposal. Get your groove on. It's totally okay" she doesn't laugh and it makes me feel better. Nothing says stupid like someone laughing at you.

"Okay. So i'm not being a whore if I have sex with him just months after divorce?" I ask just to be sure.

"You are not. It's okay to be scared and If you don't want to have sex tell him about it. He can't force you"

I take a deep breath and thank her for the talk before saying goodnight promising to send her a text if something goes wrong. She wishes me the best and hang up.

Kwanele arrives after 20 minutes. I open the gate and wait for him at the door before closing it again.

When he gets out of the car I notice he is not carrying anything with him. I'm tempted to tell him straight that we can't do anything without condoms but I stop myself.

"Hey" he greets and wrap his arms around me. I love his smell. It says i'm a man and i'm clean.

"Hey" I reply before wrapping my own hands around him.

"You smell good" he adds as we walk inside the house.

"Thanks. You too" I lock the door and pause for a second not sure what else. I think he sees that because he steps closer and lifts my chin before kissing my lips. The kiss takes my breath away, literary and I have to pull away so I don't faint.

"You taste good too" he adds before he kiss my forehead.

"Thanks" I reply and he looks at me for a moment before taking my hand to his.

"Where are we sleeping?" He whispers before his

hand stays in my neck and his thumb brushing my jaw.

"Through there" I point but don't move. I think he gets it because he is not moving too

"Are you nervous?" Again the voice is a whisper and I think I love it like this.

"Yes. Nqubeko is the only man I've shared a bed with"

I look at him hoping to see a surprise or a hesitation but I see none of that instead I get another kiss. This time it's longer and hotter. His hand pulls me closer and I hold his jacket on each side of his body.

"It's okay. I think I'm nervous too" I laugh at that but he doesn't.

"And I don't have protection" I add and this time he smiles before kissing my lips again.

"I have it" he replies before he reaches behind me and switches the light off. We walk hand and hand to the bedroom and I get another kiss before the gown comes off and his jacket follows before his shirt

shortly follows.

When he is half naked he direct me to bed and I comply before sitting down and him pulling my nightdress up before pulling it over my head. My hands reaches over to cover my lady parts but his hand gentle pushes them away.

"Relax. There is nothing to hide" he doesn't give me a chance before he kisses my lips again.

My phone picks this moment to ring and he reaches over before handing it to me. It's Nqubeko and I think about answering just as Kwanele kiss where my fading scar is. I breath and put the phone aside. I can't talk to Nqubeko. Not right now.

His kiss goes up to my nipples and I let out a sound and the phone rings again. He pause for a bit his eyes telling me to get it but I can't.

"Maybe you should talk to him" he says it out loud.

"We have nothing to talk about" I reply and kiss him. Nqubeko can wait. I never bothered him when he was sleeping with Nobuhle and he lost that privilege now.

He looks at me for a moment before kissing my lips and I kiss him back hard. I want to do this and I'm ready.

Chapter 26

I'm in love. I know it's stupid and I could get hurt but for now I'm in love and happy. I feel the butterflies in my stomach as I open my arms and smell the man next to me. He is still sleeping but his hands are around me and I have mine over his arms and my one leg over his. The feeling is amazing and I want it to last for ever but I know that such only happen in fairy tales.

"Morning" he greets and plants a kiss on my forehead.

"Morning" I reply and kiss his chest instead. I can't risk his getting my morning breath.

"What time do you leave the house?" He asks as he reaches for the phone and turns the screen towards me so I can see what time it is.

"In the next hour" this means I need to get up but I need him to get up first because I'm naked and I don't want him to see me naked.

"So I have time to impress you with some breakfast" he doesn't wait for me to answer and pretend to rub my eyes so I don't have to see his naked body. It was okay during sex but now I'm just not there yet.

"I don't have much. So don't be surprised when you open half empty cupboards "

"It's cool. I'll use what I get. Get ready so you are not late" he pulls his t-shirt on and leaves the bedroom barefooted.

I use this chance to grab my nightdress and slip it on before rushing to the bedroom to brush my teeth first.

He is still in the kitchen when I return and make the bed before showering. It's a good day and I pick an outfit that will match my mood. I pick a yellow dress and use a yellow headband for my braids and pick gold sandals.

"Breakfast is done. Come eat" he calls from the

kitchen and I grab my phone before going to see what he created. The smell is inviting and he is standing there like he is happy with himself.

"This looks good" I get on the chair and pick the fork before stabbing the egg and put it in my mouth. He watches me as I chew and swallow.

"And?" He asks when I don't say anything.

"It's good. Thank you so much"

"Eat up while I shower" he kiss my cheek and go back to the bedroom. I could get used to this.

My phone vibrating tells me someone wants to say something. It's a text from Phili asking how the night went. I'll call her when I'm at work because I don't want Kwanele to hear me gossip with my cousin. There are four more messages saying Nqubeko called me several times the night before and messages from him. I click the first message he is saying he misses me and wants us to try again. The second message begs me to answer. Two more messages beg me to answer and then the last message says I didn't have to do this to him

and he is sorry for everything. I don't understand and I don't care so I put the phone down and focus on eating until another text come through. It's Nqubeko again. I'm annoyed but I open the text and this time he is saying I broke his heart but he understands because he drove me to it. I still don't get it so I ignore him. Hopefully he will find someone to mess with and leave me alone.

I'm few minutes late, not a good impression on the second day but still I hold my head high and head to my desk feeling like everyone can tell I had sex and that it was way too soon. They say you should at least wait 90 days but hey Steve Harvey didn't invent dating and relationships. He was just trying to sell the book. I know I'm trying to comfort myself here and it's working.

"You look good" the girl from yesterday is standing at my desk again. This time she is wearing a name

tag and it says her name is Pretty and she is a front desk lady.

"Thanks" I look at her outfit and it's not something I would wear but she looks good as well so I add "You look good too"

"Thembeke right?" She add hesitantly.

"Yes" I can tell there is something she wants to say but she isn't sure yet.

"You were married to Nqubeko Mbonambi?"

I should have known but still I return a polite smile and nod. She doesn't continue for a moment and I can feel it's about to get really awkward now.

"He cheated on me so we got divorced. I don't know how many he was sleeping with" it's uncalled for but I need her to know that if she wants us to get along then Nqubeko shouldn't be part of our conversations.

She doesn't seem surprise and she doesn't hurry off in embarrassment instead she pulls a chair and sit.

"Then he must really hate himself right now" she

turns to her phone and press several buttons in a hurry before turning the screen towards me "This is my cousin. We went drinking last week. Him and his girlfriend had a fight. Your husband" I give her a knowing look so she can see the error "Sorry, I meant ex. Your ex over hear the argument and stops my cousin from ruining it further by taking some girl home. We were so impressed. Sorry he wasn't that at home"

I nod and smile at her so she doesn't think I have some unfinished business.

The silence start to get to her so she stands up and say she has some work waiting for her. I watch her walk away before getting busy with the real reason why I'm there.

The day goes smooth and unlike yesterday, today I leave the office first and not care that some people are gossiping about me. It's an office so people

gossip and I'm used to that. I once trended on social media so at some point the 'I don't give a damn' girl inside me has to wake up and take over.

The phone rings just as I reach the mall for bread and milk. It's Kwanele. It's a fifth call of the day and I can't get enough of his voice.

"Are you in a crowded place?"

"I'm buying some bread and milk before going home" am I being a whore for wishing he can come over again tonight? I'm not sure but just thinking about him has me all warm and and fuzzy.

"I see. I'm still at work. I think I could be working late. Construction can be like that. Do you have plans tonight?"

"Cook, eat and sleep. That's pretty much it. Beside working late. Do you have any other plans yourself?"

There is silence before I hear someone call his name. It sounds like a woman and that wipes the grin on my face immediately.

"I'll call you back Thembeke" the line goes dead after.

This fills my mind with doubt but I tell myself that not all men are Nqubeko. I shouldn't punish Kwanele for Nqubeko's sins.

The store is empty so I buy everything I need before heading home.

Living alone has some benefits when it comes to cleaning and cooking. What you left there, you find there unmoved and if you clean up after yourself it stays clean. Most of all, when you are too busy to cook you can have bread and sleep. This is me today. As soon as I walk in I kick the shoes off and call my cousin. I never got a chance at work even during lunch because Pretty invited herself into my table and wouldn't stop talking until we had to go back.

"So how did it go?" She doesn't beat around the bush.

"It was good" I'm unable to stop smiling.

"Aybo. Details. I'm sitting outside because I don't

want the innocent ears to hear this. So talk"

"It was really good. So good I was pulling the sheets and saying things I don't normally say. He really knows how to do it" I'm all giggly and excited. The weird ending of the call and the woman on his end is long forgotten.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. You deserve it" she sounds excited as well.

"It was really nice. Even though Nqubeko called me so many times. He even sent me messages saying I broke his heart and other rubbish I didn't understand"

"What does that mean?"

"You will never know with that man Cuz. Whatever it is I'm not interested. He almost ruined my evening with endless calls"

"So he called while you were busy doing it?"

"Yes. Repeatedly. Can you imagine?" If it was someone else they might have changed their minds about me thinking I'm playing some games.

"It doesn't make any sense. So the heart break message came in the morning?" She is asking like she is trying to solve the big mystery.

"Yes"

"Where was your phone while you and Kwanele were busy?"

"I put it aside. Why?"

"Let me hang up and check your call history. Check if you didn't accidentally answer Nqubeko's call. Why would he be saying you broke his heart? Check" she commands and end the call.

She doesn't know Nqubeko at all but still I decide to put her suspicion at ease and check the history.

Right there my phone says I received a call from Nqubeko and it lasted for over 3 minutes.

"And?" She ask when I answer her call.

"I think you could be right"

"Yep. He probably thinks you answered on purpose to hurt him" when she puts it like that I get this image of Nqubeko sitting on the couch listening to

me moan over the phone.

"What do I do?" This is the moment where my mind decides to go blank and the big girl in me is silent.

"Maybe you should call him and apologize. Not for the sex but for the mistake. I think it's decent thing to do. To show that you are not petty"

Phili sounds more clever than me so I take her advise without any doubt. If I let this go without telling him he will think I did it on purpose. I have to say my part and let him decide if he wants to go on thinking I'm lying or whatever.

"I'll call you later Cuz"

She wishes me good luck before hanging up.

I try his phone again but it goes to voicemail so the option is to drive to his workplace and hope he is delayed because I don't want to go to his house. The trip is fast because everyone is heading home

so there is less traffic. The opposite lane is packed and I can see the annoyance in everyone's faces as I fly past. If I don't Nqubeko I'll be stuck there in less than 10 minutes from now.

The security guard is nice and recognize easily before telling me the boss is still inside. I thank my lucky stars and hope I don't see anyone else but him. I'm not up to faking a smile. I doubt the energy stays the same if you divorce the boss even if you and him are in a better place.

I bump to a man as I exit the list. He smiles and nod without saying a word. The office is quiet indicating that most have left. Its heading to six after all.

There is no one in the front desk so I head straight to Nqubeko's office and knock.

"Sure" he replies and I walk in. "Thembeke" he looks surprise and puts something on the desk before getting up.

"Hi" I greet and wonder how exactly do I start the explanation.

"MaKhumalo" he doesn't sound cheerful at all. I

think I see anger in his eyes but he smiles.

"What happened last night last was a mistake. I didn't mean to do that"

"So you didn't mean to let me hear you moan his name?" The smile is gone and I recognize the angry Nqubeko. When he moves I step back.

"I was ignoring you. I think I might have touched the phone by mistake and the call got connected. I wasn't aware. I'm not that person at all" another part of me says I shouldn't have come and I owe him no explanation. Too late now. I'm here and he is standing in front of me.

"You didn't do it so I can know that you were right about finding someone else?" I remember saying these words in anger but it was just anger talking that day.

"No. It wasn't at all"

"So was he really that good?" The question is unexpected and I'm tempted to say far better but I don't see humour in his eyes so I decide to let it pass.

"Did he take you from behind with a pillow below you stomach because that's when you....."

"Please don't do this Nqubeko"

"Why not? You and I fucked baby girl. You cried my name so many times. He knows and that stunt you pulled doesn't bother me much. I was angry this morning but now seeing you here gives me hope that you are coming back home. I will wait
MaKhumalo"

I step back and push the door wider before looking at him again.

"I came to apologize for that. Because I thought you didn't deserve it. Nothing else. Have a good evening" I walk away feeling so stupid for having to come all the way just for Nqubeko to act like this.

"Let me walk you out" his voice sound like he is speaking directly to my ear. I'm walking like a mad woman and he doesn't seem bothered. I want to break into a run but that will make me feel even worse.

"I hope you guys used a condom. We don't want

Kwanele J r. He already have a daughter with his wife" he adds before pressing the lift.

I should speak but somehow the words won't come out so I get in and press the ground floor.

Chapter 27

"Hello" he answers after the fourth ring. I'm sobbing like a child but somehow I manage to say the words. Asking him if he is really married. He doesn't reply right away which means it's true. That makes me cry even harder. I was hoping he will say something like 'that's crazy. I'm not married' but there is silence. Silence is never a good answer.

"Are you home?"

"J ust tell me the truth Kwanele. Am I a side chick?" I yell and almost throw the phone out of the window but I stop myself. It's my phone and my cousins might try to reach me so I need this phone.

"You are not a side chick. Tell me where you are so I can come get you. I don't like hearing you cry like

this"

I look around and it's less than a minute away from Nqubeko's offices. When I left his office I was crying so hard so I drove for few seconds before stopping. I'm still there and crying hasn't stopped.

"Thembeke. Tell me where you are" he yells.

I tell him before hanging up. I could call my cousin and tell her but the way I am crying, she might really start thinking there is something seriously wrong with me. No grown woman cries like I do.

Sitting start feeling to much so I decide to get out for some air and hope it will calm me down.

"Bitch don't move" someone grabs my braid and bang my face hard on the car. I'm confuse and I think about asking what's going on but things happen fast. Another blow follows before i'm being pushed down and shoved back inside.

"Drive ndonda" the man yells still grabbing my braids and I think the hair has come off because my scalp burns along with my face.

"Please don't...." I start to speak but my nose is bleeding and my lip is bursted. The man push me down and hit my head twice with something hard. My mind tells me it's a gun. I'm dying today.

"Easy on the lady Gee" someone speaks and the other laugh.

"Don't start. J ust drive" the man yells. He sounds so young. My head tells me to reason with them. They can take the car and the money but they need to leave me alive. I can't die yet. I have a family.

The grip on my head is gone and I raise my head but immediately something is covering my head and I can't breath. I try to pull it off but the hand is pressing tight at the back of my neck suffocating and strangling me at the same time.

My feet keep kicking and my hand clawing the hand on my neck. I can't die like this, not yet.

The grip is suddenly loose and I realize that i'm being lifted up but not for long before I go forward and hit something. I think a bone just snapped but i'm trying to pull my head out. I can't breath. My

lungs can't take this. My head gets free and I hear the noise but I can't see. My face is swollen and my ears keep ringing in between the noise and the ringing sound.

"Thembeka" I hear Nqubeko

I can't speak. I'm gasping for air taking as much as I can but my neck feels like its going to close up.

"Please move" someone commands before I feel hands on me. I'm too tired so I allow the sleep the take over.

I wake up gasping for air and someone remove my hand when I try to remove something on my face.

"I can't breath" I force the words out even though my head hurts.

"You are safe now. Calm down baby" whisper someone I can see. When I try to open my eyes they hurt so much so I close them and try to focus on

breathing.

"Breath. You are okay" repeats the person before they hold my hand. I'm alive. I try to think about what happened but I slip back into sleep before I could remember much.

I keep waking up and sleeping until I start to be aware of my surrounding. My eyes slowly comply until I can open them. The first face I see is Nqubeko. He is staring at me but not blinking.

"Baby" someone speaks and it makes Nqubeko blink before his gaze settle on me. I turn to my side and it's Kwanele. He leans closer and kiss my cheek.

"You are awake" says Nqubeko before he kiss my hand.

My lips are dry and I feel they will bleed if I start talking. I know i'm at the hospital but I don't understand why they are both here.

"This is the part where you get the nurse or a doctor" says Nqubeko without looking at Kwanele. I

think Kwanele wants to protest but he walks off after a second.

"You scared me. Never do that again MaKhumalo" he kiss my hand again before kissing my forehead. I can't feel the kiss because I think i'm wearing a bandage on my forehead.

"Ah. You are finally awake" says the doctor walking in with Kwanele behind him.

"Am I going to be okay?" I whisper because my throat hurts.

"Yes you will be okay. But we have to run some tests to make sure we didn't miss anything. You hurt your head pretty hard but for now you are doing good" he start checking my eyes and ask me questions about myself as well as about my body. Everything seems to be working but my wrist is broken. The nose is hurt but the doctor says it won't need some fixing with plastic surgery. He says it will heal even though I probably don't think so.

The checks last for a while before he leaves saying a nurse will come see me in a moment. Both man

are back on my side as if it's a competition.

"Do you remember anything about the hijacking?"
Asks Kwanele rubbing my broken hand with his thumb.

"We don't even know if it's the hijacking" barks
Nqubeko looking at Kwanele.

"Unless you know something we don't know but the police are convinced that it is" replied Kwanele returning a pissed look at Nqubeko.

"What are you implying?" Asks Nqubeko looking like he might grab Kwanele's neck.

"I don't know. You are the one obsessed with your ex wife. You even stalked me because you are twisted" this makes me look at Nqubeko. I remember him telling me that Kwanele is married.

"Don't fool yourself. You are not important"

"And you are? You are sick Mbonambi. She doesn't want you anymore" he yells and I see a fight break out if I don't stop them.

"Please. Don't do this right now" I cut in and both of

them turn to look at me like they forgot I was even there.

"He is childish" says Nqubeko first.

"Maybe I just want to talk to my girlfriend alone. Without her annoying ex" replies Kwanele.

The nurse walks in and I tell her I'm thirsty. She looks at both man before telling them visiting time is over. I'm grateful because I can't deal with them right now.

It's a second day here and Kwanele is here. He says he is happy to be here alone with me instead of Nqubeko. I nod and close my eyes. There is so much i want to ask him but at the moment i can't open my mouth and say something. Part of me wants to speak but i don't want to cry yet.

It stays quite for a moment before he starts telling me about the police investigation. It was a hijacking

and those men have hijacked over 30 people in different cities. They killed 8 of them and I should consider myself lucky for surviving. I do and maybe I'll celebrate when I leave the hospital but for now i'm not feeling lucky.

"Thembeke" he calls my name and I turn my head to look at him.

"You have a wife?" I ask straight out before he start telling me lies.

"It's not what it seems like. Noluthando and I don't even live like a married couple. She has her own life and I have mine"

"Meaning?" I ask still looking at him

"She does her own thing and I do mine. We've been over for a while now" I want to laugh at this but I can't.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was afraid. That it will chase you away. That you will change your mind. I'm sorry. I should have" he sounds so sincere right now. If I was never married

before maybe I would believe this but I've been Noluthando before and it left me heartbroken.

"I don't think I want to date you anymore" there is no doubt in my words but I can see the surprise on his own face. He opens his mouth to speak but stop when the door opens and Nqubeko walks in.

"J esus Christ!! Can't you leave us alone?" Yells Kwanele looking at Nqubeko.

"I know I have the charm and all but J esus Christ is way above my league" reply Nqubeko before he walks over and kiss my cheek.

"Do you mind? We are in the middle of something here"

"Continue and act like i'm not here" replies Nqubeko

"We will talk later Thembeke" says Kwanele looking at me with pleading eyes.

"Yeah and while at it tell her how you answered my call so I can hear you have sex with my wife" says Nqubeko

"Ex wife. You are divorced for heavens sake!!" yells

Kwanele

I'm surprised that he doesn't deny it. He seems more angry at Nqubeko instead of denying this. Only a sick person would do such on another person.

"Is it true?" I ask

"Thembeke. I can explain. Could you leave us alone?" He seems so focused on getting rid of Nqubeko it annoys me because I should be the one he is focusing on. He lied to me and betrayed me.

"You are married and have a daughter. Thembeke hates liars. That's how I lost her. I lied. Just get lost buddy" says Nqubeko

I wish he could shut up as well. I'm angry at Kwanele right now and he is not helping at all.

"I need both of you to leave"

"Thembeke please. She doesn't matter. We've been over for a while now. Don't do this to us" he begs and it makes me even more angry. How can His wife not matter?

Nqubeko doesn't argue. He leans over and kiss my cheek before he walks out.

"I'm not a home wrecker Kwanele. Go home to your family. Don't call me again" I say the words before closing my eyes. I need him to leave so I can cry peacefully.

Chapter 28

I'm back home after a week at the hospital. I wish I can say I feel better but I don't. I can't stop crying and each time I think about the way I felt about Kwanele the morning after, my heart aches so bad and the tears just stream down my face. Nqubeko brought me home and left saying he had a meeting. Part of me thinks it's a lie, he is avoiding seeing me cry like this. My car is gone. They said when those guys lost control they hit the pole and the car caught fire after I was pulled out. Nqubeko even told me that he was the one who saw that I was being hijacked chased after the car until a taxi driver blocked the car and forced them off the road.

I'm grateful to be alive even though I feel so stupid about Kwanele. I haven't seen him and I'm happy because I don't know what I will say.

My supervisor came to see me at the hospital and brought a card with signatures from my colleagues. I know that half of the signatures come from people who don't even know me face to face but I'm grateful for the support and the fruit basket that came with. The good news is that I can stay home until I am fully recovered and the cast on my hand is gone. I wish I can go home and be with my family. I can't even call them because I have no phone. Someone stole it during the chaos.

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"Thembeke" a knock on the window makes me jump. I've fallen asleep on the couch with the tv and the radio on. I sit up and listen again just in case it's a dream.

"MaKhumalo" comes the knock again. It's Nqubeko. I quickly wipe my eyes and my mouth before

opening the door.

It's still early. The sun is gone but the sky is still orange indicating that the sun hasn't gone down in some places.

"Are you in pain?" He ask when he walks in.

"No" my voice isn't convincing and immediately my eyes fill up with tears.

"I brought you some dinner. I figured you wouldn't be able ti cook" he hands me a plastic not the one that looks like it has food.

"And this?" I look inside and it's a phone. A brand new cellphone.

"I hope you like it" he says and walk to the kitchen.

I turn the radio off, walk to the couch and take the phone out. It's an expensive model and he bought it on contract which means he is going to pay for it.

"I can't accept this "

"Why?"

"Because it's expensive" if we were still married I

wouldn't mind but we are not and I am no longer his problem.

"It's a gift from me. Don't worry about payment" he walks back with a plate and glass.

"I'm no longer your problem Nqubeko"

He looks at me and say nothing before he walks back to the kitchen and return with his own food. It's fried chicken and rolls. I have no appetite but I have pills to take so I place the plate on my lap.

"Thanks" I point the food.

"Not a problem" he start eating his own food and watch Tv.

We eat in silence and it reminds me of the years we were married. We were like this and for a long time I thought this was okay. I was happy but now I'm crying nonstop and my heart is heavy.

"Are you in pain?" He ask as the tear lands on plate.

I can't speak so I shake my head.

"Are you done eating?" His tone sounds annoyed. I'm annoying I know but I can't help it.

I nod and he takes the plate and put it on the coffee table.

"Look at me" his tone is commanding and I look up instantly. He looks like he is going to yell but stop himself. I must look pathetic and annoying.

"You had a crush on Kwanele?" The question is unexpected and I didn't know what to say. Is he going to mock me? I'm stupid I know but now I feel worse.

"You went to the same school so I know you didn't just meet him. It's an old thing. Am I wrong?"

I shake my head still unable to speak out loud.

"Baby girl these things happen. You can not have a breakdown every time some fuck boy takes a chance" his tone sounds different, gentle and it makes me cry even harder. Maybe if he is yelling it wouldn't feel so bad.

"Hey. Don't do this. Come on" he move and sit next to me "It hurts. You feel betrayed and you hate yourself. It's okay. You are new at this and you are learning. Don't be so hard on yourself"

"I feel so used" I whisper

"And it sucks but think of it like this, you got your orgasm and that's all that matters. Some don't even reach that point in these things"

I laugh just picturing a no orgasm sex. Phumelele once told me her first boyfriend used to suck in bed. Even as a virgin she knew it wasn't done right. They did it a couple of times before she had enough courage to leave him.

"There. A little laugh" he smiles

"I feel so stupid" I wipe the tears and pull my legs to my chest before hugging them.

"Why?"

"Because I shouldn't have invited him over. I gave him that power"

He doesn't reply instead he scratch he head multiple time before clearing his throat.

"Lets make a deal"

"About what?"

"You will dry your eyes and treat Kwanele as experience. Dust yourself up baby girl. You are too fine to be crying over a fuck boy. There is so much to see Thembeka. If you go out there and meet people you are going to have to put your sexy big girl panties on and take it as it comes"

"And if I get hurt again?" I wipe my running nose with my sleeve.

"You are going to get hurt. That's part of life Thembeka. Girls your age have dated more than three guys already. They can tell you that a little disappointment never killed anyone. Some have been dumped several times already and they survived. You are going to be fine too"

I nod and close my eyes hoping the tears will finally stop. They don't.

"I blame myself" he speaks after a moment.

"Why?"

"Because if I was a good husband to you, we would still be married and Kwanele wouldn't have happened. I mess up and now look at you. All

heartbroken and crying non stop. I don't want to see this. I hate it" he sounds angry. It's not his fault. It's just me. I was foolish and now I feel like a whore. Who sleeps with a guy they hardly know just because they have a crush on them?

"I'm stupid too. I should have waited. Got to know him just a bit. If I waited I wouldn't have slept with him now look. I feel like a whore"

"What!!?" He yells making me jump because i'm not expecting it.

"I brought him in my house and slept with him in my own bed. His wife was probably waiting for him at home the whole time" I don't even know him but I can picture a faceless woman kneeling on the side of the bed crying and praying that her husband comes home.

"You are not a whore. Never call yourself that. You were horny and Kwanele was more than willing. Treat it as that. Sex is not wrong unless you don't give consent. You are both adults and knew what were you doing. He is guilty not you. He cheated on

his wife not you" he sounds annoyed and I fear he might start shaking me.

"Like you cheated on me with her" that comes out unexpectedly but somehow I don't regret it. He broke my heart first.

"And I've been feeling like shit since you left me. I regret everything that happened between us. I ruined us baby. And when I was finally cleaning up my act you left. Not a day goes by that I don't think about it"

"You broke my heart Nqubeko"

"I know. I'm sorry baby girl" he sound like he is going to start crying too. I don't want that. I can't see his tears because they will make me feel bad.

"I think I should go to bed now" I put my feet down and slip them into my sleepers. He stands up too and pick up the plates.

"You can warm this up tomorrow. Take your pills" he instruct before disappearing to the kitchen.

I drag my feet to the bedroom and take my pills

before going to the kitchen. I find him washing the plate and glasses.

"Thanks" I take the washed glass and fill it up with water before taking out the pills.

"About your car. It's a total write off. I think you need an upgrade" this makes me look at him. Is he offering me a new car?

"I don't have enough money for a new car. I just started work and now i'm injured maybe they will fire me for being a loser. I can't take a new car"

"You still love the rings" the rings is how I describe Audi cars. They are my favourite.

"You know me" I smile because he laughed the first time I referred to the car as the Rings.

"I'll sort it out and don't argue" he adds before I can even open my mouth.

"Thanks"

We both go quiet and he continues to wipe the counter and wipes the sink until I can tell he is not just wiping the sink. He wants to say something.

"It's dry already"

"I want you to go for counselling" he says quickly and put the dish cloth over the dish rack.

"Why?"

"The crying. No one cries like this Thembeke. Even heartbroken people don't cry like this. I think you need to see someone and the hijacking will bother you for a while. I think you need to get some help dealing with everything"

"So you will never stop seeing me as a helpless person? A child with issues?" I shout unable to stop myself. Who sees a therapist because they are crying. It's crying not suicide attempt.

"You are not helpless. You are not a child but no adult cries like you do. You even cry in yourself MaKhumalo. No adult does that"

"You broke my heart Nqubeko. You and Kwanele broke my heart!!" I yell because clearly he has a problem with his hearing.

"And you lost our baby Thembeke. You lost the

pregnancy and you haven't stopped crying since then!!"

The tears I was so sure they are gone, instantly fill my eyes and I stare at him in shock. How dare he brings it up.

"Leave"

"Why? Because i'm telling you the truth? We lost our baby MaKhumalo. You were heartbroken when Nobuhle attacked you and I failed you when I wasn't there when you needed me the most. It's not just Kwanele. It's all those things. You have anger and we need to get you some help"

"I don't need help. I'm fine. Please leave" I take my pills and go to the bedroom while furiously wiping my eyes.

"I'm not leaving. You will get nightmares being at home after the hijacking. I want to stay and be there for you" I hear him say as I put the pills in the drawer.

"Now you want to be here? You use to leave me in bed Nqubeko. When I needed you the most you

weren't there. Why now?" I march back to the lounge and find him sitting on the couch.

"And I want to make up for it. You need me today and just for today please allow me to be here for you. If you don't wake up screaming in fear I'll leave" he begs.

The stupid tears fall harder on my face and I go back to the bedroom in defeat.

Chapter 29

I wake up alone. Nqubeko is gone and he left a note saying he needed to check something out in his place. The house is too quiet so I turn the radio on and use my one hand to clean around while watching the time. The moment the clock ticks 8 I call my cousin.

"Thembeke" she sounds shocked. I don't blame her. It's been too long and I'm sure she tried to call me before but reached my voicemail.

"Hey. Are you guys okay"

"I'm okay now. Where have you been?" She sounds like she is walking somewhere.

"I was hijacked. Well almost hijacked but Nqubeko was there and saved me. I've been at the hospital for few days" I pray she doesn't ask too many details about the hijacking because I don't have the energy to relive that moment.

"You are okay now?"

"Yeah I'm okay. My nose is black and blue, bandage on head and they shaved the hair and a broken wrist but I'm okay. I'm back home" I try to sound all cheerful but my eyes are filling up with tears.

"I was so worried. I've been calling everyday. I even suggested that Dabula should go to Durban to look for you. But we had no idea where to even begin"

"I lost the phone. Nqubeko bought me another and luckily I could do a sim swap and for the number. I'm fine now. Don't worry" tears start rolling down my cheeks and Nqubeko's words in my head. Maybe I do need some help after all.

"Thank God. I can tell you are crying"

"I was so scared. I thought I was dying. If Nqubeko wasn't there I don't.."

"Stop thinking like that. You are safe now. Is Nqubeko still there?"

"No. He left before I woke up"

"He slept there? Where is Kwanele?" The last time we spoke Kwanele was still a thing. She doesn't know that he is a liar and we are over before we even happened.

"Thembeka" she says after a moment because I've gone quiet.

"You were right about Nqubeko hearing the sex. Kwanele answered the phone on purpose"

"What?"

"Yep. He didn't even deny it when Nqubeko said so. He is married with a daughter Phili. When I asked he said his wife doesn't matter. Who says the wife doesn't matter? I couldn't believe it. So we are over. I hope I never see him again"

"You don't have to. Think of him as bad experience.

You were protected, right?"

"Yes we were"

"Good. Now stop thinking about him and tell him to get lost if he tries to contact you again" she makes it sound so easy. Like I should shut this part and lock it somewhere in my head and move on.

"Why do I feel bad like this? I feel like I did something bad. Something dirty"

"You feel like a whore" she asks and I nod forgetting that she can't see me.

"Thembeke" her tone makes me realize that I nodded.

"Sorry. Yes I feel like a lose woman. Dirty"

"That's okay. We were raised with a belief that a woman can't have sex unless she is married or with a long time boyfriend. It's okay. He was your first after Nqubeko. Don't feel bad" his voice sounds kind and loving and more tears just pour out of my eyes.

"Now stop crying" she adds when I keep on sniffing.

"Thanks Cuz. I miss you guys so much"

"We miss you too. Now stop crying or you will get a headache"

"Okay" I try to laugh but it's a teary laugh.

"Promise me you will be okay"

"Now that I've heard your voice. I'll be okay" she laughs and I can imagine her doing it. It makes me miss them even more.

We talk for a while longer before she says she has to go. Saying goodbye makes me emotional but I don't show it to her.

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The day goes fast and I have nothing much to do beside napping until Nqubeko arrives with lunch. I have no appetite but I don't refuse when he serves me a full cooked meal. Beef, pap, beetroot, butternut, potato salad. It looks like it was dished for a man, the takeaway is full and spilling out.

"Where did you buy this?"

"There is a lady who sells these meals near our offices. We place daily orders and she delivers"

I watch him eat and wonder if I was such a bad cook in such a way that he had to buy someone else's cooking.

"What?" He asks when he sees me staring at him.

"Does she cook better than me?"

"No she doesn't. Your cooking is good"

I nod and eat few more spoons. He also continue eating until he is done and go the kitchen.

"Do you want some tea?" He asks before I hear the kettle being turned on.

"I'd love a cup. With powdered milk" I reply.

He doesn't reply and after a moment he walks in with coffee and my tea,

"Here you go" he puts the cup down on the tray before sitting down with his.

"What did Nobuhle have that I do not have?"

It's a surprising question and he fails to hide the

shock on his face.

"What?"

"Nobuhle. What did she have that I lack?"

"Should we be doing this MaKhumalo?" He sounds annoyed but I don't care. I want the truth.

"I think we should. We are here already so we might as well. So what do I lack?!!"

"Nothing. You lack nothing" it's a lie. The way he says it doesn't sound convincing at all.

"Don't spare my feelings Nqubeko. I'm hurt already so tell me the truth. I cooked, I cleaned, I did the laundry and everything else a woman has to do for a man. So why did you cheat on me?"

He doesn't reply instead he sips his coffee and rub his chin. I'm not backing down.

"I know that you were sleeping with her before we were even married but why continue? I was a good wife to you"

"You were inexperienced for me. Sexually you weren't. I kept Nobuhle around for that" he replies

after a long moment.

I think I should be angry and maybe disgusted but somehow I am not. I'm shocked just a bit but I feel there is more.

"But I gave you the sex every time you wanted it. Everything I know about sex came from you"

"I know"

"So how can I not be experienced enough for you? You broke my virginity Nqubeko. What did you expect me to know?" I raise my voice but he doesn't seem moved at all.

"It's not that"

"Then what?" I put the food aside before I find myself throwing it on his face.

"Could you calm down a bit"

"Why?" I yell louder than before.

"Because we don't want the neighbours to hear us plus I'm here with you so there is no need to yell" he replies in a very calm tone and it irritate me even more.

"Then tell me the truth. I deserve the truth"

"Why now? why today? What brought this on?"

"Because we are both here already talking. So talk I want to know" I demand and surprisingly enough I'm not sobbing.

He doesn't reply so I continue "You say I'm inexperienced but you taught me to be like that. How was I supposed to get the experience?"

"You were supposed to get the experience from me but I feared that I might scare you so I held back. I see my fault there"

"What do you mean by that?" I wish I don't have to dig each and every word out of him. Why can't he just it at once.

"Nobuhle understood my sexual appetite Thembeke. She was always ready and I didn't fear scaring her off because she was open to everything we did"

"In what manner? Did she let you fuck every whole in her body?" I try to block the unpleasant thoughts that are starting to form in my head.

"Not that. Damn do we really have to do this?"

"If you don't want to talk you can leave. I don't have to beg for the truth like I had to do it while we were still married" I snap.

"Okay fine. Nobuhle was daring. She was always horny and she didn't mind where we were. When we had sex in the boardroom you wore the guilty look the whole day Thembeke. Nobuhle didn't mind. Sex with her was always a thrill and fun. Sometimes we took risks and laugh about it. With you, it was different"

"You mean sex with me is boring?"

"I didn't say that. It wasn't boring but it was careful. I needed to be careful not to hurt you because a little discomfort had you all frozen and your eyes full of fear. I'm not saying it's your fault. It's not and I didn't help the situation"

I nod and stand up before taking my now cold tea back to the kitchen.

"You can't get mad Thembeke. I tried to avoid this but you wanted to know" he follows

"I'm not mad" I lie. I'm sad and mad.

"But you are disappointed. I can see it"

"So you think I should be excited that you were sleeping with another woman because I was like a dead chicken in bed. I couldn't do the things she could and I was boring" tears start up and my face heat up. I was doing so well with dry eyes. I wish they could stay away just for a bit.

"I didn't say you were boring. Don't do this please"

"You meant exactly that" I wipe them before they fall.

"I don't. You asked and I'm trying to explain. It's my fault. I should have made sure you were comfortable and introduced this to you. You would have got used to it"

I nod and wash the cup on the sink before staring at it for a moment.

"Thembeke"

"How do you like sex? Beside being always horny and daring. What else is there in your sex?"

He stares at me for a moment before he leans

against the fridge and bury his hands deep in his pockets.

"I like comfort. Someone who is comfortable in their own body turns me on. When you danced on the tables I wished you had done it for me. Let me see the playfulness in you. Wear something sexy and take a photo for me. Come to my office for a quickie if you are feeling horny. Let me touch you under the table and fuck me into exhaustion from now and then. That sort of thing"

"So you are addicted to sex?" I reply in shock.

"I'm not addicted. I enjoy it"

"And you enjoyed it with her than with me" that sounds bitter but I don't care.

"I didn't say that. I enjoyed it with you and I wish I didn't mess up Thembeke. I was just so stupid"

"But she was better"

"Don't say that. I should have seduced you Thembeke. I should have introduced all that to you until you were comfortable. Sex is about exploring

and enjoyment. If I didn't fail you, you wouldn't have been bothered by the table or the office sex. You would have been comfortable and enjoyed it. But I didn't. I failed"

"It doesn't matter now. Thanks for the truth. I think I need a nap" I lie. I want him gone so I can be alone.

"I can stay. I don't mind" he doesn't move.

"Okay fine" I head back to the lounge and pick up my food before returning to the kitchen. I'll eat later for now I just want to be alone and remind myself that Nqubeko can't hurt me anymore because we are divorced.

Chapter 30

"You asked him that?" Exclaim Phili on the other side of the line after I finish telling her what I asked Nqubeko the night before.

"I needed to know" I reply before pulling back the curtain. The sky is clear and it looks like we might be getting a full sunny day today. I want to go

outside and feel some fresh air.

"And now you know. So what?" She sounds like she might burst into laughter. I hope she doesn't because I'm feeling emotional already.

"It hurts. I keep telling myself that it doesn't matter but it hurts" I'm being honest with Phili because she is clever than me and she solves these things so easily.

"Where is he right now?"

"Gone. He left early. I think he was avoiding me because he didn't even say goodnight last night" he had no problem saying it the night before last but last night he didn't. I feel he was angry but he doesn't know how I feel. He might say he takes the blame as well but I feel he is just doing it for me. I pushed him to it because I'm uptight and strange.

"Can I ask you something. You don't have to answer if you don't know or not ready to talk about it" she says in a lowered voice. I can tell she is going to ask me a question I might fail to answer. I hope she doesn't ask me about anything related to sex

because I'm not in any position to talk about that with no anger in my head.

"Ask" cross my legs and fingers. It's a habit. I used to do it a lot growing up because they were always mad about something and demanding answers I wasn't comfortable to give.

"Do you have feelings for Nqubeko? Forget that you are divorced and he broke your heart. Forget all the bad and think. Do you have feelings for him?" I wasn't expecting this one at all. I uncross my legs and fingers before sitting down.

"What is love?" Maybe if she tells me what love feels like then I will know what is and what is not.

"I can't give you a clear picture of what love is because it happen differently for all of us but the simplest example will be how I feel about the kids, you and Dabula. I want only good things for you, I think about you all the time, I pray for you every time I close my eyes, if anything were to happen to any of you I would be heartbroken. As long as you all are okay then I'm okay too. If one of you is not

well like you were hijacked I'm not okay as well. Love is that for me. I want to see you happy, hear your voice all the time and I want all the good things for you. But obviously when it comes to romantic relationship it has to involve sex, kissing, touching and everything else lovers do" As she says all these things I realize that I do all that for them too. I want to see them happy all the time and as the picture form in my head I see Nqubeko there as well. For a long time it was always him in my head. I wanted him to be safe, I wanted him to achieve his goals even though I had no idea what those goals were.

"So, I ask. Doesn't Nqubeko still have that place in your heart?" She speaks when I don't reply.

"He is the only person I know. Beside Kwanele, whom I didn't know at all. My life has revolved around Nqubeko for so long"

"And he is still there. That's the problem. You are divorced but you are living together. He is still part of your life in a big way. I haven't met many divorced people in my life but I doubt them getting along is like you and him" this makes me think

about the house which he gave to me. The car he is promising, the food he buys, the messages he sends asking if I need anything if he is not here. Him spending a night because he thinks I'll be scared to be alone after the hijacking. I did have a bad dreams but they aren't intense like I thought they would be.

"So I should kick him out?" I ask because I am really clueless.

"Not really but Thembeka if you want to have a life without Nqubeko in it you will have to get a life without Nqubeko in it. Make friends, go out, have a life you want and Nqubeko will also go back to his life. That's if you don't have feelings for him. I mean the romantic feelings" she advises

"What if I do?" It's no lie that with him around I feel protected even though I'm not sure why, maybe it's because he has always been there even when I didn't see him.

"Then you and Nqubeko need to sit down and find a way forward. Get help from a third person and get

some therapy. Don't take this a bad way but I do think you might need some help with emotional issues" she sounds unsure and I think she fears that I will be offended. I am offended because nothing says you are 'crazy' like people telling you, you need help with your feelings and thinking.

"Because I'm always crying?" I ask already wiping my eyes.

"Yes. Look Thembeke, getting help doesn't mean you are weak. It means you are strong enough to cry for help" her words are comforting but I'm already tearing.

"Thanks Cuz. I really appreciate this"

"It's nothing. I just want to see you get better Thembeke. You are young, you have a job, you have house and a car. It's not okay that you are not living your life because of the things you've gone through. You need to heal and see what else life can offer. Even if you don't get back with Nqubeko but still you need some love and before you get that you need to be ready to receive it"

"I'll see if I can find someone I can book for some therapy"

"That's good. And do think about what you want regarding Nqubeko. If you don't have any feelings for him then be ready to let him go. It's important that you learn to let go of what you don't need and take what you need"

"I'll do that. I love you"

"I love you more. Don't forget, a step forward is better than standing still. I have to go now. I have to talk to Celiwe's teacher about her netball practice"

"Okay. I'll call you later to hear how it went. Kiss the kids for me" I say before we end the call.

I quickly transfer some money for her so she doesn't have to worry about running low on food and electricity.

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The day goes by well enough. I go shopping for some toiletries and add some spices for the food and then buy some bread before heading back home. The taxi drops me near the gate and I notice three cars parked in my drive way. I don't recognize them except for Nqubeko's which explains the open door and unlocked gate. He has the keys and at some point I have to take them back but for now I carry my things inside using one hand because the other one is still injured.

"Where were you?" Asks Nqubeko meeting me at the door. He loOKs like he wants to shout but doesn't.

"I went to get these. I needed some air" I walk in and to my surprise Pretty is sitting on the couch looking at her phone.

"Hi" I greet her failing to hide my shock. Why is she here?

"Oh hey. Surprise" she smiles before she gets up and hug me. My body is stiff but I awkwardly hug her back.

"Do you ladies need a drink?" Asks Nqubeko disappearing to the kitchen.

"I'm fine thank" she replies before she finish the remaining juice in her glass.

"Nothing for me as well. What are you doing here?" I ask Pretty.

"I came to check on you. To how you are" she is smiling like we re friends already. Her approach is the same as Nombuso and Phumelele. They were all friendly and inviting while it was all an act.

"Why? I already reported to the HR department. I'm on leave and really injured" I reply and she seems surprise by my tone. If its an act then Nqubeko needs to pay her more.

"I didn't say it was a lie. I was just checking on a colleague"

"Well you see I'm fine" I don't add get out but surely she can read between the lines.

"Is there something wrong?" She asks without getting up to indicate she is leaving.

"Thembeke" says Nqubeko behind me. I ignore him and give Pretty a hard stare. I won't be fooled again.

"Why all the friendliness? You don't even know me"

Her face goes from shocked to sadness.

"And I was trying to. I'm sorry to have bothered you" she gets up and pick up her bag.

"Please don't leave. Thembeke that's unnecessary" says Nqubeko his tone sounding pissed of.

"So how much is he paying you?" I ask

"What?" They both say at once

"Don't act all shocked. We both know he bought you to befriend me. You didn't just wake up and decided to befriend me!!" I yell and she jumps.

"Thembeke!!!!" Yells Nqubeko making both of us jump. Pretty looks scared and I even feel sorry for her. She obviously don't know he gets like this.

"I want you both out of my house"

She doesn't reply instead she heads for the door but Nqubeko is faster he blocks her before she can get

out.

"Please wait. It's not what you think Thembeke" he yells and Pretty looks scared.

"So you didn't pay her to come here to pretend to want to be my friend?"

"What?" Asks Pretty

"I didn't. She was here when I arrived and your phone was on voicemail so I opened up and we waited. I swear I didn't do anything" says Nqubeko raising both hands.

"Can someone tell me what's going on or let me leave" yells Pretty

"The last friends I had he was paying them to be my friends. I thought they liked me but I was just a money making scheme to them" I tell her and she looks at Nqubeko with disgust before she turns to me.

"I left work early because it's Friday and I thought I should come here to see you. I'm sorry you think there is some hidden agenda. I was trying to be

nice"

Now I feel bad and it doesn't help that Pretty is looking at me with such pity in her eyes.

"I'm sorry"

"No it's fine. I should go" I can tell she doesn't mean it. I've ruined it and now she is leaving..

"Please don't leave. I didn't mean to do all this. I'm sorry. Please" I beg and cover my face with both hands before sobbing.

"Hey, please don't. Jesus I thought you were weird but you are weirder than I thought" I feel her hands around me and then she laughs "You are strange but he is far ahead. Who does that?"

I look up and she is staring at me with this grin on her face. Nqubeko looks sad and avoids looking at me.

"I thought I was helping" he replies in a low tone before opening the door.

"Okay, this needs popcorn and wine. I doubt you have though. I wish I bought that bottle but juice will

do" she shots her glance to Nqubeko.

"Coming right up" he hurries to the kitchen and Pretty laughs.

"I'm sorry for being so mean"

"It's fine. We will laugh about this once you stop crying. And we need to do something about your toenails. I have a right colour" we both look at my toes in my slippers. I do have ugly toenails but I laugh. She is funny.

"Here is the juice. She does have some snacks in the cupboard" says Nqubeko.

"Please leave me and my friend. We have to talk about you behind your back" she actually shoo him away and he doesn't look bothered. I'm laughing too.

Chapter 31

Nqubeko

"You look like you are carrying the universal

problems" says Mzamo slapping my shoulder as he walks by. He is not wrong, I do feel like I'm carrying a heavy weight in my shoulders.

I look up and notice that Khethelo and Vusi have stopped arguing about whatever they were arguing about instead they are both staring at me.

"What?" I pick up the bottle but don't bring it to my lips. It doesn't reach where I should go instead I feel like the liquid is turning into stones in my stomach.

"Okay. We know Thembeke is fine. You bought her a new car. She let you sleep in her house and she hasn't boiled you yet. So what is a problem now?" Vusi asks before he stands up to grab another beer from the cooler box.

I sit up straight and tell them what happened with Pretty's visit, her outburst and then the crying.

Khethelo whistles before he leaves the room.

Mzamo puts down the beer and looks at me like he might start telling where it all went wrong.

"That's hectic. You destroyed her" says Vusi taking pleasure in rubbing it in.

"Broke her into little pieces" adds Mzamo on some, let's gang up on him vibes. I shoot him a glance before putting down the bottle because I can't continue drinking anymore.

"Side eye never killed anyone" he adds before they laugh. I don't laugh, it's not funny. It's a m

Chapter 32

Nqubeko

"What?" I stop the car and look at her. She is crying and I don't even understand what this mean. I've never slept with her. We hardly talked whenever she was traveling Nobuhle.

"She hired me to carry the child" she sobs

"But how? Who did you sleep with? Why is it my problem?" I shout and she continue sobbing.

"Talk woman" I yell when she doesn't continue to explain.

"She took me to a doctor and they planted it on me. Your sperm" she reply in a small and shaky tone.

I don't get it. We were always using a condom because I didn't want to have a kid with her. I look at the crying woman next to me and reach over before opening the door for her. It's a scam. It's not possible.

"Please get out"

She doesn't seem shocked instead she step out and drop a piece of paper on the seat.

"That's my number. When you are ready to talk. Call" she adds before closing the door.

I watch as she walks to the other side of the road and pulls out her photo. It can't be true. She is taking a chance. I keep telling myself as I drive away.

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It takes me a while to find Khethelo because I'm confused and I don't want to cause an accident so I have to drive carefully. I find Vusi and Khethelo in the hospital parking lot. They are both crying and leaning against the car.

"What happened?" I ask as I half walk and half run to them.

"The truck lost control, hit Mzamo and another taxi" says Vusi his shoulders dropping.

"Did you see him?" maybe they made a mistake. These thing can happen.

Khethelo nods and wipe the tears on his face.

"And it was really him?"

"Yes" replies Vusi.

I move to stand next to them and we stand quietly while staring into the world as it continues to move on without Mzamo.

We stand for a long time until the spell is broken by my phone. It's Thembeke so I answer.

"Where are you?" She sounds calm.

I look up and blink the tears in my eyes before clearing my throat.

"I'm at the hospital. Mzamo was in a car accident. He didn't make it"

"I just heard. Someone posted it on Facebook. I'm sorry Mbonambi" she sounds kind and that makes me feel weak.

"Thanks MaKhumalo" I whisper so she doesn't hear that I'm crying. I don't want to trigger anything for her since she sounds so calm.

We both go quiet for a moment but I can still hear her breathing.

"Can I come over?" I ask even though I've been sleeping in her house every night.

"Yes. I cooked. I...please come" she exhales and end the call.

I go back to staring and think about Mzamo. The way he easily charmed women without doing much. He was always smiling politely and they would smile at him with hope of something more but

Mzamo wouldn't take things further.

"I miss him already" I speak first and Khethelo looks at me but says nothing.

"It's unbelievable" adds Vusi quietly.

"I have to go home" I tell them before I start walking back to my car.

There are other people here. Most of them crying because they also lost a family member. I see a woman being supported by two other woman as they walk back to their car. I can tell she lost a husband. I wonder if they had kids, how old are they, will she be able to take care of them. Their lives will change from now on.

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Thembekeka is sitting on the couch hugging one knee. I can tell she has been crying but she wipes the tears before I can sit down.

"I'm sorry about Mzamo" she smiles and more tears shine in her eyes. At least she is crying about something that I can feel too. I want to cry too because it's just a shock. We were drinking together just this afternoon and now he is gone.

"I cooked. Can I dish up for you?" She gets up.

I follow her to the kitchen and watch her as she moves around. She cooked dumplings and chicken. The smell is mouth watering.

"When did Pretty leave?"

"About two hours ago. She did the dumplings and I cooked them" she smiles and I hope this smile means she made a friend.

"Smells good" I smile back.

She nods and continue dishing up.

"When is your check up?"

"Tomorrow at 3"

"I'll come with you" I offer before opening the drawer for the fork and knife.

"Thanks. And Thanks for the car. I love it"

The car issues is long forgotten. It was meant to be a surprise but her outburst when she found Pretty ruined things.

"I forgot to leave the key. Let me get it" I walk out to get them in my car.

The piece of paper with Fanele's number is still there. I can hear Nobuhle's evil laugh somewhere. Even in death she still manages to ruin my life. It's a scam, a tiny voice says in my head.

I take the key and close the door before calling Sandile.

"Hey man" he heard about Mzamo.

"Hey. You are a lawyer right?"

"The last time I checked" he laughs.

I can't laugh.

"Is it possible for a person to steal a sperm and get pregnant without you being aware?" I ask lowering my voice just in case Thembeke is listening.

"What?"

"A woman came to my house claiming she is carrying my child. Nobuhle hired her to carry the pregnancy" it doesn't make sense even as I explain it.

"Have you met the woman before?"

"I have but I've never slept with her. She says they went to a doctor and the sperm was planted into her. Is that even possible?"

Sandile goes quiet for a moment before I hear pages turn. He is checking something so I wait.

"Where is the woman?" He ask when he is back to talking to me.

"I don't know. I told her to get lost"

"You need to find her. How far is she?" that makes my heart do a double take.

"She said four months. That is proves it's a scam" I start counting on top of my head. Nobuhle has been dead for months already. It should be longer than four month or is it three? I can't be sure.

"Nqubeko" Sandile's voice stops my counting.

"It's a scam"

"You need to find her. Have a DNA test and if it's yours we can find a way to make sure she has an abortion"

He is not making any sense. Why do all this for a pregnancy that's clearly not mine.

"I never slept with her. Nobuhle and I used a condom all the time"

"Come see me tomorrow. We will call Zweli and have him explain how it's done. You need to find that woman Nqubeko. If she has the baby and it's really yours she can sue you for child support" he advise.

I could feel the energy leaves my body so I lean against the car and try to calm down.

"We will find a way to fix this" he adds.

"I'll see you tomorrow" I end the call and stand there for a moment.

"Is everything okay?" Ask Thembeke standing at the

door. She look alarmed and I realize I've been gone for so long for someone who went to get a key.

"I'm fine" I lock the car and walk to her.

She looks at me like she can see the confusion in my head but I smile and take her hand. She doesn't snatch it away instead we both walk back and I lock the door behind me.

The food is on the table and it makes me realize how hungry I am.

"Thanks" I take my plate and she does the same. We both eat quietly.

"I never stopped loving you" I say the words slowly as she turn her head to face me. She pause and stare at me.

"I want us to fix things. I'd like to try again. I promise to do better this time. I'd like us to fix things. Please MaKhumalo. Losing Mzamo sudden just reminded me that life is not guaranteed. It can end so sudden. It's you who own my heart and I'd love to live the rest of my days being a good husband to you. Please" I beg

She doesn't speak. I can see her eyes filling up with tears and her lips tremble.

"I'm sorry" she whispers before she starts walking away. I stand up and grab her hand before she gets away.

"No more running away. Let's fix this my love. Please" I force her to stand still and face me. I love her. I want her. I should have done better and I want to do better. She only has to say yes.

"I can't" she tries to get out of my grip but I won't let her.

"Why not? I know you still love me" her eyes aren't full of hate. Just sadness and I want to fix all that.

"Because being your wife is all I know. I don't want to go back to that. I want to know myself. See what else is there beside cooking and cleaning and matching your socks" she is not wrong. My house is falling apart because she is not there.

"I understand" I let her go but she doesn't walk away.

"I'd like to go on a date, go dancing, come home late all giggling because I'm happy and it's been a good

night. Not always worrying about what if I get caught. Not worrying about disappointing you because I'm a wife and I should behave a certain way. I just found my family and seeing them made realize what I missed out on when growing up. Everyone used to yell me Nqubeko. I wasn't allowed to cry because crying meant letting out the pain inside me. I was forced to keep all the pain inside. Maybe that's why I'm crying non stop. It's all that pain. I want to heal. Experience something else in life. I've been a wife already. I'd like to be a single and dating Thembeke who dresses up for a date and go dancing" it sounds like a plea and I nod. I nod because she is right. I took her when she was just a young girl. Made her my wife and kept her in my house while I was out chasing life. I should have brought her with me.

"I understand" I reply before wrapping my hands around her.

"I'll go for therapy" she whispers and I pull away to see her face just in case she is lying.

"For real?"

"Yes. You, Phili and Pretty can't be telling me the same thing. I'll go and maybe I can stop crying" she smiles but the tears don't stop.

"So can this single guy ask this single lady out on a date the day after tomorrow" I take a chance.

She laughs and look at me. I can date her every night if it means winning her heart.

"I'll check my diary" she replies and we both laugh. Mzamo was right. Getting divorced was a bad idea but her experience matters. We can do this in her own pace.

Chapter 33

Nqubeko

The mood is sour. We just buried Mzamo and I should be having drinks with Vusi and Khethelo but I can't. I'm meeting Sandile about Fanele issue. This is the last place I want to be in right now. I want to be in bed sleeping because I am tired and the day

was hell but I can't.

"Do you need a refill Sir?" Asks the waiter looking at an empty glass in front of me.

"No. A glass of water will please" I reply. I can't be drunk before Sandile gets here. He is running late and now I wish I suggested the office not this bar. I thought in a public place things might be better if he tells me bad news. I can't exactly break the glasses her and break chairs because they are not mine and I have a reputation to uphold. It's strange but it works when dealing with control.

The waiter returns with water and I give him a thank you nod before looking at my watch again.

"I'm here" announce Sandile hurrying over. He looks like he was running.

"I hope you have better news" I say as he pulls out a chair and sit.

"I wish. Did you find her?" He waves at the waiter.

"No. She didn't answer any of my calls and didn't return the call" I stop speaking when the waiter

comes over to take his order.

"Well the bad news is it's totally doable. She could be carrying your child" he lowers his voice even though I picked the corner away from other tables.

"Can't I sue her?" I want to say kill but Sandile is a law man. He might clean up my mess every now and then but he won't appreciate that let alone agreeing to it.

"We need have a DNA test done. And get her to abort" he ignores my suing question which means it's a no.

"Can I be really forced into fatherhood Sandile?" The look in his face says it all.

"You can't be forced into fatherhood Nqubeko but you will be forced to pay child support until the child is 18"

"A child I don't want?" I yell forgetting that we are in public and an outburst from me could start up conversations I don't want.

He doesn't reply as the waiter brings his drink. We

wait until the waiter is gone before going back to our discussion.

"The court has to think of the child first Nqubeko. If she sues you for support they will grant it. But it's not all bad" there is no spark in his eyes when he says this which means he knows it won't work out.

"What?" I ask

"You can sue for custody. Keep the child and your money" yes i'm right. He knows it's a stupid idea.

"Why would I want a child I didn't help make" I don't add that I want to fix things with Thembeke and that won't happen if there is a child on the way.

"Our shot is the abortion. If not then we have to find a way forward. Together" that last word means me and her. I feel sick and pissed off. I should have agree to meet at home or office so I can break something.

"Is it legal?" I'm not clued up on that department but I think there is a rule about not aborting an old pregnancy.

"Only if the mother and the child are at risk" he gives me the look.

"Like if carrying to term can kill her?" I have to be sure about this.

"Yes"

I nod and sip the water. I need something stronger so I look around for the waiter and my eyes land on her. She sees me and says something to three ladies she is with. They all look at us and say something to each other.

"That's her" I tell Sandile as I get up.

"Who?" He asks but I don't answer. I walk to their table and I see them continue to speak as I get closer. She is drinking wine. Is that even allowed?

"Can we talk?" I look at her.

"Hi" one lady greets me and I ignore her. Fanele picks up her glass and sip the wine before she gets up. I step back so she can move closer and away from her group.

"I saw your calls" that's all she says? I've called her

several times already.

"And you never thought about calling me back?"

"I was going to before I sleep" her hand touch her visible stomach. I think she does this for my reaction because she remove her hand when I look away.

"Should you be drinking alcohol?"

"It's harmless. It's a non alcoholic drink. Besides, one glass is fine" she looks like she wants to roll her eyes but stops.

"Why?"

"Why what?" She pulls a chair and sit down. I pull another and sit apposite her.

"Why do this? I know you said Nobuhle asked you to but why didn't you think about telling me first? How did you even do it?" This time she rolls her eyes and sit back on the chair.

"She saved a sperm after you had sex with her and we went to a doctor who planted it. It's really that simple Nqubeko. Well she was planning to be her

eggs but the guy said it was easier with my eggs so you and me are the parents" her tone sounds different from that girl who came to my house. She sounds confident now.

"Why not abort when Nobuhle died?"

"Why? You are the father and i'm the mother. We are both alive" she sounds so foolish right now. The problems with fools is that they never know when to stop. They screw things up as they go along.

"Well I don't want a baby. You keep it to yourself" I stand up and walk back to Sandile without even looking back.

"I hope you didn't say anything regrettable" he warns.

I sit down and say nothing.

"She is coming over" he announces after a moment and the Fanele arrives.

"Hi Sandile" she greets him and Sandile looks surprised. I don't think he expected her to know him "Nobuhle told me that you are Nqubeko's cleaner,

well lawyer to the educated ones "

Sandile looks at me and I look at her.

"Miss....?" Says Sandile sounding polite.

"Fanele. I hope you told him that the child is binding. There is no way around this one" her tone sounds vindictive and I don't get it. She said Nobuhle asked her and she said yes so why be so vindictive about it? Nobuhle is dead so why act like she thought this herself.

"Not if you have an abortion" I remind her.

"Why? I want to have this baby so why would I abort?"

"I think you should go back to your friends" suggest Sandile. She ignores him flat and look at me.

"You see I thought about this. Then I realized that I want to have this baby so i'm keeping him. It's a boy. Your heir"

"Well I don't want him. Like I said. If you keep it, it's your problem alone" I warn her. She doesn't seem to acknowledge the warning.

"But I will still get child support from you. Fine by me"

"So you want to have the whole baby just to make some money off him?" Asks Sandile.

"You are smart after all. Anyway I wanted to tell you that anything you are planning is not going to work. You see, I learnt some tricks from Nobuhle. Like how to protect yourself in such issues. I've taken some insurance" she pulls out her phone and turn the screen towards me. I look at the photo of me and her in Cape Town. She was there with Nobuhle and she took a photo in front of me making sure i'm in the photo as well. I'm not looking at the camera but my face shows clear enough. Nobuhle is walking away from me. I was looking at Nobuhle that's why I didn't see her snap the photo.

"It proves that you know me and if you try anything I'll leak the story to the papers. Tell them you are a deadbeat. If you think you can make me disappear, think again because i've told everyone I trust that i'm carrying your child and if I turn up dead you are the first suspect. Even if it looks like suicide" she

smiles as she finishes her speech.

Sandile looks at me and I say nothing until she walks away.

"Wow" he speaks

"Let's go" I get up and pull my wallet before waving the waiter over. Sandile doesn't protest. He finishes his drink and we both leave the place.

"What are you thinking?" He asks as we stand in front of the restaurant. We are going to separate ways and he doesn't want to walk away to leave me here.

"Nothing. I need to go home and rest" I lie while pulling out my phone and snapping two shots of Fanele and her friends.

"Don't do anything stupid Nqubeko" he warns. I nod and offer a handshake.

"I'll call you tomorrow" I add before walking away. He also does the same.

I get inside the car before calling Mluleki. If Fanele thinks she can blackmail me so easily then she

watches too many movies and series. I'll show her what I do with people who don't want to stay in their lanes.

Chapter 34

Nqubeko

"Did you find it" I ask Mluleki the moment he answers the phone. I've given him since last night to find anything he can find use against Fanele. I'm holding my breath that he finds something. Anything would do right now.

"Hello to you too" he thinks I have time for jokes.

"Not now Mlu. What did you find?" I try to sound calm so he doesn't continue teasing.

"Forget me. Are you ready for your date?"

"I'm wrapping up here and then go change" I check the time and I have more than two hours to get ready.

"You need to shave, wear a shirt, formal pants and a jacket Nqubeko. Do you think you have time to sort all that out and not be late?"

"What? Stop preaching to me about a date. Focus Mluleki. Fanele is the issue here!!" I yell. Why does Mluleki pick this day to be childish?

"Relax about Fanele. You don't want her to ruin your evening. Do you?"

"She is pregnant Mluleki. The baby is growing each and every day. She is ruining my life!!"

He laughs and I end the call. He will call me back when he wants to get serious.

Something tells me that Fanele wasn't bluffing about having some insurance. If she turns up dead they will connect her to Nobuhle and the pregnancy which might trigger questions I don't want people asking. I got away with silencing Nobuhle but I can't be that lucky again.

The phone rings again, Mluleki is ready to get serious.

"And?" I answer.

"We are following something and as soon as we find something worth something I'll let you know"

"Something like what?" I'm impatient but I can't help it. When people push me into the corner I can't stay put.

"Leave that to me" he sounds serious now. I like this Mluleki because he knows how serious this situation is.

"My fear is that she will tell Thembeke about this and she will never forgive me" I can picture her broken heart face again and I don't want this to get there.

"You need to tell her first" he suggests like it's so easy.

"How? 'turns out Nobuhle's lap dog is a crazy bitch. She is trapping me with a baby' Yeah right" I laugh because he is being stupid right now. There is no way she will believe that I didn't sleep with her. Once you cheat on a woman you remain that. A cheater.

"But if you tell her first you have chance to have her on your side. If Fanele gets to her first she will never believe any word you say"

"In Thembeke's eyes i'm already a cheater Mluleki. She will never believe me" I can't risk it. The truth doesn't always fix things. Not in problems like these anyway.

"Not if you are clueless like her. If she sees that you are also trying find a solution to this she might even join forces but if Fanele gets to her first then it's Bye Bye Cheating Nqubeko and hello to someone else. She is single and available after all" those words sting because he is rubbing it in.

"Is that necessary?"

"You are acting all stiff about this Nqubeko. Any smart person will tell you this. Thembeke deserves the truth from you not her" I can hear annoyance in his voice.

"And if she never wants to see me again?"

"She will be angry for a short while and that anger will directed to her not you. You need her on your

side!!"

There is a gentle knock at the door before Thobile walks in with my dry cleaning.

"Okay fine. I'll tell her" I lie. Mluleki is a smart criminal but i doubt he is all clued up with women issues. He is single and screwing all available women for crying out loud.

"Thanks Thobile" She smiles and walk out.

"You are wearing that blue jacket aren't you?" he asks sounding like he is laughing.

"You are not a stylist" i hiss and close my laptop.

"Thank God for that. Nqubeko you are not going on a date with your wife. You are trying to charm a single woman. Don't forget to impress her. I'm off" he ends the call before i could even digest his words. I'm taking my wife on date. She is single on paper.

**

**

I pack up my laptop and lock the office before asking Thobile to cancel my appointments for the next day. She listens carefully and write all the instructions down. I look at her as she keeps flicking her hair back and smiling like she never gets pissed off.

"Have a good evening Sir" she add before i can walk away.

"You too" i reply before stopping "Are you single?"

The question comes out so wrong two ladies walking past actually stop and stare. Thobile is frozen.

"Sorry. That came out wrong" I grin and the ladies resume their walk.

"I'm not single Sir" her voice is a bit shaky. Am i that scary?

"Good. Lets pretend you are single. Would you go out with me?"

Her eyes grow large.

"I don't mean the actual date. I mean if you were single and i ask you on date, would you?"

She exhale and the smile is back on her face but she looks at me and I see a doubt.

"If you weren't my boss?"

"Yes. Lets say we are two strangers and i ask you out. Would you go?" Why did i let Mluleki get to me like this? I was fine before he started talking about my date.

"Well...eh"

"You wouldn't?" i ask in shock. Why wouldn't she? I have money and i think i'm not too bad to look at. Why is she acting like i'm a hobo?

"Unless you shave and don't look so angry" she replies quickly and drops her pen in the process.

"Shave?" I touch my beard and she is right, i haven't shaved in few days.

"Yes Sir and wear a smile on your face"

"I smile Thobile"

"Not all the time" she looks away when she says this.

"I've been a nightmare lately?"

She is still smiling but she does nod.

"We know that you are going through grief. We understand" she adds and I nod.

"I'm sorry i wasn't aware. I'll try to look less angry" i smile and start walking away.

"I'm sorry Sir, but if you have a date i would suggest you wear something else. Not that jacket"

I stop walking and look at the jacket on my hands.

"Why not?"

"Black works better" she smiles and her cheeks turns reddish.

"Thanks. I'll pick something black. Have a good evening"

**

**

I was doing fine before Mluleki said something about charming Thembeke. Now i'm standing in front of the mirror and trying out different clothes. I've never been in a position where i needed to impress someone. At least not this way. I went for a trimming and combed my short hair because i didn't want to get a hair cut just yet. Now i'm standing in the mirror wondering if I look good enough for my ex wife. The mirror is clueless as i am so I call Vusi hoping he can talk some sense back to my head. I shouldn't be feeling like this over a date with my own wife.

"Hey man" he sounds like he is sleeping.

"Did i wake you?" It's too early for him to be sleeping.

"Yeah but it's cool. What's up?"

I take a deep breath before speaking.

"Thembeke agreed to go out with me. She wants to go on a date and have a good time. I'm taking her

out"

I expect him to laugh but he doesn't. Mzamo's death hit him even harder than we all thought it would.

"That's good"

"Yeah but what if i don't get her back?"

He goes quiet for a moment before he sneezes and cough.

"You are doing this all wrong Nqubeko. Don't go there to get your ex wife back. Just go there because you like the lady and wants to get to know her better. Be presentable but most of all let Thembeka decide if she wants date you again. Only then it's fair"

"Thanks man. Who knew that first date can be this nerve wrecking" I half joke and expect a laugh but there is none.

"Have a good time and don't forget. She is nervous too"

"I won't. Thanks man"

"Sharp" he ends the call and i stare at my phone for

a moment before calling Khethelo. He answers after a while.

"Are you busy?" I don't even greet and he sounds like he is driving.

"I just pulling up in Vusi's place" I hear a door slam.

"Good. I was going to ask you to check on him" i feel relieved that he is doing that already.

"Yeah. He is taking it bad"

"I know. I'll come see him tomorrow"

"That would be great because i have to take my wife to some family thing and then visit the inlaws" i want to laugh at him because he hates his inlaws and they hate him just the same. It's fun to watch but i don't laugh right now.

"Nqubeko, did you ever suspect that Mzamo was bisexual?" The question catches me off guard.

"What?"

"Tomorrow just hang out with Vusi. We don't want to lose both. Have fun with Thembeke"

I'm left shocked. No ways. We would have known.

**

**

I'm early. The waiter shows me the table and ask me if i want a drink. I tell him yes and almost order a whiskery but i can't be drunk yet. I ask for water instead. I picked this restaurant because we once bought some takeaway here and Thembeke loved their food. I hope it's still good.

"There you go Sir" he places the water down and stops. I look at him and he is starring at the door. The restaurant goes quiet and I see other people stare at her. Men with their mouths hanging open and ladies giving them the evil eye. I want to stand up and tell them to fuck off. That she is mine and they shouldn't look at her.

It's Thembeke. She is almost unrecognisable in that tight dress she is wearing. It's short and tight. Her

short legs look longer and her hips wider. I swear she didn't look like this when i last saw her. Her breasts look even bigger than before. She looks around and spot me before she smiles and continue to swing those hips. I want to kick the men opposite our table. They are all staring at her like she is a piece of meat.

"Hi" she greets and i get up to hug and pull a chair for her.

"Wow. You look different" i can't help it. She did not look like this before.

"Pretty did my make up. She is really good" she sits down and smile.

"Yeah she is. Not that you ever needed any" i don't like Pretty anymore.

"Feels nice to be out of the house"

"Would you like a drink?" I ask while looking at her. I knew she was going to look good. She is beautiful but damn i didn't think she will look like this.

"A glass of wine please" she picks up the menu and

look at it. I look at the men again. They are talking about her i can tell.

I wave the waiter over and ask for the wine. He is all smiley with her and I feel like punching him.

"So how was your day?" i start a conversation so she can stop looking around.

"Was good. I went shopping with Pretty. I went to work just to see her and she took me shopping. It's was nice"

"That's good. So the dress was her idea?"

"Yes. I was picking this floral skirt and she said it was a bad idea unless i was going to a party" i can't tell if she is saying this to test me or what. The dress is nice, very sexy and the man inside me wants to rip it to pieces. And when did she start swinging her hips like this?

"Are you not cold?" My eyes land on the chest. The cut is lower then it should be for her breasts.

"No. I'm fine" the smile on her face seems to fade a bit. It's my tone. I've failed to hide it.

"You hate it" she lowers her voice.

"No. I don't" I lie. I hate it.

"I can tell. You've been looking around like you are embarrassed about this"

"I'm not. I'm just shocked that you can look like this. I've never seen you like this before" the waiter is back with her wine and he ask for our order.

I tell him what i want to eat and he writes it down before turning to her. I can see his eyes land on her chest and then his eyes go all dreamy before he smiles.

She orders her food and thank him. He nods and walk away.

"You expected me to wear slippers and jogging pants?"

"Of cause not. I was surprised. That's all" i try to sound all calm about it.

"Because you thought i'll be wearing a long dress looking like your ex wife?" I almost say yes before realizing i'm about to ruin it.

"No. I'm sorry for my reaction Thembeke"

"It's fine. Look, I'd like to have a good time. If you can't see me as not your wife then we can finish this and not waste each other's time" her tone sounds annoyed and I can't have that. Not when she looks like this.

"It came out wrong. I didn't mean to ruin this for us" She nods and sip her wine. I look at the men again. They are still looking and i feel like telling them off.

"So Miss Khumalo, what do you do for fun" i ask

"For now i'm still trying to navigate my way around a new phase in my life so i'm experimenting with this and that. So i can't say an exact thing so far. What about you?" She looks up and there is no silly smile on her face. She looks interested. Maybe she does want to get to know me after all.

"Depends "

"On what?" There is a smile now.

"Who i'm with"

"Really?"

"Yeah" I want to say i enjoy travelling but i use to leave her behind.

"When you are with friends?"

"We drink and tease each other. We enjoy watching sport. When i'm alone I enjoy planning my projects. I'm sort of a workaholic" she laughs when i say this.

"Better a workaholic then an alcoholic"

"I guess so. But as a man i was raised to provide and i can't do that if i don't work hard"

"Very true and everything in this life is expensive. One has no choice but work hard"

"I wouldn't say everything. Some things are free" I force myself not to stare at her cleavage.

"Like what?"

"Love. Love shouldn't cost anything"

"Yeah until they cheat on you and break your heart. Some people don't deserve it" that comes out sharp and what i thought was a flowing conversation turns tense and bitter in blink.

"We love these people with our hearts. Be loyal and everything but then they turn around and smack you right in the face. So i think love should cost. A lot so people wouldn't take it for granted" she adds before drinking her wine again.

Chapter 35

Thembeke

This is definitely not going according to plan. I thought the date was going to be easy. That Nqubeko and I will get on so well and have fun but it's not. I shouldn't have mentioned the cheating but I couldn't help it. It's the way he keeps looking at me. It's like he wants to strip me naked or cover me up. I feel disrespected and I want to go home already.

"Do you want some....." He start to ask but I stop him. We can't let this evening go worse from this.

"No. Thanks" I pick up my bag and search for my wallet. I see the waiter looks at me in shock and Nqubeko also open his mouth to speak.

"I'm paying" he sounds pissed of.

"It's fine. I'll pay for my half" I open my wallet and count the money.

"Don't be ridiculous" he hisses and check the bill "I'll pay" he gets up and pull out his wallet.

"The tip. Thanks for the service" I smile at the guy as he returns a smile as well.

"Here" says Nqubeko shoving the money to the guy's hand.

The waiter looks like he wants to burst into laughter but controls himself. I take my bag and walk out feeling the eyes on me. I shouldn't have listened to Pretty about the dress. I feel so exposed and it's like everyone can tell I feel so strange. It's a bit weird though because I used to wear short outfits while out with my hired friends and I didn't feel like this.

"Thembeke" he calls behind me and I slow down but don't stop. It's a bit cooler now and I didn't bring anything to wear over the dress.

"What?" He catches up with me.

"What was that?" He asks before he stands in front of me so I can't keep going.

"What?" I around and he moves to block me again.

"So you ruined the evening on purpose?"

"Ruin? How did I ruin it when it's was you who was acting so strange?" I yell feeling the anger rise inside me.

"How was I acting so strange?"

"So you treat all your dates like this? Look at them like you are not sure whether to strip them or cover them up!!!!?"

"That's not true" he lowers his voice and looks away.

"I think it is. I doubt you would treat any other woman like this Nqubeko" I start walking again. We look stupid, arguing on the side of the road like this.

"I was caught of guard Thembeke. I didn't expect to see you like this. I've never seen you looking like this before"

"So i'm right. You think I look inappropriate?" I stop and look at him.

"No. You look sexy. Gorgeous" he looks at me up and down.

"But you didn't even think I deserve flowers, a compliment that doesn't imply i'm dress all wrong and some manners" he looks surprised before curses quietly.

"I totally forgot the flowers" he looks around as if he expects a garden to pop up.

"It doesn't matter. You and I failed. We tried and failed. I need to get home" I can see my car already so I start walking again. He follows and we walk quietly until I get there.

"I'm sorry I ruined the night" he holds the door open as I get in.

"It's fine"

He nods and close the door. I start the car and wave as I drive off.

**

**

Living near the city centre has its advantages, It takes me less than 15 minutes to drive back home and I see Nqubeko driving behind me as I open the gate and drive in. He doesn't follow instead he waves and drive past. Of course he wanted to see me home. I can't fault him on that because safety is important.

I kick the shoes off and lock the door before making a call to Pretty. She answers immediately as if she was waiting.

"It was bad. You are back early" that's her first line.

"Worse" I take out the ice cream.

"No ways"

"For real" I search for the spoon and sit on the chair.

"He kept looking at my boobs and between that he was looking at these guys who were also looking at me. I kept thinking he will attack them or something"

"You lie" she laughs.

"I wish. Then I ruined it by mentioning cheating. His face went sour right there" I take a spoonful of the cold treat and my mood doesn't immediately improve.

"Cheating?"

"I said we as women do all these things for men and they reward us by cheating"

Pretty laughs. A hard laugh before I hear something break.

"Are you okay?" I ask

"I just knocked my glass over. You said that?" She is still laughing.

"Yeah. We couldn't recover after that one"

"I can only imagine. So beside that. What else went wrong?" She asks no longer laughing.

"Nothing. I offered to pay and I think I might have offended him a bit by that"

"Ouch. You really went for the kill"

"Meaning? Is it wrong to pay for my own food?" I

don't get it. I had money so why not pay?

"You really need to date other people and see how dating works. You don't pay the bill unless you both agreed to pay half. If he is taking you out then he pays"

"What if it cost more than his budget?"

"In that case you help him out but Nqubeko cannot be over his budget. Yes, some guy doing internship or work in some place that can be the case but not men like Nqubeko. You let them pay" This sounds like a lecture and I can imagine her pointing a finger at me as she says this.

"Okay. I didn't know"

"Now you do. Anyway do feel bad okay. First dates don't always work out"

"I doubt we will have a second one" I add after a moment.

"Why? I thought you were trying to fix you guys"

"It's stupid and a waste of time" I put the spoon down and close the ice cream.

"The whole date my ex is stupid and childish. Sorry girl I didn't want to say it and ruin your evening"

"It's cool. We tried"

"Have some ice cream and call it a night. I'll come see you tomorrow"

"Thanks girl. Goodnight"

"Night girl" she ends the call and I call Phili.

"Hello" she sounds asleep. I quickly check the time and it's after 9. They went to bed early.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you"

"It's okay. It's so cold and raining. The electricity is out and we couldn't make the fire. Everything is wet"

"That's bad. Go back to sleep Cuz. I'll call you tomorrow" I should have texted first.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine and i'm not crying today" I laugh and she laughs as well.

"That's good. I miss you"

"I'm coming home next week. Don't tell the kids. I want to surprise them" I wanted to surprise her too but I'm bad with secrets. When I get excited about something it's hard to keep it all in.

"I won't tell. Can't wait to see you"

"Me too. Good night"

"I love you Cuz. Sleep well" she ends the call and i'm left smiling. Maybe it's not all bad. I check my diary before making a note to buy a heater for them.

Mornings are a real reminder that my life doesn't have much. I want to go back to work now but I can't. Not before I get all clear for the doctor. I clean the little dirty parts before having breakfast in front of the TV. I called Phili and she said they are okay but it's still raining and the kids didn't go to school. When I called Pretty she was already at work which

leaves me bored and alone.

I eat and wash the plate before taking phone and the keys so I can go for a walk and buy some bread in the garage down the road. Someone at the gate catches my attention. It's a woman and waves for my attention.

I press the remote and watch as she walks inside. She is clearly pregnant and the tight t-shirt she has on hugs her stomach in a nice way.

"Hi" she smiles but her face looks a little familiar like I've seen her before.

"Hi. Can I help you?" I assume she must be lost even though I've seen her face before.

Her smile vanishes and I think she might start crying.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to scare you" she wipe her eyes and smile again but I can tell she looks hurt.

"Do you need to sit down?" I offer already turning to open the door so she can come in.

"Please"

"Come on in" I unlock the door and walk back in. She follows and sits on the couch.

"My name is Fanele" the way she says it, it's like she expect that to ring a bell in my head.

I nod and wait for her to continue.

"Months ago I was hired by Nobuhle to be her surrogate. I said yes and...."she cuddles her stomach before a tear drops from her eyes and land on the hand over her stomach.

"Nobuhle?" I can feel the energy drain in my own body. Her laugh as she insulted me that day. Then Nqubeko admitting the affair.

"Yes. I said yes to carrying the baby for Nobuhle and Nqubeko" her words feel like a hard kick in the stomach. She is carrying Nqubeko's baby.

Chapter 36

Thembeke.

"I'm sorry to drop this kind of bomb on you" she adds when I remain frozen and my eyes staring at her stomach.

"I don't understand why you came to me though" I try to sound unshaken but deep down it feels like a stab from a sword.

"Nqubeko wants to kill the baby" her voice breaks as she look at me with glassy eyes.

"Kill?" Who would want to kill a baby?

"Nobuhle went behind his back with the whole pregnancy. When she approached me I thought they were in it together. When she died I found out she didn't tell him. I wanted to raise the baby alone. I mean it's child already so I can't get rid of it. But now I lost my source of income and with Nobuhle gone I can see that it won't be easy to do it alone. So I approached him and now he wants me to abort" the tears start leaking and I look away so I don't join in.

No one prepared me for this.

"She did it while we were still married?" I ask just to

be sure. Nobuhle died before we were divorced and I thought her death she was gone forever in my life.

"Yes" she replies in a low tone. She knows that she and Nobuhle had a hand in ruining my life even though I was dumb enough not to see it.

"So what do you want from me?" I try not to sound so bitter.

"Can you please talk to him. I'll raise the baby alone. I don't have a problem but I'll need some assistance with things. Raising kids is expensive but I can't abort" she continues to sob and I feel sorry for her. Not the stupid situation she put herself in but having to do this to someone like Nqubeko. I have no doubt that Nqubeko is probably having sleepless nights trying to make sure the baby doesn't make it. I may have married young and was blinded by everything for years but even I know that people with money can be ruthless when it comes to babies and money.

"So you want him to pay child support at least?" I ask just to be sure we are on the same page.

"Yes. I can keep the baby out of his life. I don't mind" she sounds desperate.

"And if you die and the baby is left wanting to find how they came about?"

"I do have some family members and maybe Nqubeko will change his mind once the baby is here. I just don't want to be the one killing it"

All this reminds me of the miscarriage. The pain I felt that day I never want to feel. I doubt anyone would want to intentionally feel it.

"So you want me to talk to him? We are divorced Fanele. I have no say in his life" she seems surprised and I hate having to do this because my feelings towards this don't really count.

"I'm sorry. I'm just desperate"

"I'm really sorry. I really wish I can help" I look at the time to show she needs to go now. She gets the message before she gets up.

"Thank you" she smiles and wipe the tears on her face.

"Good luck hey" I add before holding the door open for her. It's a miracle that I didn't break down in front of her. They are having a child together. Even if it was Nobuhle's doing but still. It's his child.

I watch Fanele walk out the gate and get to a waiting car before going back inside.

I need to talk to someone but I stop myself. How long will I keep crying to Phili about these things.

"Keep it together Thembeke. Nqubeko doesn't belong to you" I keep telling myself that and wipe the tears before they fall.

"There are so many people out there. You will meet someone else" I repeat this line three times before realizing it's just not happening fast enough. He is having a child someone else. I can picture them together. Fanele with a smiling because Nqubeko now agree to be a father and love the baby. She will be happy and he will be happy. Three of them as a family. Nqubeko will shave his beard, use that aftershave and smell like something cool. He will hold the umbrella for her and not even flinch if he

gets wet. He will look at her and nod with that smile plays on his lips whenever he wants to assure you that it's all fine. His eyes will search for her around the room if they are in some fancy party and she won't be lonely like. She will make friends with rich women and organize charities if she doesn't want to work.

Then me.

The phone makes me jump. It's Pretty. I take a deep breath before answering.

"Hey girl. Are you home?" She sounds cheerful.

"Where else would I be?" I sound horrible compared to her. Even faking a laugh makes me feel worse.

"Yeah hey. Are you okay? You sound like you are crying"

"It's nothing girl. I just miss home" I lie.

"Have you called? Some times hearing their voices helps" at least she doesn't laugh because that would make me feel even worse.

"I'll call. Are you okay?" I need to change the topic.

"I'm fine just thought I should check on you"

"Thanks girl. I'll be fine"

"Actually I called to give you the number" she
hesitate for a bit.

"What number?"

"Dr Ngcobo. The therapist. I don't mean to be pushy
but I just thought you can call since you are still at
home. I hope I didn't offend you"

"Let me get a pen" I search the drawer and find the
pen before asking her to call out the number for me.
She does so and wish me luck. I'm grateful and I
decide to call immediately and make an
appointment.

Nqubeko.

"I thought gossiping was for women" I tell Mluleki as I drop an ice on the glass.

"You thought wrong. So out with it" he demands and laugh. I know he didn't drive all the way here just to hear about my horrible date in person. He just wants to tease me first.

"Mxm. It was stupid and a waste of time" I hand him a drink before sitting back on the chair.

"You forgot to buy her flowers" it's not a question. He knows. I don't reply and he almost double over with laughter.

"She knows I can buy her the flower shop if she wants flowers"

"That's not the point. Women love these things Nqubeko. Flowers and chocolates. Duh"

"Since when do you say Duh?"

"Your mess deserves a special treat. Even primary school kids know that you have to give women flowers. Doesn't matter what they do with them" I click my tongue and look out the window. It's a

beautiful day but with Fanele still out there I can't relax.

"So what did you find" I want us to get serious now. His face does just that. Go from laughing to serious.

"Fanele will keep the baby Nqubeko"

"Not if I can help it" I hiss and he gives me the 'shut up and listen' look so I obey.

"Before she became friends with Nobuhle she worked in a safe house" he pulls out an envelope and hands it to me.

I open it and it has photos. Old photos of Fanele around babies. Small babies wrapped in different blankets.

"What is this place?"

"Safe house. It burned down a couple of years ago" he pulls out another envelope and hands it to me.

It's more photos of Fanele but she looks different. Her head is uncombed and her eyes look wild. My eyes focus on the woman appearing behind her. The photo is old but i can tell. It's Nobuhle.

"Is this Nobuhle" I need him to confirm.

"Yes. When the safe house burned down Fanele couldn't cope. She was admitted there and she met Nobuhle"

There is a copy of the records. Mluleki must have pulled some serious strings to get these copies.

"Were the kids inside when it burned down?"

"No. She single handedly pulled them out but almost died when she went back in to check if she didn't leave anyone behind. Inhaled some smoke and was convinced she heard a child cry"

I look at the records again and check the amount of time she spent there.

"Six months "

"Check who signed as a next of kin" he points the paper. It was Nobuhle.

"Nobuhle"

"Here is an interesting part. These photos were part of Nobuhle's photo album. Along with the records and all" he gives me the knowing look. I can't figure

anything out right now. Not when I can't make the head or tail of this.

"You are getting sloppy Nqubeko. Nobuhle saved these so she can send Fanele back to the nut house after the baby is born. She had enough proof that Fanele is insane and the judge was going to her the child"

I look at the photos again. Fanele looks disturbed and Nobuhle looks like a worried family member next to her. Who would take a photo like this without any hidden agenda.

"But why go as far as having someone carry the child when you can just get pregnant?" It doesn't make any sense.

"Not if you can't have kids at all" he replies.

"Nobuhle was a barren?"

"Check the second copy. It's a confirmation. She had her womb removed when she was 21. Back door abortion"

"Jesus Christ!!!"

"Don't bring God into this. Nobuhle was nuts and only God knows what she fed Fanele all this time. This must have taken her some serious patience to get here. To bad she never saw the end"

I stare at the photo of Fanele with the babies. She looks so happy. She doesn't look like someone with a problem at all. The second photo shows her still in a room with toddlers this time. She seems to be talking to one while handing a toy to another. My eyes look at the lady looking the other way. It's definitely Nobuhle.

"Let me guess. They never caught the person who started the fire?" I ask

"Nope. Even the baby that Fanele heard was never found. But she lost her head in that fire"

"I hope Nobuhle is in hell" I mumble before collecting all the copies and photos.

Chapter 37

Thembeke.

I'm standing in front of the mirror and trying out several outfits. It's Friday and Pretty is dragging me to some party because I've been in the house for too long and i'm going home tomorrow so she says I need to go out tonight and go home tomorrow. I had very limited choices so I said okay and now i'm dressing up and not sure how to behave. Doctor Ngcobo's reception lady said he will have an opening on Tuesday after I didn't take the closest date she had. Making a decision to see a therapist is not the same as someone saying okay come. I wasn't ready so I picked Tuesday and set the reminder on my phone. I haven't seen Nqubeko since that failed date. He sent me two bunch of roses saying he was apologising for forgetting them for our date and the other for how sorry he was. I sent him a text saying 'Thank you' and didn't mention Fanele. It's not my place to get involved.

My phone rings and I assume it's Pretty but it's Nqubeko. I'm surprised because he hasn't called me in days.

"Hello" I answer while trying to zip the skirt i'm

wearing.

"Let me in please" He doesn't even greet.

"Okay" I put the phone down and slip the vest on before going to the dining room.

He doesn't even wait until the gate is fully opened before he drives in. I close it again and wait at the door as he exit the car. He pulls out some flowers and a box of chocolates. I watch as he walks to the house his eyes looking at my skirt and vest. The vest is thin and I fold my arms to hide my nipples. The skirt is shorter than my normal skirts but it's not shockingly short.

"Are are you not cold?" I guess that Nqubeko couldn't stay hidden for too long.

"No. I'm getting dressed to go out" I turn and walk in. He follows and close the door behind him.

"Out where?" He he throws the flowers on the couch and the box lands on the floor.

"Some party with Pretty and some people we work with"

"I'll take you" he picks up the chocolates and throw them on the couch too.

"I'll request a ride" I go back to the bedroom to finish getting dressed. He doesn't follow and I pick a shirt that will match the skirt and wear a bra first. Pretty said it's a relaxed party so I don't have to wear anything hectic. I pick flat sandals and grab my bag.

I find Nqubeko sitting on the couch watching TV. He looks up when I appear and stands up slowly. I can see the disapproval on his face already.

"Are you done?"

"Yes"

He stares at me his eyes going up and down

"Dressed like that?"

"Don't start please. Let's go" I pick up the house keys.

"How many people will be there?"

"It's a party. I assume a handful" I look away and roll my eyes.

"I'm coming too" he walks to the door and open it. I

stop and stare at him. Is this really necessary? I don't even know where he comes from for him to be acting like.

"It's a baby shower" I lie. Baby showers put men off.

"Where is your gift? Don't you need gifts for those"

I should have said bridal shower.

"There will be no men there Nqubeko. You can't come"

"Why not? You are dressed in some skimpy outfit and it's Friday night. I come or you are not going" his voice is full of authority and his face says he is not backing down.

"Well i'm not going" I don't move and he slams the door shut.

"No problem" he walks back and sit down again.

My phone vibrates and it's Pretty asking if I need a picking up. I can't text her back because Nqubeko is acting like a man right now.

"Feel free to let her know you are not coming"

"We are divorced Nqubeko. I don't need permission. Your permission" I remind him the obvious.

"I still love you and I know you love me. As a man I forbid this" he points the skirt.

"You can't forbid me anything. I'm going" I put on my stubborn personality.

"We are both going then. Come on" he points the door.

"Without you" I add and head to the door.

I expect him to try and block me but he doesn't instead he follows and we both walk out.

I turn around and lock the door while he waits. I do it slowly and put the key inside my bag. I haven't requested the ride yet so I start typing on my phone and Nqubeko grabs it.

"Get in the car. I'm driving"

"Give me my phone back" I yell.

"I like it when you are feisty. You are sexy and it turns me on" he whispers the last part with a smile on his face.

"Mxm. J ust give me my phone" I demand not wanting to react on him being turned on.

"J ust get in the car i'll take you and come fetch you when you are done" that's a quick change of heart from someone who wanted to come to the party with me.

"You won't stay?" I ask just so I heard him correctly.

"It will depend. If I find men there i'm staying. If not then i'll leave. Is that fair?"

"We shouldn't be negotiating this Nqubeko"

"Those are your options Thembeke. You take them or we go back inside" he steps closer and lowers his head to my ear "We can order in and watch TV before we finish the day with something hot" his hand touch my ass.

"So you disappear for days and come back when you are horny. Don't touch me" I slap his hand away.

"So you missed me? Why didn't you call? I would have came running"

"I wasn't. I just want to go there and get drunk,

laugh and come home to sleep and drive home tomorrow"

"You are going home tomorrow?" He sounds shocked.

"Yes. I miss them"

"I'm sure they miss you too. Can I come too?"

Who goes home with an ex husband? Plus we don't even have enough space for us how much more someone else. He can forget it.

"No. Take me to the party" I hold out my hand for my phone.

"Don't you want to wear something warmer?"

I give him a don't you dare look before walking to the car. He laughs and follow.

Pretty text the address and Nqubeko says he knows the place. I don't ask for many details because he is not being generous with them. It's a party and I was invited that's all that matters. When I asked Pretty if there will be men there she said no it was just us, Nqubeko nodded and continued to keep glancing on my thighs. We drive for over five minutes of silence before he stops the car on the side of the road. I see other cars and hear the music but I think he parked too far. I'll walk, I tell myself as I open the door.

"Wait" he speaks.

I stop and look at him.

"Be careful Thembeke. Drink like it's your last drink. Don't leave your glass unattended. If you have to use the toilet finish the drink and go or leave it and pour a new drink when you come back. Trust no one. I know it's mostly women but still be careful"

I'm touched. He sounds so sincere right now.

"I will. Thank you"

"Text me when you are done. Don't stay if you are feeling uncomfortable. Don't let anyone ruin your

fun" he add before he starts the car. I guess he wants to drop me closer. The car stops when we reach the gate and I open the door.

"Thanks " I get out.

"Have fun"

I smile and walk to the gate. I see two ladies and one of them comes to the gate and open for me.

"I'm glad you came" she hugs me. I remember her face at work but I don't know her name.

"Sorry I'm late" Ngubeko drives off and we walk to the house.

"It's fine" she pushes the door open and we walk in. It's the kitchen and I see Pretty wearing an apron while busy mixing some greens. I never understand why people have salads with meat. It's a braai. Just have meat and go to the gym next day.

"You came" she is very loud. I can tell she had a drink before.

"Yeah I did. Need help?" I don't want to but it's standard procedure. Always offer and hope they

say no.

"No. Go to the back girl. I'll be there just now"

The girl I walked in with walks back with glasses and offers me one and take my bag to the bedroom. I pour the wine Pretty just poured before following her out leaving Pretty with her greens.

There is music and ladies are sitting in chairs some smoking.

"It's Thembeke ladies. The new girl in the office" says the girl and i wish I know her name at least. There is some screaming and cheering. They are drunk already but no one makes any awkward scene and I find an empty camp chair and sit.

"When are you coming back?" Ask another girl before she takes the cigarette from another.

"Monday" I reply and try to sound like i'm not feeling nervous.

"That's good. Sorry about the accident" she stands up to smoke away from me.

I sip the wine and look around a bit before my eyes

land on Nombuso. I'm not dreaming. It's her and she is looking at me too. I look away first. I thought it was our office people why is she here.

Someone takes the unoccupied seat next to me and I turn my attention to them.

"Hey. I'm Vuyo" she introduce herself.

"I'm Thembeka" I smile at her.

"I like your skirt"

I use this opportunity to start a conversation and tell her where I got it and before long we are talking about fashion. Pretty finally arrives with a large bowl of salad and orders everyone to the table. Someone comes with meat and takeaways. It's everyone for themselves.

"Come before it gets cold" says Vuyo before she gets up. I stand up and we walk to the table. I don't bother with salad and Vuyo also does the same.

"Hi" says Nombuso next to me.

"Hi" I reply and walk back to my seat.

Vuyo comes back and sit next to me but someone

else takes her attention which opens a chance for Nombuso to sit near me.

"How are you?" She asks and I ignore her. Why can't she act like we don't know each other.

"A refill?" asks Pretty holding a bottle of wine.

"Please" I hold up the glass. She refills and I block out Nombuso until Vuyo is back and we are chatting like old friends.

The party continues to rock until someone yells that there is another surprise coming. We all stare at the door waiting for this surprise because someone did confirm that they arrived. I want to see who are these people as everyone seems really excited.

The sound changes into a different song and about seven men walk out of the house dressed in different uniforms from fire fighters to policemen.

The ladies go wild some taking photos.

The man immediately start dancing while taking their clothes off.

"They are stripping" I tell Vuyo not believing my eyes.

"They are fine" she bites her lips and whistle. I don't blame her. These men are fine.

"Have fun ladies" yells Pretty over the music.

The brave girls jump at the chance of touching the men and I remain sitting just laughing at everything. I hope no one calls the police and ruin the party. Something lands on my lap and I jump before they laugh. The man just passed his shirt to me and he is smiling in a daring way. I will for him to pick someone else. My skirt is short and i'm not even drunk enough to let loose but he doesn't go away. He steps even closer and dance in front of me. His belt follow and he places it on my neck. He is about to take off his pants and because i'm sitting down his dick will be on my face.

Someone starts to scream but stops abruptly and

the music also dies down. The man stop and I notice that people are looking at someone else.

"Ladies and gents" says Nqubeko's voice.

The man in front of me turns and I see him. He sees me too and walks over. The man moves aside and Nqubeko offers a hand towards me. I don't hesitate in taking his hand as he pulls me up. The shirt falls and Vuyo picks it up. Nqubeko takes the belt from my neck and hands it to the man before he takes my hand and lead me back to the house.

The music starts and the ladies go back to cheering.

"Get you bag" he speaks as we reach the passage. I nod and try the first door. It's a right room and I take my bag.

"You are leaving" says Pretty walking in as well.

"Yes. It was great. I'll call you tomorrow" I hug her and she kisses me cheek before we leave.

Someone follows us and close the gate before going back inside. Nqubeko holds the door open and I get in. He doesn't immediately close the door

instead he leans over and kiss my lips. The kiss is soft and he tastes like cherry. I kiss him back for a moment before pulling back. He doesn't say anything as he closes the door and walk to his side.

"Did you have fun?"he ask when he drives off.

"Yes. It was nice" I don't add that I was about to receive a dance when he walked in.

"I'm glad"

"Did you leave?" I ask because he just arrived like he saw the strippers.

"Yes but i'm glad I came back just in time" he looks at me and I look away. Why am I feeling so guilty? We are divorced and I am very much single.

I don't reply and the silence lasts until we reach my house and he opens the gate.

I get out and search the keys in my bag. He takes them and unlock the door. I'm drunk but nothing hectic. I walk to the bathroom to pee before going back to the lounge. Nqubeko walks from the kitchen with a glass of water.

"Drink"

"I'm not drunk" I protest.

"Just drink"

I look at him and take the glass before drinking and hand him the glass. He walks back to the kitchen and I take the chocolates. I'll have them tomorrow.

He walks back and takes the chocolate from my hands before putting them on the coffee table. He doesn't speak but he pauses before he kiss my lips again. I kiss him back. I'm horny too so why act like sex won't be good right now. The kiss lasts for a while before he takes my hand and we walk to the bedroom. When I try to take my shirt off he stops me and does it himself. He strips me slowly taking each item off me as if he wants me to be sure that I want to go all the way. When I'm finally naked he lays me down and pull my legs apart before he kiss my feet and works his way down to my thighs. I close my eyes wait for the first touch. It doesn't come fast enough but when it does I feel his wait on me and his lips on my lips. He doesn't come in he is

just pausing there but the light brush is driving me insane. I want him inside me.

"Nqubeko"

"Shhh" he whispers and press on my entrance "You had a good time?"

"Yes" I whisper back.

"That's what you want? To have fun and get drunk?" He pushes his legs further apart and that stretches mine even wider.

"Yes"

He pushes inside me and I hold my breath for a bit.

"Have strippers?" He asks and I don't reply. He holds still.

"Have strippers?"he asks again.

"I didn't.... Ha" he pushes in making me stop talking.

"Talk. With strippers"

"Yes" I move my hips desperate for him to do the same but he doesn't.

"Because you are wild?"

"Yes" I try to pull him into me hoping he will do what I need but he doesn't.

"There is a wild bad girl inside you?"

"Yes" he could call me a lion right now and i'll say yes.

"What do you want me to do to this wild girl right now?"

"She needs a good fuck" I can't believe I just say that and I can tell that Nqubeko is also surprised but he does just that. Each thrust is hard and has me saying yes until my nails are sinking into his skin and my knees are one each side of this rib. He keeps going until I don't think its possible for him to stop but I don't want him to. Not when i'm this high and this tense. Even when my body finally let's go he doesn't stop until his own body tenses up and grabs my thigh so hard my body trembles. We both fall back into our own bodies and remain locked in each other's arms.

"It this the kind for fuck Thembeke needs when

drunk?" He whispers.

"Yes" I whisper back.

Chapter 38

Thembeke

When drunk some things seem like a great idea but when sober they are different. That's me right now. I'm awake but I'm still pretending to be asleep because i'm a little shy about facing Nqubeko now.

"Morning" he speaks and I jump because i'm not expecting him to be awake.

"Morning" I hold the blanket tight around me. He knows my naked body but still I hide it.

"It's after 9. Just so you know" he adds before reaching for the phone and show me the time.

"Gosh I'm late" I sit up and spot my clothes on the chair. I have to walk there naked while Nqubeko stares at me. Why did he pick them up? I check for

anything I can slip on but there is nothing. Nqubeko made sure that there is nothing close by.

"Wild girl gone already?" He asks when I keep shifting and trying to see if I can walk over there with the blanket around me.

"I was drunk" I shoot back.

"I've seen you naked so many times MaKhumalo. Allow the man to look. Go on" there is a smile on his face. This is what I get for having sex with him. I should have kicked him out last night. Being horny doesn't kill.

"Why are you still here anyway?"

"I'm taking you home. Before you protest, I'm also going home and I thought we should share a drive. You will drop me off in Plaza"

Driving alone is not nice and with him in the car he can do the driving himself. It's a good idea.

"Okay"

"Really? I think I need that in writing" he laughs and get up. I watch him as he walks across the bedroom

and throw the shirt towards me.

"Thanks "

"I don't get why you have to be all shy now. Last night you were on fire" he winks and I look away feeling my cheeks burn.

"Can we not talk about it?"

"Why not?" He picks up his own pants and pull them on.

"Because I don't feel comfortable talking about it. It was just sex between two ex's "

He doesn't reply and I stand up allowing the shirt to cover my nakedness leaving just the thighs.

"Well to me it was more than sex with my ex" he replies after he is done putting his vest on.

It's my turn to remain quiet so I grab a towel and head to the shower.

I find him making the bed when I finish bathing. I pick an outfit and pull my bag before selecting few outfits i'm going home with. I want to leave some clothes there so I won't have to pack all the time when I go home.

"It's cold outside. Please wear something warmer"

I look out the window and I can see the sun alright. He is being himself so I ignore him and pick a dress.

"A jacket will do" he adds when I don't reply.

"It's not cold"

"It will be when we get to Melmoth. Please just listen to me"

I roll my eyes and pick a jacket. His eyes are on my chest when I zip it up.

"I don't get why you are so obsessed about what I wear now. Happy?" I stare at him with the jacket zipped all the way the top.

"No. I want to complain about the size of this dress as well. It's short but I'll stick to the jacket for now"

"Must you always control everything Nqubeko? I can walk around naked if I want to" i'm getting annoyed by this need to always control things.

"Not if I can help it"

"You are not my boss!!"

"I know but as a man I can't help it. I'm jealous"

"Maybe you shouldn't be jealous. There are things you can't control. Like what I wear or do" I shove some underwear in the bag.

"But I can try"

"Then enjoy disappointment" I zip the bag and grab my phone.

He follows me to the dining room. The flowers and the chocolates are still there. I'll have them at home with my family but the flowers need a vase so I take them to the kitchen.

"I'm sorry" he speaks behind me.

I turn and face him.

"I'm sorry for everything that went wrong between

us"

I nod and look away. The last thing I want to do is to start crying. I'm going home today and once I start crying I won't stop.

"I love you"

"Thanks" I reply after a minute and continue putting the flowers away.

"Can I make us some coffee?" He offers.

"I'll have tea not coffee"

"Do you mind if we drive past my place so I can pick up few things?" I want to say yes but I say no instead.

"Also check if you didn't unplug the fridge by mistake. You always did that"

He laughs and continue with the tea. Looking at him as he does this my head goes back to our married life. Why wasn't he like this those days? Why did we have to get divorced first before he decided he wants to be a husband.

"When did you start loving me?"

He stops pouring the milk and look at me.

"When Nobuhle was still alive you weren't this man. You acted like I didn't exist Nqubeko. She dies and suddenly you claim to love me. You can't even leave me alone long enough to hang out with friends. You want to control my clothes, you come to my house uninvited and you tell me you love me. I'm supposed to love you back now because she is dead....."

"That's not true"

"It is true. You only became this man after she was gone. For years Nqubeko I was your wife and you hardly told me you love me. For years I was forced to navigate through marriage alone because you were busy with her. Do you know how it's like to live with a person you fear offending because you don't even know what will offend them. Do you have any idea how hard it was for me?" The tears start falling but I don't care right now.

"I admit I handled it wrong MaKhumalo. I should have been a good husband to you. I know I failed

but I'd like us to try again. I know we can do this better this time around. I know I can. Please"

"What if I don't want to?"

"Is it because you don't love me anymore or because you are angry?"

I start to walk away but he grabs my arm.

"Let go of me"

"Why? I asked you a question"

"Because I don't know. Okay. I don't know!!"

He doesn't let go instead he come to stand in front of me.

"What is it that you don't know. I'm here and I want us to fix this" he demands.

"Let go of me" I try to free my arm but he doesn't let go.

"Talk Thembeke. What is it that you don't know?"

"I don't know how I feel about you. Sometimes i feel like i love you but then i remember how you treated me"

He lets go but doesn't move. We stare at each other with me crying and him looking like he wants to join in too.

"What can I do to make it better?"

"I don't think you can"

"There must be something I can do to make it better. I love you and i admit my mistakes Mashobane. I'm willing to do anything to make it better. Make us better. Please" he begs before he wraps his arms around me. I cry even harder and hold on to him.

Several minutes pass before I pull away from him and wipe the tears in my eyes.

"Do you still want the tea?"

"Not anymore. I'll have some fruit" I think he doesn't want the coffee anymore because puts everything back and push the kettle away. I take my fruits and leave the kitchen.

Nqubeko takes less than 15 minutes to pack. I remind him to ensure that everything is unplugged beside the fridge. He laughs and double check before we lock up. We are both coming back tomorrow but this is Durban and a lot can happen till then.

"Don't you want to drive at least half way?"

"Nope" I open the passenger door and get in.

"Okay fine" he gets in and start the car.

It's my car so I can't put my feet up and sit back. If it was his I would.

"Can we turn the music on?" He asks.

"No problem"

The sound of Kenny G and Peabo Bryson fills the car. We both look at each other. It's our wedding song. It was picked by him but still the lyrics stayed in my head. Even when we did it the first time he played the song.

"I can turn it off if it makes you uncomfortable" he

offers

"No it's fine. I like the song"

"We can start again Thembeka. I can do things even better" he is starting again.

"That's not the point"

"Then what is the point?" Maybe traveling with him is a bad idea. I don't want to talk about this the whole trip because I don't want to get home in a bad mood.

"The point is I will never know if you love me for real or you just don't want to let me go. Everything you do Nqubeko i'll always wonder if it's because you want to or you just want to have me back. I don't even know if you love me or not. You say you do but I will never know. I can't possibly know"

He goes quiet and I look outside the window.

"But you do love me?"

I don't reply and the song comes to the end. Jason Mraz Make it mine comes on and I start singing along. His hands reaches the radio and I think he

wants to turn it off but he turns in even louder and drums his fingers on the wheel.

I continue singing while he starts dancing moving his shoulders to the sound. When the song ends we both laugh.

"I didn't know you listen to this kind of music" I didn't even know he could dance to such song.

"I don't. I went through your playlist one night and copied the music to my music player"

"Why?"

"I just wanted to see what you like. I should have asked but like many things, I did it wrong" he shrugs.

"It's fine. I don't have any specific song that i like. I listen to good music"

"And movies? I know you don't like blood"

"I love romance and comedy. But i do watch action films"

"We should have a movie night" he suggests and I nod.

"Did Kwanele ever contact you again?"

Hearing someone mentions Kwanele's name make me feel stupid. I was so sure that i was in love and saw the happily ever after. Only i was being stupid.

"No"

"I'm glad" i look at him and he smiles "Don't look at me like that. I won't lie. I'm glad he is out of the picture"

"You are controlling"

"I'm not controlling. I care. I worry so to avoid worrying i tend to want to fix things my way" he makes it sound like it's a good thing.

"I think you confuse caring with control. You even want to control what i wear Nqubeko"

"So you don't catch a cold"

"Yeah right" I roll my eyes and look away.

"For real. I've done so many things just to ensure your safety and also make sure you were okay. I guess my fault was leaving you out of it. I should have included you" he is starting to go back into

that dark place and I hate it.

"Can we not talk about what went wrong? We can sing along to some songs I have. Anything but this"

He nods and connect the phone.

We sing along to several songs. I do some videos until it's boring and we stop for a refill in Melmoth. I go to the toilet while he buys some drinks.

The weather is no longer warm and I can tell it's going to rain soon. Nqubeko hands me coffee and opens his bag before pulling out a tracksuit.

"Wear these. To keep you warm. It's probably cold in ULundi"

I nod and take the pants before putting them under the dress.

"I'm waiting for I told you so" I say when he doesn't say it.

"You know I'm saying it on the inside" we both laugh and get in the car.

"How come you have my size?"

"I bought them for you. Well it was on sale. His and hers so I bought them and wore mine"

"Thanks. They are warm" i'm not lying. They are really warm.

"I know. I don't want you catching a cold"

When we get to Plaza Nqubeko offers to help me pick up things for my family. We buy blankets. I take three and he adds another 3 saying he will pay. I don't protest. We buy two heaters, warm sleep wear for the kids and then groceries. He offers to pay and I let him do just that.

"So I have to take a taxi here. Are we driving back together tomorrow?" He asks as we stand next to the car.

"I think I'd like that" I look behind him as I spot a familiar body. The man looks towards me and it's really him, Dabula.

"That's my cousin" I start waving at him hoping to catch his attention. Nqubeko whistles and Dabula finally spots us. He smiles and walks over.

"Hey. Phili told me you are coming" he looks excited until his eyes fall to Nqubeko. He goes back to seriousness before offering a hand to him.

"Khumalo" says Nqubeko shaking his hand.

"Mbonambi" replies Dabula.

"Are you going home? I'm driving home now before it rains" I look at the greying sky. The rain could start any minute from now.

"We are going too. I'm just waiting for Fanele" he looks behind him and I do the same. He said Fanele but of cause it can't be the same Fanele.

"There she is"

I look at Nqubeko and he looks at me. It's the same Fanele. She sees us too and stops walking.

"Fanele" I say it out loud and look at her and her pregnant stomach.

"You know her? She is Uncle Mcebo's daughter.

Thanks to Khumbulekhaya for reuniting her with the family" says Dabula sounding all cheerful.

"We are related to her?" I ask my voice sounding like a shout and several people look at us.

"Yes. She is family" replies Dabula looking at me and then at Nqubeko who looks like he wants to kill her on the spot.

Chapter 39

Thembeke.

"Am I missing something?" Asks Dabula looking at us one by one.

"She is carrying his baby" I point at Nqubeko.

"Oh" that's all he says before he looks at Fanele who also looks like she wants to disappear.

"Can we go?" Asks Nqubeko opening the passenger side for me.

"I think i'm driving now" I remind him.

"No. I'm driving. I'll make a plan when I get there" his

tone says it's not up for discussion. To avoid drama I get in and Dabula opened the back door for Fanele before he gets in himself.

"So did you guys drive safe?" Asks Dabula as Nqubeko starts the car.

"It was alright. Hopefully it doesn't start raining soon" I reply.

"Luckily they extended the path near home. The neighbour bought a car and he wanted a clear path for his car" says Dabula.

"That's better. We can't escape the mud though" I reply.

"I hope even if it rains but nothing hectic. Our local team have a soccer tournament and we can't play well in the mud" continues Dabula.

"You play soccer?" Asks Nqubeko

"I help with the coaching. It helps the boys stay busy" says Dabula sounding like a proud parent.

They continue talking about soccer and I check my phone. I have several messages from Pretty asking

if i'm okay. I decide to call her back before she calls the police.

"Thembeke" she answers

"Hey. Sorry I didn't see your messages and missed calls"

"Are you okay?" She sounds like she is still partying.

"I'm fine. I'm heading home"

"Oh. You mentioned that. So you have no hang over?" Someone is demanding a refill and I heard bottles.

"Nope. I didn't have much" I look at Nqubeko since he is the reason why I didn't stay long enough to have any side effects.

"Girl. Did you tell Nqubeko to come get you?"

"No I didn't" It's like Nqubeko can tell we are talking about him because he looks at me and frown.

"So he just arrived and took you away? J ust like that?" She sounds shocked

"How else would he exercise control if he doesn't do

that?" I roll my eyes and look at him.

"And you guys fucked? Right?" She laughs

"How did you guess?"

"I know these things. I got laid too" she whispers and it's my turn to laugh.

"Tell me more"

"Girl. Let's just say the brother knows how to put it down and speak French while at it"

"He speaks French?"

"Yes. He is not a South African and I am keeping him"

"You go girl. They say they tend to be very loyal. Unlike South African" I can tell that Nqubeko wants to know what are we talking about.

"I hope so girl. Anyway I'm trying to relive last night. Have a safe trip and text me when you get there"

"Will do girl. Enjoy" I laugh and hang up.

The conversation in the car has moved from soccer to what's wrong with the area. Dabula loves the

place but he wishes it had more to offer especially the youth and also helps with the teenage pregnancy because girls are dropping out of school. I don't share my views because I don't want Fanele to get a chance to speak as well. So far she is sitting there quietly.

We finally arrive and Fanele asks to be dropped off before we take a turn for our home. Nqubeko asks where is she going and I almost ask how it's his business but Dabula explains that she doesn't stay in our home but she is with the other family. That makes me feel a lot better because Phili told me we are not a close family. She is their problem not ours. She gets off and says goodbye. Nqubeko waits until she reaches the gate walks inside before he drives off.

We continue silently until we reach our home and Celiwe is playing with four other girls in the yard.

"Do I drive in?" Asks Nqubeko.

"It's my car. I think you get out" I reply.

"You can come in. It's okay" says Dabula and Nqubeko sticks his tongue out at me before driving inside.

We get out and leave him in the car. Obviously he can't come in because we have no space and he can't get in the kitchen or even our bedroom. The uninvited guests stay out.

"I'll be back" I tell him before walking to the house.

Phili is busy cooking and something smells like home.

"Hello" I greet before looking inside her pot. She cooked dumplings and mutton. I'm hungry, I realize that now.

"Hey. Where did you find Dabula?" She gives me a one hand hug because she is holding a spoon with the other hand.

"Bumped to him in plaza" I don't add Fanele. Not yet.

"Great, he saved on the fee" she looks at me as if

she can't believe I'm really here.

"I got us some blankets. I'll take them to the other room"

"Here is the key" she hands me the key and looks at the car "Someone left inside?"

"Nqubeko. I think he should take the car and come pick me up tomorrow evening. We drove together" I explain and she gives me the 'there is more look' but I walk away before she can ask more.

Celiwe and her friends helps me carry the blankets inside and I give them some money before they run off to buy some snacks.

"Thembeke. Come in for a second" calls out Phili appearing in the kitchen. I lift one finger to Nqubeko and hurry to her.

"Here. We can't let him leave without offering something" she points the tray on the table. I'm surprised because the tray has a large plate that is filled with everything we bought for the kids. She opened all the chips and mixed them up for Nqubeko. Even the biscuits are there.

"Did you leave some for the kids?"

"Yes I did. We could dish up for him and get him into Dabula's room but the dumplings are not done yet. Does he drink coca cola?"

"No he doesn't. This will be fine" I take the tray before she goes even further and offers more.

He will have to eat in the car because I am not bothering Dabula in his own room.

I find him on the phone but he ends the call when I get in.

"Phili did this for you" I had him the plate and put the tray at the backseat.

"Thanks" he starts eating right away "Do you mind if I drive out?" He asks already starting the car.

"I think you should take the car and come get me tomorrow"

"Thanks. I'll bring you back" he drives out.

We drive to the main road before he turns and drive towards the school and then stops. I watch him eat the chips as if he doesn't find it weird.

"So you don't think we are too poor for you? We don't even have a living room" I ask before taking a biscuit because he is not offering.

"Baby girl, I love your family. I don't care about living rooms. I can help you build one if you want"

"I wasn't hinting for one"

"I know you weren't. I'm just saying" he lifts the plate and place it in the backseat before turns so we are facing each other.

"So you are picking me up after 2 pm. If you get here early you will wait Nqubeko. I am not hurrying to leave just because you are early. If you have an emergency then you leave my car and hurry to Durban alone"

"I won't have any emergency. I'll be here after 2" he shift closer and his hand reaches out to my face but I move my head back.

"What are you doing?"

"Touching you" he continues until his thumb is caressing my chin "Am I not allowed to touch"

"No you are not" my own hand reaches for his and move it away. He resists before he moves closer until we are close to each other.

"I need to kiss you. Please" he whispers and his eyes drop to my lips before he leans in and kiss my lips "I need this" he adds before he kisses me again. This time I kiss him again and taste the different flavours in his lips.

"Nqubeko" I pull away and breath.

"Yes" his hand pulls my neck and his lips are on mine again. I place my hands on his thighs for support as I kiss him back just as much. When he pulls away he picks up the water bottle and opened the door. I watch as he washes his hands and throw away the bottle.

"You are polluting the area"

He laughs and get back in the car before he is kissing me again. This time his hands rubs the pants and pull the dress up. When he realizes that he can touch the flesh he grunts in frustration and I laugh.

"You wanted me to be warm" I speak against his lips.

"You are warm" he replies and kiss me again. His hands reach even higher until they reach the elastic part of the pants and then he reaches inside.

"Wait" I pull back and snap the elastic into my skin.

"We are just kissing. Relax. Unless you are not comfortable"

"I'm fine but we have to talk about the elephant in the car" he exhales and nod before kissing my lips again.

"In a minute" he whispers and continue to kiss me. I'm on the cross roads. One part says go with a flow and another says don't you dare. Demand answers. His hand goes back into the pants. I don't pull back even when he touches the shaved part of me and his knee pushes my legs apart. When he finally touches me I can feel him exhale and his tongue is in my mouth. I make a sound and hold him tight. His hand reaches down and his fingers find their way in.

"Someone might see us" I speak after he kiss my neck.

"Shhh" he whispers and French kiss my neck "just come"

I push my legs wider and lay back a bit so he can have more access. He touches all the sensitive spots and before long i'm basically riding his hand while holding him tight.

"Right there baby. Right there. Come MaKhumalo" i'm gasping for air and my muscles are tensing up until I climax hard and my body is shuddering against his.

"I love you" he kiss my lips and withdraw his hand slowly until it's all out.

I lay my head on his chest and inhale his perfume.

Chapter 40

ThembeKa

"Can you stand?" Ask Nqubeko his arms still around me.

I nod and he slowly ease me down until my feet are on the ground but my knees are still feeling weak so I don't let go.

"Let me carry you to the car" he whispers.

"No. It's fine. Give me a moment" I should be able to stand in a second. Orgasm has never paralyzed anyone.

"Let's put the pants back on. It's cold" he leans over and pick the pants behind me. I don't protest when he bends down and lift one leg. I hold on to his shoulder until he pulls them up and pull the dress down.

"Are you not cold?" He is wearing a jacket but I think he might be cold too.

"No. I'm fine" pick me up and place me on the same position was in only this time he is not pulling my leg and trying to hit that spot inside me and me telling him not to stop. Now we are both dressed and he is leaning against the car between my legs.

It's dark already and it helps that we parked near the trees and there is no house nearby otherwise someone might have seen us and I will be branded a hoe and my cousins getting a reputation they didn't ask for.

"No regrets please" says Nqubeko kissing my cheek.

"I don't. I'm just thinking about something silly. Let's talk about Fanele" she is the elephant in our life. As much as I managed to go on without thinking about her for few days it's not possible now. Not when she is family.

"How did you know about Fanele anyway?" He asks his face so close to mine I can smell the chips he ate earlier.

"She came to my house and told me you want to kill the baby" even in the dark I can see Nqubeko's eyes go wide.

"She came to you? When?"

"Few days back. After our failed date. Are you trying to kill the baby Nqubeko?" I fold my arms on my chest so we have that little space between us.

"Nobuhle went behind my back. She and Nobuhle did that alone. I don't think it's fair that that I'm forced to be a parent in such a way"

"So you want the baby to die?" I get his point but at this point it's no longer about him. It's about a child that's growing in that woman's stomach.

"It's not a baby yet"

I push him back but Nqubeko is not a small man so he doesn't even move.

"There is a heartbeat, she said she is over four months. In fact I think she is over five months. It's a person Nqubeko. A tiny person with your DNA" I yell at him.

"Please don't yell at me"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell but it's a person Nqubeko. Your child" even though it hurts that it's someone else but still it's Nqubeko in there as well.

"So you think I should let her have this baby and be tied to me forever?"

"She is already tied to you Nqubeko. If you get rid of

this baby it won't change anything. She will still be the mother of the baby you killed" he take my hands and pull them apart. When I try to fold them again he hold them on my side.

"I never wanted a child Thembeke. Not with anyone but you. They committed a crime against me"

"And you want the baby to pay the price? She told me she will raise the baby away from you but she needs you to help with the expenses when she can't afford some things. That's all she wants"

This time he let's go and move from in front of me before he scratches his head.

"Do you really think she can do that? Take the money and leave?"

"Maybe not but how hard could it be for you to send her money every now and then? You can set up some account for them and have your bank automatically send the money. You can do anything Nqubeko" I can't believe I'm arguing Fanele's case but it's a baby. The baby is more important.

"And us? Won't this baby ruin us?"

"I don't know but I do know that I don't want you to kill your child as a favour to me" I know what i'm saying. I'm saying there is us. That we can be something in the future but we will cross that bridge when we get there.

"You do love me Thembeke? No pressure to do anything. Just a question. Your feelings for me are still there?"

"Yes. I still have feelings for you and even much more when Fanele came to me and I realized I didn't want you with someone else" But part of me still hates how everything happened but i don't say it out loud.

"But you still resent me for what happen between us?" He asks after a moment. I guess the years i stayed with him he did figure some things out about me.

"Part of me still does" i reply and play with my fingers.

"We can go for counselling. Us both. I meant it when i said we can try it all to fix us" he comes back

to my face and his hand is around my neck

"Anything baby girl. Please" he begs

"Let me go for my own therapy. Fix myself and then we can fix us both. How about that"

"No problem but we can continue to see each other? No pressure though" i think this means we can continue to have sex.

"But i'm allowed to go out with friends. And you take me out on dates and not complain about my clothes"

"Even if it's cold and i fear you will get sick?"

"Nqubeko!!"

"Okay, okay. I'll try not to complain. But i'm allowed to have an opinion on the outfit once in a while?"

"Once a week" i negotiate

"Three times a week"

"Two times a week and not if i'm going out with friends"

He goes quiet for a moment before he laughs

"Okay fine. Twice a week. But i'm allowed to drop and pick you up on those outing with friends"

"Yeah sure. If i'm drunk i won't be able to drive anyway"

"And i can stay if there are men in those parties. This is non negotiable"

"Define men. Men in general okay but if men as in dancers then no. I want to cheer the strippers and come home to fuck like that day" being in the dark helps because Nqubeko can't see my burning cheeks.

"Men in general. But strippers are not allowed to touch you. Not in that way"

"Fair enough"

"Shake on it?" He asks and i offer my hand. We shake hands and laugh.

"I love you" he adds before he wraps his arms around me.

"I love you too and you and Fanele need to sort this out. But don't kill the baby Nqubeko. As much as it

hurts but a baby deserves a fair chance" i wrap my own arms around him.

"I'll sort it out MaKhumalo. Lets take you back home before they worry" but he doesn't pull away. To be honest i don't want him to.

I don't know if i will regret this but deep down something tells me i have to take a chance.

Chapter 41

Nqubeko.

I watch Thembeke walk inside the house and close the door before driving away. I don't want to leave but I can't stay. Sleeping in the car is not an option especially when i'm this tired. I drive further away before calling Fanele. Her phone rings for a long time before she finally answers sounding like she is in a party.

"Hello" she speaks and I hear someone telling others to keep it down. It must be a large family.

"Can we talk? I'm still here" I ask while sitting back and feeling Thembeka's panties in my pocket. She hesitates first before saying okay.

I end the call and close my eyes remembering Thembeka's hands around me. Her cries of pleasure and her warmth around me. I can feel myself get firm just thinking about how hot it was and how good it felt. Last night was great but in the car was even better and she wasn't even tipsy. Then the real surprise was the way she accepted the situation. I don't want to lie and say it's my sex game because it's not. It's them. Her small family of cousins, they calm her down. When Dabula and I were talking she wasn't wearing the sour look on her face even though Fanele was here and she knew. She was calm and happy which I think it was because Dabula was there.

My thoughts go as far as the first time we were married and I told her we were going to live in Durban. She didn't say anything at all but when the day she was packed and ready to go. In Durban she didn't say anything but fixed the house into a home

while singing along to some songs I've never heard before. It was a while before I heard her laugh while watching TV and she thought I was sleeping. A laugh that should have woke me up but I was too busy to focus on that. I should have made me her safe place. If I had done things right from the start I wouldn't be only learning now that Thembeke is a little freak when horny. The way she was riding me in the backseat shows just that and I loved how she came in her own terms before I came inside her more than once. My erotic thoughts are stopped by realizing that we never used protection at all.

"Shit" I curse quietly and pull out my phone wanting to ask if she is on birth control so we can get the pill if not but Fanele knocks on the window. I'm so caught up in thoughts I didn't even see her approach.

"Sorry" I say after opening the door and put the phone away.

"It's fine. I didn't know you are still here" her stomach seems even bigger than before.

"Yeah I was with Thembeke. Why did you tell her?" I turn the light on so she can see my face clearly.

"Because I knew she might talk some sense into you. I think she did" she smiles like she just found a break through.

"She thinks I should let you keep the baby" I make sure she knows it's not my decision and that she should be grateful to her for this.

"And i'm grateful for that" she continues to smile and brush her pregnancy.

"Why did you tell her the truth? You could have lied and ruined my name" the smile vanishes and she looks at me like she is confused.

"You wanted me to lie?"

"No but you could have. You could have told her we cheated so she dumps me and you and I raise the baby together. Isn't that your plan?" I give her a hard look and hope she gets some kind of effect and show me some fear but she doesn't. She still looks confused and after a moment her face clears off and she laughs a bit.

"Why would I want you to lose a woman you love? Everyone deserves someone who loves them even though at time they hurt them"

"Please don't act all wholly wholly now. If you thought so from the beginning you wouldn't have agreed to this. You and Nobuhle went behind my back with this" I shout and she doesn't even jump.

"No Nqubeko. Nobuhle wanted to do this whether I agreed or not. If I said no she would have hired someone else and still do it. We don't know what that person would have been like. Maybe they would have wanted more than just child support from you. Maybe they would have destroyed your house before you did it yourself" her voice sounds sharp.

"Or maybe had an abortion as soon as they realized it was a scam" I shoot back.

"Okay fine. I'll have the baby and give it to you to kill" she yells her hands going into fists and so close to hitting the car.

"Look. I blame Nobuhle for this but you have to

acknowledge your part in this Fanele. You helped her do this" I try to calm myself down before she has some kind of a fit. I know she has some kind of mental illness but until I know for sure what's going on in her head I have to pull back before I push her over the edge.

"But Nobuhle didn't just randomly pick you Nqubeko in a business section. You willingly slept with her for years. Whatever she did to you, you also had a hand on it because if you were home with your wife she wouldn't have knocked and asked for a sperm" her words hit me hard. She is not lying. I brought Nobuhle into my life when I had a wife at home.

"But still....."

"No. Take some of the blame Nqubeko. You helped the situation too" she even points a finger at me.

"We used condoms. I used condoms so this wouldn't happen" I point her stomach.

"Yeah well it happens when you underestimate women like Nobuhle. You know I used to try and warn you" she look and smile. It's not a vindictive

smile but a pure smile that reaches her eyes and makes them even larger than before.

"No you didn't. You didn't even talk to me Fanele. You were just Fanele's runner and she treated you like crap most of the time" that stings I can see the smile disappearing on her eyes.

"She treated me just fine. I tried so many times to warn you. I even went as far as befriending the waiter in that bar you liked so much. Her name was Thembeke and I used to think it's funny that she was the same shade as your wife, the same body structure with her short legs and that when she smiled her you can only see her four front teeth just like your wife. She was pregnant. I said it seven times that Thembeke is pregnant. That she is having a baby and hope her husband was happy about it. At the time I didn't even know that you weren't on board about the baby thing. Nobuhle made me believe that it was a decision you both made. She cried to me about how it was affecting your relationship that she couldn't conceive and when she asked if I can help I said yes. I just

thought it was odd that you would have a wife and want a child with someone else but hey you rich people do things differently" I think about what she is saying. I even see the waiter in my head. I did think it was such a coincident that she would be Thembeke and have some similarities to my wife but I pushed that off as me feeling guilty about what I was doing.

"You should have spoken up Fanele. Pull me on the side and ask why I'm planning a baby with a side chick"

"We know you wouldn't have heard me. I'm sorry to say this but I think you are not as smart as you appear to be. You don't read between the lines as you should be. You only see things once someone has drawn them out to you" that sounds like an insult. In fact it's an insult but I don't show her that I felt it.

"You don't know much about me Fanele. You only know what I allowed Nobuhle to see. Don't make a mistake of thinking you've figured me out" I warn her but I can tell she is not moved at all.

"I don't need to. In fact I don't give a damn about you. I only want this baby to have a chance in life" she cuddles her belly.

"We need to have some rules"

"For who?"

"You. Since you insist on wanting me involved. I'm not doing half. I will be involved. You will attend the doctor's appointment....."

"Take my medication, continue with my therapy, be around family, eat healthy, do gentle exercises and make sure I deliver a healthy baby" she finishes off for me in a cheerful voice.

"Good. You will also stay away from Thembeke"

"Because you think I want to ruin your relationship? Give it a rest Nqubeko. You are not my type"

I'm left speechless but it takes me few minutes to recover.

"I didn't say I was"

"Good. Can I go now?"

"Wait. How did you end up being related to Thembeke anyway?" I ask and wait for her answer.

"My father is the reason. I guess like everyone else I didn't choose my family. But before you accuse me of forging the relation. They found me not the other way around"

I nod and look at the time. It's late and I still have to drive home.

"We will talk"

"Sharp" she opens the door and get out. I watch as she walk away without even looking back. I need to find her old doctor before talking to the current doctor so I know what exactly I am dealing with. Something tells me that her current doctor might have been in Nobuhle's payroll and if so I need to know. She is having my baby after all.

Chapter 42

Nqubeko.

I'm driving home in high spirit. Things are looking up again and i'm excited I don't even feel the annoyance of the thick fog that covers the whole area. I finally make it home before they are all in bed. I want to brag about having Thembeke back to my life but I can't yet. I have to wait a bit so there is no pressure.

"That grin is telling" says Buhle before she hands me her daughter.

"Why is she still up?" normal babies sleep before 8 pm.

"Don't ask. So how is Thembeke?" She asks before she gives me a bottle to feed this person who should be sleeping.

"She is fine" I turn my attention back to the child so her mother can stop interrogating me.

"And you are driving her car because?" She asks and I look at her. Her laughs makes me realize it was a trick. My face just gave it away that it's really her car.

"I borrowed it" I reply

"Yeah right. We actually saw you in Plaza. You and her. You did not look like a divorced couple" she continue to laugh.

"You were in Plaza today?"

"Yes. I saw you. Me and mum. Get ready for the interrogation tomorrow" she warns and take baby from my arms.

"Thanks for the heads up" I get up and follow her out.

My thoughts are interrupted by Mluleki's call. I answer him as I unlock the door to my own room.

"Hey man"

"You sound excited. I take the trip was a success" he laughs.

"You have no idea. I'm back in business" I can't help myself. It feels like I can face whatever that's coming my way with Thembeke by my side.

"You do know what that means. Right?" His tone is back to seriousness. He is about to burst my bubbles I can feel it.

"What?"

"Loyalty Nqubeko. You can't expect Thembeke to be loyal and then fail to return the favour" sometimes he does act like a big brother but I don't mind. I'm not close to my brothers after all. Between him and my friends, I can say I'm doing very well.

"Of cause I will be loyal"

"Not just being faithful but she needs to know the real you Nqubeko. She is no longer an innocent child you married"

This is worse than I assumed.

"Mlu"

"Don't Mlu me. Jacob is back in town. We don't know what he will bring so Thembeke needs to know everything about you. She needs to know if her life is in danger or not. Everything Nqubeko"

"I hear you. So Jacob is back" my hand automatically feels my gun as if he will pop up right here.

"Yes and he contacted Mthalande and Zindela. We

know he is not back because he misses the beach" I even fail to laugh at that.

"You think he might go for Thembeke?" That thought alone squeezes my heart painfully. I can't have that.

"Cowards have no boundaries Nqubeko. Jacob is a coward. He will go for the weaker part" he warns.

"I'll get Tiko back"

"Good but tell her so she is aware. She needs to know that you don't just carry the gun but you can pull the trigger as well and that sometimes these things do backfire and threaten family" I hear a woman talking to him.

"Okay. Let me not keep you then"

"And i'm about to be extremely busy" he laughs and end the call.

I dial Tiko's number and he answers quickly.

"Sure boss"

"I think I might need to back. Are you in Durban?"

"Yes I'm in Durban. I saw Zipho today and he told me that Jacob is back and he wanted then for some job but he didn't say what it was" explains Tiko

"It's cool. Wait for my call then"

"Sure boss"

I end the call and call Thembeke. Her phone goes to voicemail. My heart starts to wonder but I push that thought away and try again. It rings this time and she answers after a while.

"MaKhumalo"

"Mbonambi" she replies and I can tell she is smiling.

"Are you in bed?"

"Yes and you?" I hear the kids laugh and she laughs too.

"Not yet. Are you warm enough there?"

"Yes I am" she laughs louder than before.

"Good. Say goodnight to your family for me then"

"Nqubeko says goodnight guys" she announces and the kids say goodnight back before they giggle.

"They say goodnight as well" she replies and I find myself smiling.

"Goodnight to you too my love. Dream of me hey"
I expect her to laugh but she doesn't.

"I might just do that. You do the same, okay?"

"I will. I miss you" I whisper and I have no idea why.

"I miss you too. But we will see each other tomorrow"

My phone warns me that the battery is low.

"I love you MaKhumalo"

"There are kids here I can't say that but you know" I imagine her blushing and it makes me hard.

"Okay. I'll call you tomorrow" I end the call and charge my phone. If Jacob thinks he can come for me then he has another thing coming.

Thembeke

I wake up late the next morning. Phili is long gone and the kids too. I fold my blankets and sweep the floor before going to the kitchen.

I find them having breakfast.

"Morning guys" I greet

"Morning" replies Phili as she continues with the tea.

I mix hot and cold water to wash up. "Your phone is on the charger. Hurry up. I'll make breakfast for you" she adds before I walk out. I nod my eyes focusing on the people I see approaching the gate. It's two men and three women.

I walk back to the room before they get closer because it's clear that they are coming here.

Last night I told Phili everything about Nqubeko and Fanele. She was obviously shocked and said it was better that Fanele wasn't staying with us because it would have been awkward. She is not wrong. I

might have convinced Nqubeko to let Fanele keep the baby but deep down it's not exactly a thrilling issue.

I wash up quickly and change the sleep wear to something representable and then go to the kitchen. The kids are playing outside and Dabula is back. I walk in and greet. Two ladies reply while another gives me an accusing look but I don't care about her. Phili offers them tea and the men politely decline. Only one lady says she will have tea only the others don't even bother to reply to her.

"We saw the car. Her and that man acting like lovers" says the man and I stop collecting the dishes to the washing basin and look at them. They are talking about me.

"Then later Fanele goes to the same car. She is pregnant and she hasn't said much about the baby but after she went to the car I asked her if that was the father. She said yes" continues the woman after the man.

"So what exactly is the problem?" Asks Dabula his

voice sounding like it's not coming from him at all. He sound older and threatening.

"We want to know what is she doing with Fanele's boyfriend" the woman replies as if it's an obvious thing.

"Did you talk to Fanele before coming here?" Asks Phili

"Fanele is pregnant Philelwa. You've been pregnant before you know this. Pregnant women need to be protected" replies the second woman not answering Phili's question.

"Well since Fanele didn't tell you. That man is my husband. She knows how she got pregnant me and my husband had nothing to do with it" I reply and they all look at me as if i'm a lamp post that just started talking.

"But you are divorced" someone adds after a moment.

"On paper. In reality, Nqubeko and I are very much still married" I reply and look at my cousins they are both nodding as if to support what I'm saying.

"What do you mean that boy had nothing to do with Fanele?" Ask the man.

"Why don't you ask her? I'm sure she will be happy to explain how she really got pregnant" they look confused and the men mumble something I can't hear clearly.

"What is divorced on paper? It's either you are married or not" says the man out loud.

"Well things don't always work out the way you expect them to. Nqubeko and I are doing things our way" my life has nothing to do with them.

"Your way shouldn't hurt Fanele. She is pregnant and affairs are the last thing she needs right now" preaches the lady no longer drinking her tea.

"Let me guess. Fanele doesn't know about this. You came here to bully us?" Ask Dabula

"No. We came here to sort out what could hurt this family. We just found Fanele. We don't want to lose her because there was this big misunderstanding. Family protect each other" says the man without looking at Dabula.

"So what exactly is threatening this family?" I ask

"That you and Fanele share the man" replies the woman and others nod to agree with them.

"We don't. Nqubeko is my man not hers. Like I said before. Go home and ask Fanele how she got pregnant. That man is not hers. He is mine. Alone" i'm yelling now I can see it in their faces but you know the elders who always think things have to happen their way. These people don't seem convinced that there is nothing magically happening between Nqubeko and Fanele.

"Doesn't matter how it happened. How are you going to cope when the baby comes and Nqubeko has to be the father and you are not the mother?" I think she thinks her words should hurt me because my man is having a baby with someone else. She is not far off. Yes it does hurt but not the way they think it does and I won't give them that satisfaction.

"I won't care" I reply and I see them shaking their heads.

"So you would rather hurt yourself instead of letting

them do this without you?" One of them goes for the kill. I knew it. They are here to tell me to leave Nqubeko for Fanele because Fanele is carrying his baby. All this running around was just for this part.

"Who said i'm hurting myself?"

"But you will be when we take Fanele to his home to report the pregnancy and if their are reasonable family they will want to do a right thing" the man says.

"What right thing?" Ask Dabula.

"Marry Fanele so the baby has both parents" says the man and the women agree.

"So you are here to ask me to break up with Nqubeko so him and Fanele can be together?" Phili gives me the weird look but i ignore her.

"Yes. To keep the peace in this family. You and Fanele are cousins. It won't be right if this issues comes out and you are in a love triangle. You are young. You can still find someone else. Let them do this together" says the woman convinced that she can manipulate me into agreeing with this.

"It's not happening. Nqubeko is mine and i'm keeping him. If that bothers anyone so much i hope they find peace. If there is nothing left to say may i be excused. I need to call Nqubeko and ask him to wash my car before he comes to pick me up" i don't even wait for a reply. I need to tell Nqubeko this. Now i wish i never told him to let Fanele keep the baby. It's not even born yet but already there is drama around it. But if they think i'll just hand him over to her just like that, then they don't know me at all.

Chapter 43

Thembeke.

"Thembeke!!" Nqubeko yelling my name is the reason why I stop yelling at him. "Take a deep breath and tell me what's going on. Slower this time" he adds.

"This family is telling me that i need to let Fanele have you because she is pregnant and that it will

hurt me to see you and her have a baby together....."

"What family" he cuts me off before i can continue.

"Fanele's family" i reply not even wanting to say my family.

"Wow" that's all he says. This makes my anger reach the roof so i end the call before i say something i'll regret to him.

He calls back again and i watch the phone as it rings to voicemail. The message follows and then another call. I do the same again. Who says wow when you tell them something like this? Wow?

"Thembeke" Phili's voice makes me jump. She hurries in and take the ringing phone.

"Don't answer him" i warn her. She looks confused as the phone stops ringing and another message follows.

"And then?" She asks.

"Nqubeko only said wow. Who says wow when you tell him what this family is saying. J ust a fucken

wow. Clearly it makes him happy" i'm yelling at Phili now. It's a good thing that they left otherwise they would be hearing all this anger.

"So you are now ignoring him?" She ask still sounding so calm.

"Yes. How can he say wow unless he is happy about it. Maybe it's their plan so they can be happy together with their baby"

"I thought you said you are willing to learn to trust him Thembeke. Trusting someone involves hearing them out if there is a misunderstanding. Plus you don't want him ti drive all the way here because he can't reach you on the phone" hearing her makes such sense makes mr angry because i should have yelled at him for saying wow.

The phone starts ringing again and this time she hands it to. I answer the call and listen.

"Thembeke"

"Yes" I reply quietly and i hear him exhale.

"What's going on there?"

"The family wants you and Fanele to raise the baby alone" i tell him in a calmer manner and Phili gives me a thumbs up before she walks out.

"What baby?"

"How many babies are you expecting Nqubeko?"

"Sorry Baby. So where is everyone now?" He sounds like he is walking.

"They left. I'm with my cousins now" I reply and I still don't get why he sounds so chilled about it but I don't want to say more.

"And you didn't cry?" This one is unexpected.

"So you thought I had a meltdown in front of them?"

"I'm only asking MaKhumalo"

"No I didn't. I told them they can forget it because no one is getting you from me. If they think I'll just hand you over then they are crazy"

"And you didn't cry while saying that? You are not crying right now?" He asks. I don't get why he is more worried about my reaction. I'm not totally insane you know.

"Of course not. I'm not crying"

"And your cousins were there?"

"Yes. We were all there" I reply with annoyance now.

"I love you Thembeke" that is unexpected at all. We are having a serious conversation here and it has nothing to do with him telling me he loves me.

"I know and now they say you and her should be together. It's about keeping the peace in the family. Can you believe that rubbish?"

"Forget them. Focus here, on your reaction"

"What?" I'm not following at all.

"For the past weeks Thembeke you've been crying non stop and this happens but you are not crying. I'm proud of you my love. That's a major achievement"

"Oh that. Well I wanted to but telling them off was more important. Can you even believe it? You and I saw each other first. How dare they tell me this?"
Now that Nqubeko mentions this I do feel like crying. Not quiet sobs but scream on top of my lungs until

if feels like the anger will exit on my fingers and toes.

"They are crazy Baby and don't worry about it. No one is telling me anything. I'm yours forever"

"Good" I sit on the folded blankets and exhale. We are the family too. Why do this and hide behind keeping the peace?

"MaKhumalo"

"Yes"

"I didn't say start crying. Don't be sad. It won't happen baby I promise" I can tell he sounds alarmed.

"What kind of family is this? We are also their family. Just because we are orphans doesn't mean we should be bullied"

"And you won't be for long. You are not orphans Thembeke. You have me and I'll take care of that mess"

"But still don't hurt the baby Nqubeko. I don't think Fanele sent them. I think they decided alone after

seeing you and her. You know how the adults suddenly think they know it all" I don't want to live with the guilt if Fanele does something about losing her baby. Something about her says 'i'm attached to this baby' but she will do it alone if she thinks her family can ruin my life.

"I won't baby. I do need to talk to the cousins though. Maybe Dabula first and then Philelwa next. There is something I need to understand about that family and how it can be solved" he sounds serious.

"Something like what?"

"Family baby. Your family. Have you had breakfast?" He is avoiding continuing with this topic I can tell.

"I'm no longer hungry. I'll start cooking lunch now"

"Please eat something. For me at least. I'm begging" I can tell he is smiling. I even imagine him looking at me and how he lick his lips when he does this.

"I will. I love you too"

"And my mother says hi. I love you much more

MaKhumalo wam. I'll call you when you are done cooking"

"Tell her I say hi too. Bye Mbonambi"

"And don't worry about that family. In fact forget them. I'll call you later. Bye"

"Bye baby" I end the call and get up.

Nqubeko has to fix this or I'll personally approach Fanele and it won't end well.

Nqubeko

I've been avoiding my mother since breakfast but now I can't avoid her anymore. I know she is dying to lecture me so I zip up my bag and place them in the car before going to see my parents. It's over four hours since I talked to Thembeke but I'll delay a

bit just to give her enough time with her family. The other family issue I'll let them come.

"Knock knock" I say it loud before walking in. My parents have visitors. Two men I don't recognize and now I wish I had waited.

"Good. Sit down" says my father sounding annoyed. I look at my mother and she looks angry.

I sit down on the empty seat and greet the strangers. One of them look at me and I see the resemblance. They look like Dabula.

They reply and I wait for my father to say something.

"So you have a pregnant girlfriend Nqubeko?" Asks my father getting to the point. These people don't waste time at all.

"Not that i'm aware of. Thembeke hasn't told me about any pregnancy" I see my mother giving me a questioning glance.

"So you don't have another woman. Expecting your baby?" Asks my father his voice loaded with warning. It's a good thing that he can't beat me up

anymore because he looks like he wants to give me a real beating right now.

"I really don't. I only have one girlfriend and it's Thembeke" I reply.

"So you are back together for real?" Asks my mother and my father looks like he wants to tell her off but he can't.

"Yes. I begged and she finally agreed. And we are not pregnant yet" I try to figure out how they got here so quickly. How everything was planned so quick? Money is the motivation.

"So you don't know Fanele? She is carrying your child" says one man and my mother gasp.

"No I don't. Did she say she knows me?"

"She is carrying your child" he yells.

"Did you ask her how she got pregnant because I know for sure that I never fucked her"

"Nqubeko!!!!!" yells my father.

"I'm not lying. Fanele claims she is carrying my child but I know that I never fucked her. Ask her

how she got pregnant" I ignore my father.

"We all know how people get pregnant. We can have a DNA test done" he suggests and this makes it final. We are not dealing with small minded rural people. We are dealing with opportunists and I'll be damned if they think they can push me into the corner.

"And if it's my child then what?" I ask.

"You will have to do a right thing" he replies and my father looks at me waiting for an answer.

"And that is what?" I know the answer. I need them to say it.

"Marry her. A child needs a safe and secure home with two parents" the man replies and I laugh out loud.

"Nqubeko" warns my father. I ignore him and stand up.

"I can't believe you people. You don't give a damn about the child. You just want money and you will not get it. I did not sleep with Fanele so forget about

me paying anything. There is no right thing here. In fact if you want a right thing then tell me how you want for Thembeke because that's the only woman i'm willing to pay and have for the rest of my life. Not anyone else"

My mother smiles and look down. She wants Thembeke. In my mother's eyes Thembeke will always be the little girl I married and she wants her to be happy.

"Sit" says my father.

"I respect you father but this is not something I want to deal with. Thembeke is waiting for me as we speak. I came to say goodbye. About Fanele. Ask her how she got pregnant and when it's done stop harassing Thembeke and her cousins. Since the family don't give a damn about them so they are now my responsibility and if anyone tries to bully them they will have me to deal with" I know I've gone too far but I don't care. Phili and Dabula give Thembeke the unconditional love she never got and they keep her calm. I need them to be safe and protected so Thembeke will be happy too.

My mother follows me out. I turn to her and she looks emotional.

"Treat her well Nqubeko. She is very special. No more tears and if she is crying be the one who wipes the tears. Don't be the reason why she is crying. When she is ready she will marry you again" she hold my hands and smile. I smile back and kiss her cheek. It a blessing and I have to make her proud.

Chapter 44

Nqubeko.

There is no sound. Anyone walking in would think there is nothing happening unless they see my head between Thembeke's legs and her hands closed around the sheet. Her stomach rises and fall but she can't move her waist because my hands are pressing her down. Only when my lips loses contact that she protest and open her eyes. She was so close but I didn't want her to finish. Not before I am

inside her. I kiss her against and her legs tremble. That's my cue so I move up and sink in with one thrust. Her nails sink on my skin as she climax. I don't waste time. I hit her deep and hard until we both come and she is holding me so tight like she think I might vanish.

"That's how you say good morning" I whisper in her ear and she laughs. A breathless laugh that makes her whole body tremble.

"Good morning Mbonambi" she replies and continue to hold me.

I don't move instead I get this intense feeling on my shoulders. The missed opportunities, the pain of losing a pregnancy we both never got a chance to know about and the pain of watching two young kids bring out the best on my own wife. I should be her source of strength. Someone who comforts her broken heart. I never even held her after she lost the baby. Now we are here and I fear messing up again. If she walks away I won't survive. If her family take her away I will never get her back.

"Never leave me MaKhumalo" I say the words out loud and hold her even tighter. She hold me back and says nothing. I don't need words. She came back. That's enough for me. Tears fill my eyes and Thembeke cross her ankles around me. She locks me in and the tears drop. I'm feeling weak and everything is heavy.

"I won't leave unless you make me leave" her voice is quiet and she is now calm.

"I love you" I add

"I love you too" she replies.

When she finally unlocks her legs I roll us over and pull her over my chest. We have an hour to rest before we need to get ready for work. We lie quietly until her breathing goes soft but her hand doesn't let go of me. I'm glad she wants to go for therapy. With her greedy family, Fanele, J acob and us trying to work things out she will definitely need someone to talk to even if it's not me.

My phone vibrates and I reach for to before it rings and disturb Thembeke. It's Khethelo.

"Sho mfethu" I lower my voice.

"You are still in bed?" He asks

"Yes I am" I reply my other hand busy brushing Thembeke's head.

"Are you with Thembeke?"

"Yes. What's up?"

"Vusi tried to commit suicide last night. His landlord found him just in time and stopped him from swallowing a second handful of pills"

"Where is he?" I should have checked on him instead of making calls and sending messages. I was too busy trying to fix my life.

"I'll send you the location. I'm there now. I'll update you"

"Thanks man" he ends the call. I put the phone down and hold Thembeke before closing my eyes. I have to do things better this time.

I wake her up after an hour. She has to get ready for work and i need to call Tiko so he can start and i need to go see Vusi.

"Morning" she smiles and kiss my neck.

"Morning and you might want to stop doing that MaKhumalo before you are late for you first day back" I warn as she continues to plant kisses in my neck.

"I can be very fast Mbonambi" she laughs and kiss earlobe.

"In that case why don't you let me fix you up" I pull her back and kiss her neck. She continues to giggle and takes her top off. Her nipples are firm as they press on my chest. I rise for the occasion and she immediately sink on me. I stop her when she tried to move. I need her to face the other way. She follows where I'm leading and her ass in facing me. I push her forward and get up. She kneels down and I push her chest down before pulling her ass up. She

obeys and I press her swollen warmth. She raises her feet and her hand closes around the cover.

"You want this?" I ask my hand pressing her sensitive spot. She mumbles something I can't hear.

"You want this Thembeke?" I ask louder this time and sink deeper.

"Yes" she replies her voice trembling.

"You want it how?"

"Fast and hard" she replies her voice full of confidence. I do as told. It's fast and hard. She keeps pushing back to me as if she doesn't want any delays. When she reaches her orgasm I slap her ass hard and she falls forward. I balance myself and continue until i'm done and she continue to moan my name and her body shuddering with the after shocks.

"Thank you Mbonambi" she speak as I try to catch my breath.

"I love you" I reply and kiss her spine. I'm never letting her go.

Thembeke.

I'm exhausted as I put my shoes on and grab my bag. Morning sex was good but next time I won't minutes before I need to go to work.

"You will your coffee on the way" says Nqubeko as I walk to the lounge. He is holding a travel mug and I am grateful because I need it.

"Thanks. I think I have it all now" I hand him the keys. I know he is driving so there is not use arguing about it.

He opens the door and hold it for me. I walk out and stop when I spot a car at the gate.

"That's Tiko" says Nqubeko.

"Who is Tiko" I wait for him to lock up and give me

my house keys.

"Protection. I'll explain in the car" he replies and my heart falls. It's been a good morning but clearly it won't last.

I follow him to the car and get in. He starts driving and the car at the gate also moves but doesn't go anywhere. We all wait till the gate closes before we drive away and the car follows.

"So who is Tiko?" I ask while looking at the car behind us.

"Someone named J acob tried to cross me a while back. I turned him down and he got pissed. He is back into the country and until I know that he is not here for some petty revenge Tiko will be with you 24/7"

I look at him when he says 24/7. That's a lot of time.

"24/7?"

"Yes. He will wait outside the toilet if you need to go. He will watch you even at work. He will stay with you in the house when i'm not there. J ust until I

know that J acob is not planning anything" he explains and his tone says he is not changing his mind.

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"Continue with your day as normal as you can. Ignore him" he makes it sound so easy. How do you ignore a person around you 24/7?

"What did you do to J acob?" It must be pretty big for all this to happen.

"I refused to help him steal some tech things he wanted to use in the black market"

"So you think he will hurt me to hurt you?". He nodded and held my hand.

"I want you to be safe always Thembeke" he adds after a moment.

"I see. So how do I explain a man around me at work?"

"Protection. I talked to your boss last night and explained the situation. He doesn't mind. Just ignore him" if only it was so easy as Nqubeko made

it seem.

"And at night. Where does he sleep?"

"If i'm not there he will sleep on the couch. If i'm there then I'll take over"

"I feel like I should be protesting this but somehow I feel like it's just useless to argue" I look outside the window.

"I want to be sure that you are safe Thembeke. Tiko will take instructions from you from time to time. He will drive unless you tell him not to but still if he senses danger please let him drive and listen to him" he instruct.

"You make if sound like you won't around" I look at him.

"I will be but obviously I can't come to work with you" the car comes into a sudden stop and Nqubeko pushes me down. I hear tyres and something loud follows. He doesn't remove his hand over me and I can't get up to see what's going on. There is some yelling. Someone is telling people to call an ambulance and women scream.

"Nqubeko" I complain and push myself up.

"Sorry" he let's me go and I sit up straight. It's a car accident. A car and a taxi. The car is wrecked but the taxi doesn't look that bad and people are being helped out of the taxi.

"I think the driver lost control" says Nqubeko.

We can't continue now and we can't reverse because there are other cars behind us. We stop and Nqubeko opens his door.

I pull out my phone and try to call the police. I don't see anyone with a phone in the ear. They are taking photos instead.

I get out too while holding to go through. The network is a bit weak in this area. The call gets cut off and I look at my phone. It says no network coverage.

"Nqubeko can't you call the police" I ask Nqubeko.

He pulls out his phone and then look at me. I see his eyes go wide and then I'm being pushed hard against the car just as something burst behind me.

Someone yells and a hand shoves me back into the car. I land on the seat and cover my head as people scream and more guns go off. The chaos lasts for a while before everything is quiet. I slowly raise my head and I don't see Nqubeko. I see several people on the ground and then approaching sirens.

"Are you okay?" The man opens the door and ask. I nod and look at him. He nods too and close the door. I push the other side and watch in horror as Nqubeko is laying so still in the pool of blood.

Chapter 45

Thembeke

It's been the longest four days of my life. I haven't slept. They chased me away twice saying I need to rest but I can't rest. Not when Nqubeko is still in the coma and I'm waiting for him to wake up. He can't leave me right now. Not when we are doing so much better.

"I brought you some food" says Nqubeko's mother handing me a lunch box. I don't protest. I am hungry. Eating is the only thing I am able to do since this happened. I can eat but I can't sleep. I stay up until the sun comes up and I have to come back here.

"Thank you" I put my feet down and open the lunch box. It's sample and beans with beef curry.

"I will stay with him while you go home for some rest" she adds before she pulls a chair and sit.

"I'm fine. I took a nap earlier" I lie. I don't want to go home. Not when I won't sleep and I keep seeing him laying in that pool of blood.

"Sleeping on the chair is not kind to the body. You need to rest on the bed. Take some sleeping pills. We should ask the doctor for some pills" she suggests.

"They won't work. They gave me some the first day. I didn't sleep"

"Maybe they will work now. You are tired" she presses and I know she won't give up.

"I'll go in the next hour" I reply and start eating because I can feel my stomach grumbling.

When the hour passes I get up and kiss Nqubeko's cheek before leaving. She promises to call if anything happens. I'm grateful for her support because it does feel like i'm losing my mind.

"I need some milk. Do you mind if we go to the mall?" I ask Tiko as we leave the hospital.

"No problem" he replies.

I don't know how Nqubeko knows this man but he is always quiet. He does everything I ask and update me on everything that's happening. I know it was an attack. Six people died including a taxi driver and the taxi association got involved and hunted Jacob and his gang. Tiko says it's over now but not for me. Nqubeko hasn't woken up and the doctors keep saying we have to wait until he wakes up.

We head to the mall and buy the milk because Nqubeko's mother loves her tea with milk.

My phone rings and it's Pretty. She calls me often since this happened and even though nothing she says makes me feel better but I appreciate her call.

"I'm outside your house. Are you in?" She asks after greeting.

"I'm at the mall. I'll be there in few minutes. If you don't mind waiting" I reply.

"I don't. See you now" she ends the call. I could use some company right now. There is no way I could sleep right now anyway.

Tiko drives us back to the house and we find Pretty waiting. I let her in and tell Tiko to stay close. I don't relax if I don't see him just in case something happens.

"Hey girl" she hugs me tight.

"Hey" I hug her back before she greets Tiko who replies politely before he unlocks the house.

We follow him and go straight to the kitchen leaving Tiko in the lounge.

"How is he today?" She asks as she helps unpack

the few things I bought. She also brought a bottle of wine.

"No change. We are still waiting" I reply and take out the glass. I need a drink.

She opens the wine and pour the glass for me and one for herself.

"How about you? How are you coping?" She pulls out a chair and sit. I lean against the fridge and look at her.

"I fear that they will call me and say I should come say goodbye. I can't Pretty. Not now" tears fill my eyes and I don't blink them away. Crying doesn't help but not crying also doesn't help. It doesn't make me stronger.

"They won't. He will pull through" her words don't give me comfort. I know she doesn't know that for sure. She hope it does like everyone else.

"I'm going to resign"

"What? Why?" She is shocked.

"Because I haven't worked Pretty. I can't keep on

taking leave. Let's face it. I'm not ready for work. Not with Nqubeko still in that place" my phone starts ringing. I put down the glass and go to answer it in the lounge. It's the therapist's office.

"Hello" I answer.

"Hi. It's....."

"I know and I've been meaning to call. Can I reschedule my appointment again?" I should say cancel but I don't have the heart to say I am not coming. At least when I reschedule it doesn't say I'm a quitter just yet.

"Actually Dr Ngcobo would like to speak to you"

I'm surprised. Why would she want to talk to me?

"About what?" I ask wondering if she is on Nqubeko's payroll beyond the therapy.

"I'll put you through" she doesn't wait for me to answer before I hear the beep and then someone picks up.

"Miss Khumalo" she sounds like she knows me.

"Hi"

"Is it possible for us to meet? For few minutes" she asks.

"Right now?" I didn't know that therapists can now call and arrange meetings before you are a patient.

"Yes. Right now if you are not busy"

"Okay" I should say I am busy but it's too late. She ask for the address or a place I'd like to meet at. I give her the home address and she says she will be here in few minutes. I end the call and go back to Pretty.

"Girl. Dr Ngcobo is coming here. I have no idea why" I pick up my glass and gulp down the wine

"Oh. I forgot to tell you. If you cancel or postpone she personally comes to you" I stare at her in disbelief "Look. Just tell her that your man is in a coma and you will make another appointment when he is better. She will totally understand"

"Isn't this like an invasion of privacy?"

"Relax. She is old and you know how old people are. They worry about us in that way. She just wants to

make sure that you are not hiding away or having suicidal thoughts" Pretty is all calm and collected about this.

"And the wine? Won't she think i'm an alcoholic?"

"You are not. You worry a lot Thembeke. She knows that a glass of wine is good every now and then" she pours herself another glass and gulp it down in one go "Look, call me when she is gone. I don't want to make you both uncomfortable by being around"

I nod and wash the glasses.

"Thembeke, you will be okay. Nqubeko will be okay too"

"Thanks girl" we hug and then she leaves.

Dr Ngcobo is not how I imagined her. She looks like a stylish grandmother without the grey hair. She is

dressed in blue matching skirt and shirt. Her hair is short and black but her face does say i'm old and I've seen a lot. We exchange greeting and I notice that she doesn't look around the house. She stares at me as if she is reading my mind.

"How are you?" She asks as I put down her glass of water.

"I'm fine. Well, breathing because i'm still alive" I sit down opposite her.

"I am glad to finally meet you. When you postponed for the second time I was a bit worried. The you didn't call to confirm this morning I was even more worried. I know that you youngsters tend to change your minds quickly whenever you feel a bit stronger when in fact that strength is for you to seek the help you need" her tone is kind and seems to match her face. Something about her reminds me of my own grandmother. She was old and kind. Whenever you were unhappy she had the face that made you want to curl up in her lap.

"My ex husband is in a coma. We are still waiting for

him to wake up" I tell her the truth.

She closes her eyes for a moment and then look at me.

"That's hectic. I can only imagine what you must be going through. So you are alone?"

"No. His mother is at the hospital as we speak. We take shifts. Only I can't even get some sleep when i'm here. I'm so afraid"

"That you will get a call that says the worst has happened?" It's like she is reading my mind.

I nod and then look down because my eyes are filled with tears.

"If he dies I don't think I can be okay. Not now"

"You said he is your ex husband" I look up and she is looking at me.

"We were married. For years and got divorced few months ago. It was an arranged marriage" I don't give her all details. This is not a counseling session.

"Ah I see. So what are the doctors saying about him?"

"He lost so much blood. The bullet missed his heart but another went through his neck. It's a miracle that he made it to the hospital. Now we have to wait for him to wake up" I try not to repeat the exact words as the doctor said them to me.

"It's must be exhausting and scary" she has no idea how scared i am.

"Sometimes i feel like i can't breath. I can't sleep" i wipe the tears in my eyes.

She opens her handbag and pull out a tissue.

My phone rings just as she hands the tissues to me. It's a landline so i have to answer.

"Excuse me" I pick the phone up feeling my heart slams painfully against my chest. She nods and i answer the call.

"Is this Miss Khumalo? Miss Thembeke Khumalo" asks a woman in the other end.

"Yes this is her. Is this about Mr Mbonambi?"

"Yes Ma'am. The doctor would like to see you. Can you come to the hospital please"

"Please tell me. Did something happen?" I ask desperate for any news now but I don't want it to be death.

"I can't say over the phone. I'm sorry"

"Okay" I end the call and lean against the wall as my knees feel so weak. What if they want to switch the machines off? I cannot lose him. Not now.

Chapter 46

Thembeke

Dr Ngcobo wants to drive me to the hospital but I decline because Tiko is driving and I don't want her asking what is the relationship. She makes me promise to come see her even if it's just to talk. I will but for now I have to face this moment.

"Are you okay?" Ask Tiko when we arrive in at the hospital.

"I'm scared" I try to take a deep breath. It doesn't work.

He nods and wait as I do few more breathing exercises but they don't work.

"Let's go" I walk in and he follows.

I can see the nurse looking at me as she talks to another. My feet gets heavy but I drag myself to the reception area. The lady is on the phone but she smiles at me.

I watch as she writes on the piece of paper and push it towards me. It says "Go in"

I stare at it and then look at her so she can confirm if she really means this. She nods and continue to tell the person on the line about the appointment.

"Thank you" I smile and almost run down the passage. Tiko follows as we both hurry down the hall.

The guy we left to watch Nqubeko and his mother is not there so we walk in and his mother is talking but she stops when I walk in. I stare at the bed and his eyes are closed but then a smile spread in his lips.

"Come closer" says his mother as my eyes start

leaking again. Its the happy tears now. I don't mind.

He open his eyes wider and the smile grow even wider and then he extend a hand towards me. I walk up close and hold his dry hand into mine before laying my head down on his good shoulder.

"I've missed you" he whispers before resting his chin on my head.

"I've missed you much more. You scared me" I whisper and try to wipe the tears on my face.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. Let me look at you" he requests and I oblige.

I'm all teary and ugly but I don't care. He is awake at last.

"You look tired. You haven't been sleeping" it's not a question. He knows me too well.

"I couldn't sleep"

"I'm awake now. I need you to rest. Come close I want to tell you something" he gentle pull me close until his lips are close to my ears.

"You look sexy and I can't wait to come home fuck

you again" he whispers and kiss my ear. I let out a giggle even forget that there is an elder in this room.

"I missed that laugh much more" he adds.

The door opens and the doctor walks in. I stand up straight and try not to smile like a stupid girl with a crush.

"I'm glad to see you smiling Miss Khumalo" he turns to Nqubeko "She did give us a scare for a bit"

I laugh. He is right. There was a time when I was sure that I was going crazy.

"I'm better now" I reply and hold Nqubeko's hand.

"That's good. He is doing much better. The complications we feared are not there at all. But he does need to stay here for more monitoring" explains the doctor.

"How long?" He asks.

"You just woke up Nqubeko. You cannot be rushing already" says his mother her tone disapproving.

"Thank you mah. He needs to stay for few more days. Don't forget that you are still going to be in

pain Mbonambi. We will only let you go once we are sure that you are well enough to recover at home" says the Doctor.

Nqubeko close his eyes and squeeze my hand. I squeeze it back.

"Okay fine. I'll stay" he replies after a moment.

The Doctor excuse himself after warning us about giving him enough time to rest. His mother also leave wanting to call home. I use this chance to lay my head on Nqubeko's arm and tell myself that he is back. Awake and back to me.

"Its still me" he says when I touch his skin again and again.

"Thank you for coming back. I was so scared" I press my face on his hand.

"I heard you cry MaKhumalo. That's all I could hear while I was laying there unable to tell you to calm down" he closes his eyes and breath.

"I am calm now" I smile even though I am crying. He wipe the tear with his thumb and touch me cheek.

"I love you"

"I love you too" I reply.

We both look at the door when it opens. To my surprise it's Fanele. Her stomach walks in first and she looks really good. The pregnancy loves her. When I look at Nqubeko he is also looking at her and there is no annoyance on his face.

"Hi" she greets and smile warmly towards Nqubeko.

"Hi" I reply while he nods.

"I didn't mean to interrupt. I just thought....."

Nqubeko cuts her off.

"It's fine" he speaks while looking at her.

"How are you feeling? I tried to come see you but they said family only" she walks closer while smiling "But today the lady said I can come in"

"Thanks for coming. I'm going to be okay" he smiles back and I can't help but feel jealous as I watch this. She is gorgeous and she is carrying his baby.

"That's good. I had a check up yesterday. If you guys would like to see the scan" she looks at me her

eyes shining with excitement. I expect Nqubeko to say no but he does the opposite and says yes.

"It's a boy" she smiles and open her handbag. She pulls out the photos and hand them to me. I pass them to Nqubeko who stares at them and smile.

"Thank you. So everything is going well?" He asks while looking at the photo with such pride.

"Yes everything is well" she smiles and cuddle her tummy.

"That's good" he doesn't take his eyes off the photo.

Fanele doesn't stay long but her arrival seems to ruin the mood somehow. Nqubeko tries to talk to me about life in general but my heart is no longer there. The way he looked at her bothers me so much. He almost died. What if that experience makes him want the woman who is carrying his

child. What if he leaves me for her?

"Thembeke" his voice snaps me out of my thoughts.

"Sorry what?" I look at him.

"You are far away. What's wrong?" He asks.

"Nothing i'm just tired" I lie.

"Sleep next to me. We are going to fit" he tries to shift but it's not easy.

"It's fine. I'll go home and sleep" I get up but he holds my hand.

"Talk to me. Something is up"

"It's about Fanele and her baby. You look like you've had a change of heart" I guess it's a surprise question because he let go of my hand and look away.

"Yes I have" he replies after a moment.

"You want the baby?" I ask.

"Yes I want the baby"

"What about his mother?" I ask and stare at him. He

doesn't look at me. He looks away and I can tell that it means yes.

Chapter 47

Thembeke

I can't believe it. After everything that we've gone through now Nqubeko wants to do this to me.

"So you almost die and wake up wanting another woman?" I yell while my eyes are already tearing. He can not break my heart like this.

"I don't want her. At least not that way" he replies and pull me back to him. I land on the bed and my head on his shoulder. "It's you I want. Always and for ever" he adds before his arm goes around me. So I'm crying for nothing.

"So what does this mean?" I wipe the tears and sit up so I can see his face.

"You are right. I almost died Thembeke and that child in Fanele's womb would have been the only

thing left for you to remember me by. I have to take care of them" he coughs and it's a reminder that he is not well at all. I can see the pain on his face as he does so.

"I should let you get some rest" I try to get up but he holds my hand.

"Not yet" he replies between the cough. I pick up the glass and bring it close to his lips.

"Have a sip" his eyes focus on me as he takes a sip and swallow.

"Thanks "

I nod and put the glass down.

"So I want to take care of Fanele and the baby. As a father I have to do this" he continues.

"I see. So what about me?"

"What about you? You are my Queen Thembeke. Fanele and the baby come after you MaKhumalo. Don't even doubt that" he sounds serious. But then again Nqubeko cheated on me for years while he was acting like a busy man.

"I see doubt in your eyes" he speaks when I remain quiet.

"You will never cheat on me again?" I ask. I know I sound like a stuck record but it's something that's inside me now. He planted the seed so it's partly his fault.

"Yes. I will never ever cheat on you again Thembeke. I promise"

I nod and put my phone on the drawer next to him before laying down on the little space next to him. He shifts gentle until I can fit and I try not to rest the whole weight of my head on his shoulder.

"I thought I lost you Nqubeko. I thought I was going crazy"

"You are not my love. I've been given another chance so I have to use it right. Do right by you and Fanele. But I need you to be okay with it"

I don't reply instead I close my eyes and try not to see Fanele with her beautiful pregnancy in front of me.

"Please Mzikilazi wam. Say something" he begs his hand going up and down my arm.

"So supporting her will mean what exactly?" I ask without opening my eyes.

"Going to the check ups with her. Helping her with the shopping and checking up on her every now and then. We can do it together" he suggests and I can tell from his breathing that he wants me to say yes I'll join in.

"Loving you Nqubeko means having to trust that you mean it when you say you won't cheat. I trust you so you will do that with her" I know deep down I don't want it to be like that but I also don't want to be the third wheel in this. The poor Thembeke who has to watch Nqubeko help the mother of his child. People won't even see it as that. Nope, I'll be that woman who has no choice but run after the man because she fears that left alone they will make another baby.

"What about you?" He asks his hand no longer brushing my arm.

"I have you. That's all that matters" I reply and feel my body get calm. I'm tired and I haven't been sleeping for days. I need some rest.

Nqubeko

I can feel her body go soft that she has fallen asleep. She is tired. It's the first thing I noticed when I saw her.

The door opens just in time as I try pull the sheet over Thembeke.

"She can't sleep here" complains the nurse.

"Please let her sleep. She is tired"

She wants to complain but stops when she notice that I'm trying to cover her up.

"Let me do it" she takes over and pull the sheet over her. I can feel Thembeke shifts closer to me.

"Thank you"

The nurse nods and walk over to my left side to change the drip.

"She must be excited to have you back"

"I'm happy to be back to her" I reply.

She doesn't say anything but she does look like she wants to say something.

"What is it?" I ask so she can speak up.

"Nothing. It's just that it's highly unusual for a man to love his woman like this. Most men cheat and lie. Even when you love them you still fear what you don't"

I really don't know how to answer her. I cheated on Thembeke when she was a loyal wife. I lied to her repeatedly so I'm not far from most men.

"It's not always roses. But I've been given a second chance so I have to try and do it right this time" that's all I come up with without revealing my life to

her.

Vusi and Khethelo walks in just in time to save me from further conversation. The nurse finishes up and leave. Vusi looks better than I assumed but he is thinner than I remember.

"Hey man" he greets and sit down.

"I need some coffee" says Khethelo before he rushes out. He wants to give us some privacy.

We stay in silence for few minutes before we both speak at the same time.

"Sorry. You first" I say and he looks away for a moment.

"I was being stupid and I shouldn't have done it"

"But you did and we almost lost you man. Why do us like that? You know that we are open about everything Vusi. Why not say something?" I shouldn't yell but i'm annoyed. He almost died.

"I didn't know how to say it. Mzamo knew and understood. You were always busy trying to fix your own house Nqubeko. I just felt trapped"

"And you are not anymore?" I ask and he shake his head.

"My mother was a real surprise. She cried and said she has been waiting for me to speak up for years. She never imagined burying me before I came out" there is sadness in his tone.

"I hope you apologized for scaring her"

"Yes I did now she wants to feed me back to shape and keeps asking me when I am bringing him home" he smiles but the sadness is there.

"Mzamo would have been the him you were bringing?" I ask and he nods.

"He was always telling me to stop hiding. Just come out so we can enjoy the relationship. But I wouldn't come out Nqubeko. It frustrated him and now he is gone" he wipes the tears in his eyes and I blink mine away.

"He was a real surprise. No goodbyes" I add bitterly.

"You almost did the same. She was wrecked" he points at Thembeke.

"I can still hear her cries" it was going to take me forever to get over them. "At one point the nurses were thinking of putting her to bed but she wouldn't hear it. You need to love her right Nqubeko"

"I will" I look at her even though I can only see the top of her head. She deserves the best from me from now on.

"And J acob wrote his own ending. Everyone knows that you don't poke the taxi industry and expect them to take it laying down" he says and we both laugh.

"Too bad I didn't get a chance to cut his throat myself" I lower my voice. Thembekeka doesn't know me that way.

"It's quiet now. Khethelo said so"

"It's good. When I get out of here we are going on a vacation. Me and my girl. J oin us. I'm thinking a cruise. So there will be other people there"

He laughs and I think we might get our Vusi back.

"I might come. I need time to relax and see things"

"And get some therapy Vusi" I advise.

"My mother even went as far as confirming that i did book an appointment. Relax. It won't happen again" he smiles and i smile back. Never thought i'll have a gay friend but i'm fine with it. We've been friends for years.

"Good. I still need you around. You are my brother Vusi" i look at him.

"Thank Nqubeko. It means a lot...."

Khethelo walks in with three coffees.

"This one is way better" he hands one to Vusi and puts down the other "when she is up she will love it"

"She snores" teases Vusi.

"It's sexy though. I love it" i reply and they laugh.

"Yeah we can bet on it. The tiny Thembeke" says Khethelo looking at her.

"And she can sleep" says Vusi.

"She is tired. It's been hectic" I reply.

"So we are all going on vacation" asks Vusi.

"But everyone is paying for themselves" I reply and we laugh. Sometimes we are stupid like that but we are friends.

Thembeke suddenly sits up before she runs out covering her mouth. Khethelo follows her.

"And now?" Asks Vusi.

I have no idea and I don't reply until Khethelo comes back saying she is violently throwing up in the toilet.

"What?" I ask when they both stare at me as if they expect me to have answers.

"Maybe it something she ate" says Vusi before looking at Khethelo who laughs and agree. It takes me a moment to realise what they mean.

"Fuck"

Chapter 48

Thembeke

It over a week later. Nqubeko is back home but

taking things slowly because he is not 100% well but he can move around freely. I asked him to move in with me so I can take care of him and let his mother go back home. He didn't hide his excitement. When I told him I've resigned he was excited and said he will help me get another when I wanted to go back. I was going to go back some day but for now I wanted to focus on therapy, him and my family. I'm seeing Doctor Ngcobo in a minute. When Nqubeko woke up I called her and told her he was awake. She was happy and asked me if I wanted to make an appointment for our first session. I said yes and that's today. I'm waiting in her room. It's a beautiful and inviting room that doesn't look like an office. There is a large maroon couch and another smaller couch next to it. A comfortable chair away from the couch. A large plant pot in the corner. A balcony secured by a glass but it gives you a clear view of the Durban Harbor. Then a filing cabinet, her desk and then beautiful large paintings with different colours. The room is inviting and calming.

"Sorry about that" she walks in take her jacket off before she hangs it up behind the door.

"It's okay. I wasn't waiting for too long" I smile and sit up straight.

She looks at me and smile back.

"How are you feeling?" She asks and I don't think the therapy has began. I think it's a general greeting.

"I'm fine. Happy he is well and back home. It was really scary" I reply hearing my voice tremble for a bit.

"He is doing well?" She walks around her table and opens a drawer.

"Yes he is doing way better. But he is not back to work yet" I reply and move from the large couch I'm sitting on. I pick the chair opposite her so we can look at each other.

"That's good. Are you happy to have him home?" Her eyes are on me.

I feel hot around the face. She is a therapist so I can tell her about Nqubeko and not feel shy that she will

think i'm being a weirdo.

"I'm very excited. Sometimes I wake up at night and check if he is really there. I hope it will go away sometimes"

She smiles and sit down. I expect her to write down in the notebook but she doesn't. I guess we haven't began enough for her to take notes.

"You've been together for a long time?"

"We were married. Had some problems and got divorced. Then he came back and told me he loves me. So we tried again. Not to be married now but to have a relationship" I explain and watch her face just in case she sees it as stupidity but she doesn't show anything but a warm smile.

"Because it was an arranged marriage before?"

"Yes. I was young when we got married. Now I'm older and I can decide what I want in a relationship. He agreed and said we will do it my way"

"Your way being?" She asks and this time she does open a note book and write something down.

"Go on dates, have fun and take things slow"

"When you were married it was different?" She continues to write down.

"Yes it was" I reply and let my arms rest on my lap. I notice her eyes follow this and then she write something down.

"How was it different?"

I take a deep breath and explain to her how we were like two people into some kind of agreement and we both kept our end of the deal. I cleaned and made sure everything was okay at home. He provided like a husband should.

"What changed that?" She asks as I finish explaining.

"The woman he was cheating with confronted me in front of people. She called me a witch and said I had bewitched him into marrying me. I was heartbroken because I was thinking we were better now. I mean those days we were talking more and I loved him" tears fill my eyes and she opens the drawer and pull out a box of tissues.

"Thank you" I take two and wipe my eyes "To be honest we were living two separate lives for so long sometimes I did think he was cheating but told myself he was too available for me so I was being ridiculous"

"Too available how?"

"I mean he travelled a lot but whenever I called he came home quickly. If he wasn't traveling he was always checking up on. Doing shopping for groceries whenever we were getting low. When I was writing exams he was very helpful around the house and allowed me to study. If it was raining he drove me to campus and back. For all those things I thought he wouldn't find time to cheat but I was wrong" I wipe my eyes as the tears continue to come harder.

"If you hadn't married Nqubeko how do you think your life would have turned out?" It's a question I never asked myself after I was married. Before I was married I thought about it a lot.

"I think I would have found a job in Plaza. Earned a

living and then moved to Johannesburg for better opportunities" that's how things were done back home. If you didn't get out fast enough you would have been a mother soon and then get married if you are lucky or end up being someone who stays at home and wait for the working family members to visit.

"But then you got married. After you were married did you wonder about what else was there?"

"Not really. When I got married I was told that from now on my life will belong to Nqubeko. I was told he will tell me what he wanted and I had to do everything he asked. Listen and obey him all times" she nods and write it down.

"And was it like that?" She asks

"Yes and no" she writes down and give me a 'you can continue look'

"Yes because I waited for him to lead me to everything. No because he never did demand much"

"You say much. Did he demand a bit?"

"Not really demand. But I knew that he expected sex and his food cooked and his shirts ironed. I did all that"

"What happened if you hadn't done what was expected?"

"He didn't yell. He asked for it. If I was too busy with school work he did it himself or went on without" her eyes stay on my face for a bit before she smiles and write it down.

"Tell me about growing up. How was it like?" She asks.

I can't help but smile. My growing up means my grandmother.

"I was raised by my grandmother. She was the sweetest woman ever. She was kind and loving. I never knew my mother but she never make me feel like I don't have mother. She was loving and I felt safe with her" memories come flooding and I keep talking about her until the phone rings. I stop talking and look at the clock. Our time is up and I've spent it all talking about my grandmother.

She speaks for a second before the door opens and Nqubeko walks in.

"Nqubeko" I look up in surprise. I left him home.

"Hi" he greet the Doctor before smiling at me "I waiting for too long so I thought I should surprise you" he doesn't even sit down instead he looks around.

"Mr Mbonambi. It's nice to meet you" says Dr Ngcobo offering a hand.

He doesn't hesitate to shake her hand.

"We are done for the day Thembeke. I'll have my assistant confirm our next appointment" she smile and I smile back. I love this woman already.

Nqubeko

I expect Thembeke to freak out that I came after but she seems calm. The honest truth is that I came to check the Doctor out. To see the kind of person she is and also make her see that I'm a supportive person. I can't right all my wrongs but from now on I want to make things right.

"So you came to fetch me?" She asks as we leave the Doctor's office.

"Yes and asked Tiko to take the car back. We will drive together" I hold her hand.

"That's okay. We have to go past the shops. I need some ice cream" I nod and look at her. I don't have a heart to say she should take a pregnancy test. I have to wait it out until she sees it herself.

"So you only want ice cream?" I ask just to fish out if the cravings have gone past ice cream.

"And some cookies. I'll do some workouts tomorrow" she giggles.

"But a bit of weight on you will be just fine"

"You just want me to be fat Nqubeko. Don't be

smart" she hit my shoulder playfully.

She really has no idea and I won't be first to say it.

"Okay fine. Let's go get some junk food and go home" I open her door and close it when she is sitting comfortably.

"Admit it. You came to check Dr Ngcobo" she asks as I get in.

"To get you and see the Dr Ngcobo. She looks fine" I reply truthfully.

"Yeah she is sweet. She reminds me of my grandmother. Only she is stylish" she laughs.

"You like her?"

"I love her" she replies and sit back before she puts her feet up.

"Because it's my car" I point her tiny feet.

"Yes"

I laugh and look at her. I don't even know why it took me this long to see how much I love her.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" She looks at

me.

"Because I love you"

"I love you too" she looks outside the window and her eyes follows a man who is selling tomatoes on the side of the road.

"You want them?"

"Can we get them? I could make some soup when we get home"

"No problem" I stop the car and the man comes closer before she buys three bags of tomatoes.

The man is thankful and I can see that Thembeke is touched.

"What is it?"

"Phili used to sell vegetables like this in Plaza. She told me some days she would borrow transport money because she wouldn't sell anything"

"I see" I start the car.

"I've been thinking about helping them rebuild home. A five roomed house for us and two room outside

building for Dabula"

"I see. Well i've been thinking something slightly different"

"Different how?"

I wanted this to be a surprise but I might as well tell her so she doesn't worry too much.

"Like sending Dabula to school. He can even do part time or full time. He did so well in school Thembeke. A brain like that needs to explore things. I can make sure he gets in. Then we will take Phili and the kids to come stay with you for safety. I don't want them alone there plus, no offence but you family is full of opportunists. I don't want someone abusing them"

I expect her to laugh but I can see the tears in her eyes. I hope Dr Ngcobo the tears issue soon.

"You want to do that for my family?"

"Yes. Buying them food and blankets isn't enough Thembeke. You need a home. A place that people will not look down on. I want to give your cousins that. Then when you are ready to marry me we can

leave them with a safe home" I look at her just to see if is shocked. She doesn't appear disgusted by the marriage suggestion. Maybe one day she will marry me out of love.

"That means a lot Nqubeko. Thank you" she lays her head on my shoulder and I put my arm around her.

I wonder when will she start suspecting pregnancy because I won't be the first to say so.

Chapter 49

Thembeke.

"Okay i'm gone" I announce to Nqubeko as Pretty's car stops at the gate. She invited me out for dinner with some of her friends and I said okay because i've been in the house with Nqubeko for days already. I love him and the sex is great but I do need some air.

"Don't you need me to come with you?" He asks as he appears in the passage.

"No. Pretty is here already. I cooked so please do eat" i put on my shoes and ignore the protesting look on his eyes. Lately he does this a lot. I can't even go buy the bread alone. I think he is also bored but i'll let him figure that part out for himself.

"And you won't drink?" he asks.

"No. I told you. Alcohol makes me nauseas lately. I think i'm just going to stick to juice and water for a while" the last time I drank some wine I threw up everything I ate. Now even a smell rubs me off the wrong way.

"Good. It's much more fun to seduce you while you are sober" he grins and I look away so I am not tempted to strip him naked. If we have anymore sex I might have a whole on my back.

"Bye Nqubeko" I laugh and walk out.

Pretty is waiting outside the car as I walk out the gate. She is dressed in a denim jumpsuit that fits her so well. Looking at me simple blue dress I feel like i'm not dressed well enough.

"That look won't work. Come" she yells as my pace

start to slow down. I'm thinking about my own denim dress that could work on this occasion.

"I can go change quickly"

"No you won't. You look good. Come on"

Going back to change means having to deal with Nqubeko trying to stop me and then dealing with impatient Pretty because we are running late.

"I'll be the one taking the photos then" I unlock the gate and get out.

"Don't be silly. You look great" she replies and get in the car. I also do the same.

"Thanks for this girl. It's been boring to stay home"

"And I thought you and your man enjoy doing this" she laughs and start the car.

"It's been great but I do need time away from Nqubeko. Anyway where exactly are we going?" I open my bag and take out my lipstick.

"It's a birthday party. It's going to be great"

"Who?"

"Some girl at work. Well you don't work with us anymore but I'm sure you will remember her face when you see her. Don't worry told her you were coming. She is a bit shy like you"

"I'm not shy" I argue and she laughs.

"Yeah and i am not left handed" she rolls her eyes and turn down the radio.

"You are left handed?" I look at her hands.

"Don't tell me you've never noticed"

"No I never did"

"I am. But that's not the point. My point is, when we get there I need you to be relaxed and ready for fun. That's all"

"I will try my best" I finish reapplying my lipstick and put it back in my bag.

The birthday lady booked a restaurant. The whole place looks great and i see some faces i saw in the last party i attended. They are all friendly. Pretty manages to get me to sit between her and Vuyo. This makes me happy because Vuyo is friendly and talkative. She starts telling me about her relationship problems right away. I guess she is the type that doesn't mind sharing her relationship drama but I also don't mind listening. Too bad I won't be doing the same about my relationship with Nqubeko.

"Hi" someone speaks behind us. We both turn and it's Nombuso. Vuyo smiles at her while I turn the other way and ignore her.

"Can I talk to you Thembeke?" She speaks when I don't say anything.

"No" I reply without looking at her.

"Please. J ust a chance to explain" she begs and Vuyo gets up. I can see other ladies looking at us already.

"No. Whatever you want to say I don't want to hear

it" I get up and take my glass with me.

"Please" she grabs my hand.

"I said no!!" I yank my hand away and the juice i'm carrying spill all over her shirt and shoes.

"Ladies please" the birthday girl speaks up. The music has stopped and everyone is looking at us.

"I just want to explain" says Nombuso.

"I told you I don't want to hear it" I scream at her.

The glass is half empty anyway so I put it down and walk to the toilet. The music starts again and I close the door behind me.

I don't need to do anything so I sit on the toilet seat for a moment before flushing the toilet and then leave.

The ladies are back in their seats as the birthday girl opens some of her presents. I look around and spot three guys. One of them looks familiar and I can tell he recognises me because he stares at me for a moment.

"This one is from my baby Bonga" says the lady as

she opens a small box. She smiles at the man and I remember how I know him. He once came to the house for some business with Nqubeko. I think it didn't go well because Nqubeko was left less pleased.

There is some cheering as the lady holds up a car key. He bought her car and she is very excited as she hurries to him. We watch as they kiss like we are not even there. When they finally pull away she walks back into her seat and picks up another box.

"So you won't even give me a chance to explain" says Nombuso behind me.

"Explain what? How you pretended to be my friend while Nqubeko was busy paying you behind my back?" I yell out loud for everyone to hear since she keeps pushing this issue.

"And I hate myself for doing it" she replies.

"Good. Now fuck off" I turn and face forward.

Hopefully now she will take a hint and leave it alone. I can't even see Pretty now. I wonder where she is.

The birthday girl looks less impressed and I don't

blame her. I would be pissed too if someone was busy ruining my party like this.

"You know what? Both of you get out" she stands up and point at me and Nombuso behind me.

"What?" Asks Nombuso.

"Yes. You both get out!!" she screams.

I stand up to try and argue my case but before I can even speak someone grabs my arm and pull me back hard. The chairs fall and my bag also falls down but I can't grab it because the person dragging me away is not giving me a chance to do anything.

It happens so fast. At one point I think i'm on the floor but then again someone pulls my legs up and I think i'm being carried outside. There are loud screams and then suddenly I land on the hard and wet ground before something lands on my face. I stay down for a moment before it dawns to me that I've been kicked out and that it's raining. My leg hurts and there is another pain I feel but i'm not sure where exactly it is.

My hand feels whatever that hit my face and it's my handbag. I pull myself and i'm wet and dirty. They threw me in a pool of dirty water. I get up check my bag and the phone is not there. I think I left it on table. I check my wallet and it's still there. My wristwatch says it's after 9. I look up and down the street. Most places are closed but I can see a garage down the road so I take my shoes off and walk there.

There is a taxi there. I think the guy came for a refill. He stares at me as I approach. I'm a dirty and I smell.

"Are you okay Miss?" he asks as I get closer.

I shake my head and the tears starts streaming down my face. The man comes closer and tries to ask me questions but i'm sobbing. I don't know if

it's the pain or the humiliation that makes me cry like this.

"Have a drink" someone shoves a plastic cup on my face.

"It's water" the person says and I hear someone saying my arm is swollen. They talk about calling an ambulance. I can't let them call an ambulance. I need to call Nqubeko.

"Take a deep breath and try to speak" says the taxi driver.

I try to do that but it doesn't help at all. The lady brings a chair and orders me to sit down and try to calm down. I sit still for a while and then see a pen in the lady's hand and a slip on the guy. I indicate for them that I need to write down. The guy gives me piece of paper and a pen.

I write down Nqubeko number and my name. The taxi driver offers to call and he stands there a he makes a call. I can hear Nqubeko in the other end as he picks up. The man greets him and start describing me and says I can't speak so they don't

know if I was robbed or something. Nqubeko asks where we are and the man gives him the directions before they end the call.

"He is coming. Hang in there" he says as he rests his hand on my shoulder.

The other lady starts talking about how many robbery victims they some times see while working. Her two male colleagues agree with her and the taxi driver says he has a daughter my age so he doesn't just walk away from someone in need of help. He looks young to have a daughter my age but I don't object.

A car stops and Pretty comes running out. She is crying and the moment she gets to me she throw her arms around me and continues to cry. I don't hug her back and her arm is pressing where my arm is bruised but I don't push her away.

"I've been looking all over for you. I drove down the road and asking people if they saw you and they said no. I've called the police" she explains while crying.

Another car stops and it two policeman.

"I called. This is her" says Pretty to them.

"Are you okay Miss?" One of them asks.

I nod and wipe the tears in my eyes. They don't look convinced. One lady says i'm in shock. I think she could be telling the truth. That would explain why i'm not saying anything.

"I..." I try but the words fail to come out. I close my eyes and see those men as they dragged me outside and carried me like i was garbage before tossing me on the side of the road. Me alone not Nombuso. They threw me out like that.

"Have you called a relative?" The policeman asks and someone explains that we are waiting for the person already.

Nqubeko finally arrives. The moment he reaches me i throw my arms around him and wail. He holds me tight and I wince in pain. I think i may have landed on something that hurt my back.

"Did someone hurt you?" He asks his eyes staring at

me.

"I went for a smoke at the back and when i came back they said Thembeke was kicked out by security. I think they manhandled her roughly" explains Pretty.

"We need to go to the hospital" says Nqubeko his voice sounding alarmed.

"I want to go home. Please" i whisper.

He nods and helps me to the car. The policeman tries to show some interest but Nqubeko brushes him off by saying we will come in for formal complain if needed. He also thanks the garage workers and the taxi driver who called him. They all stand there and watch as he walk back to the car and get in.

We get home in a blink. I open the door and get out.

My ankle hurts when i walk so i limp to the house and stops me from walking further in.

"Are you in pain?"

"No. I'm just cold"

He nods and pull the dress over my head. He throws it on the floor and walks behind me. His finger touch the tender spot on my back and i wince. He touches another and i wince again. He also check my arms and walks around to check my stomach. His hand rests bellow my belly button protectively and i look at him. The unprotected sex we had in the car. His obsession with asking me what i want to eat and my sudden desire for ice cream.

"If you are pregnant we can't take that risk. We need to have you check out" he says and immediately i can feel the pain on my lower back. The pain almost familiar to the pain i felt when i miscarried that day.

Chapter 50

Thembeke

"Everything looks good. Again. Congratulations Mr and Mrs Mbonambi" says the Doctor as she hands Nqubeko the photos of the scan. We don't bother correcting her plus Nqubeko is still wearing his wedding ring. I never noticed this before, I will have to ask him about it when we get home.

"And it's in a right place?" I ask

"Yes it's in a right place. After few weeks we will be able to see a better scan. For now it's still small but the heartbeat is strong" she smiles and Nqubeko squeezes my hand.

"And we can still have sex?" He asks and the Doctor doesn't seem embarrassed like I am right now.

"Yes. Just as long as she is comfortable. But I have to say, she really does need to rest. Get the bruises on her back healed" she is right about that. It really does hurt like I broke a bone or something.

"And the sex won't move the baby into a wrong

place. Like a tube?" I ask and she doesn't give me the ridiculous look that Nqubeko is giving me right now.

"No it won't"

"Thank God. The last time I almost died"

"This time the baby is in a right place Mrs Mbonambi" she smiles and hand me some more papers.

"This is for reading. You can both read up just to you can be prepared for the changes coming your way. Not all pregnancies are the same so if you experience something different don't be scared"

"What about the cravings Doctor? She eats a lot of different thing from ice cream to cookies" asks Nqubeko.

"It's okay. J ust try to also have fruits and vegetables. Drink plenty of water. Weight gain is natural during pregnancy. So don't be alarmed when you gain some weight"

"But she is not allowed to work out before the first

three months is over?" Asks Nqubeko.

"I wouldn't say not allowed but we do recommend waiting for a while before you do some gentle workouts at home. Nothing hectic just stretches, going for a short walk in the park" she looks at her notes and writes down something.

"Thank you Doctor" says Nqubeko standing up. I also get up and take my jacket.

"Here is your prescription. It's just painkillers and don't worry they are safe during pregnancy"

Nqubeko takes the paper and we thank her one more time before we leave.

"I am hungry" I tell Nqubeko as we walk to the parking lot. It's late now. Even the hospital cafeteria is closed.

"There is KFC down the road" he suggests as he opens the door for me.

"I don't like chicken. I think I'll have peanut butter sandwich and tea when I get home" I sit back and try not to wince when my back hurts.

"Are you okay?" Asks Nqubeko looking at me.

"I'm fine. Just the bruises on my back"

He stares at me for a moment and then starts the car.

"What really happened Thembeke?" I know he has been dying to ask me this question.

I close my eyes and tell him everything that happened. I can still see it. Hear the chair falls and then the noise. I think some people laughed and I am sure some took videos. It was humiliating.

"And they throw you out just like that?" He asks and I nod.

"What about Nombuso?"

"I don't know. They only throw me out" I even doubt they manhandled her at all. It was all just me.

"And Pretty wasn't there?"

"No. I left my phone there. I doubt I'll ever find it again" maybe Phili has been calling.

"Pretty gave me your phone. I left it in the house"

"Thank God. I need to call Phili and tell her about the pregnancy" I sit up and look at Nqubeko. How could he know that I am pregnant and not say anything at all.

"What?"

"You knew and you kept quiet" I poke his arm with my finger.

"I didn't want you to yell at me not wearing a condom"

"I wasn't going to yell" he laughs and looks at me with the face that says 'yeah right'

"Okay fine. Maybe just a tiny bit. Being an adult sucks" I lean back again.

"Why say so?"

"Because of the responsibilities it comes with. You

know raw sex is good but raw sex means pregnancy. Being an adult means knowing that but having to stick to protection because you don't want to be pregnant" he nods and remains quiet for a moment.

"So are you mad about it?" He asks

"No. I'm happy. Scared but happy"

"I am happy too" he replies.

Nqubeko

I watch Thembeke as she eats her sandwich. I am relieved that she accepted the pregnancy so easily. I was ready for whatever she was going to send my way. But now she knows and she is happy.

"Don't you want some?" She holds up the plate. I

guess I have been staring at it for far too long so she might think I want to share.

"No. It will give me a heartburn"

She nods and continue eating. I stand up and go to the bedroom remembering that when the call came I was busy hiding the skimpy dresses in Thembeke's closet. I had managed to put away five dresses but now I think I need to rethink this. I put back three and take away two who are the shortest.

"What are you doing?" Her voice comes behind me and I freeze.

Shit, now I need to explain and I can't see the way out of this one.

"Is that my dress?" she asks and I quickly turn around and hide the dress behind me.

"No it's not" I lie but I can tell she is not buying it.

"Let me see" she holds out her hand.

"Okay fine. You got me" I hold out the dresses and she doesn't even smile as she stares at me.

"What are you doing with them?"

"I was going to hide them. They are way too short Thembeke. I can see your ass without you bending over in these" that came out wrong I can see it "I mean they are....."

"Don't" she yanks them and put them back in the closet.

"We can go shopping for something else. Anything longer than that"

She doesn't reply instead she hangs them back to the hangers and close the door.

"Thembeke"

"I'm going to bath and sleep" she announce and starts stripping rift there. I watch as her nipples harden from being released from the bra. She bends over and and take her panties off. She shaved earlier and she looks really good.

"Can I join you?" I ask and she shoots me a warning glance "i'm sorry about the clothes Thembeke. I was being a man baby" no sane man would just relax knowing that his woman is wearing something like that. I should have burned all five earlier and be

punished for something I did.

She doesn't reply. I watch as she walks to the bathroom and locks the door loud enough for me to hear that I am not invited. I wait until the shower starts running before making a call.

"It's the middle of the night Nqubeko" complains Thuba.

"I know. Do you still have dealings with Bonga?" I ignore his protest.

"Yes and I thought you said you didn't want him anywhere close to you"

"I still don't but his goons manhandled Thembeke earlier. Tossed her out on the street like garbage. If that's not a direct poke then I don't know what it is" I didn't tell Thembeke that I think Bonga did that on purpose just to get to me. She has enough things to worry about right now.

"I heard about that. My girlfriend was there but she doesn't know Thembeke. Damn that's brutal. The video is online already"

"Online?" I lower my voice.

"Yes. Someone posted it. It doesn't show her face but her thighs and panties do show"

"I guess Bonga is still mad that I turned him down" I knew he was a coward. Him and Jacob have no balls.

"I guess so. So is Thembeke okay?"

"She is a little bruised on her back and legs but she is fine. Heartbroken though. All she wanted was some fresh air" if only I followed her there. I thought I was giving her some freedom but I was wrong.

"How come you let her go? Are you no longer that protective?"

"I thought I was being a calm man. Next time I am tagging along" and I'll be armed like I'm going to war.

"Look Nqubeko. You can not let him get away with this. He needs to know that Thembeke is off limit. If she was my girl I would be chopping him to pieces as we speak" he laughs.

"I'm going to chop him alright. You wait and see" the

shower stops running meaning she is coming out.

"That's the Nqubeko I know"

"Sharp man. I'll try not to ruin you in the process" I end the call before Thembeke opens the door.

She walks out naked. I stare at her feeling my pants go even tighter than before. She ignores me and pick up her body lotion. I sit down and adjust my zip.

"Let me help" I offer but she shake her head and squeeze the lotion to her palm before she apply it over her nipples.

"I'm sorry Thembeke"

"It's fine Nqubeko" she replies and continue to apply the lotion on her body.

"So are we cool now?" I ask looking at the red mark on her thigh. It's going to be black in few days.

Bonga doesn't know me at all.

"Yes we are cool" she walks over to the bed and place one leg over the bed before she massages her leg. I swallow hard and adjust my zip again.

"Do you mind checking if I have another bruise in

my ass?" she turns around and bends down just a little. Her ass is on my face "Do you see it? Or I should bend down more" she does exactly that.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. She is doing this on purpose. Showing me that i can look but not allowed to touch.

"Do i have it? Right there" her hand appears between her thighs and touch under her butt cheek.

"No. You don't" i clear my throat when my voice fails me.

"That's good" she picks up the lotion and squeeze it on to her hand. I watch as she bends over even further. I'm hard and tense but i don't touch her at all. She does this and finish while i'm just sitting there.

When she is done she walks over to the closet and comes back dressed in something that leaves nothing to the imagination.

"Please turn the lights off when you are done" she instructs and walk to her side of the bed.

"So we are sleeping?" I ask not believing it.

"You can stay up but I am sleeping" she turns her side lamp off.

"Come on MaKhumalo. You can not do this to me" I beg and she doesn't say anything.

I wait for few minutes and then hear her gentle snores. She has fallen asleep.

I stare at her and smile to myself. She does make life interesting even if she delivers a harsh punishment. I walk over and kiss her cheek before leaving the bedroom. Bonga is going to pay.

Chapter 51

Nqubeko

Mluleki is early. I can see the disapproval on his face as he glances on his watch before shakes his head. I'm few minutes late he will be fine and it's not like Bonga has somewhere to go.

"You are late" he complains as he puts out the cigarette.

"Hello to you too" I reply while putting my gun under the jacket.

"Just come" he walks ahead. I grin and catch up to him "How is Thembeke?" He asks

"Fine. Moody but fine" I hope she will be calmer when I get back.

"Is she excited about the pregnancy?"

I can't help but smile. Her reaction was better than I expected. "She loves it. Scared a bit but happy"

"Take care of her Nqubeko. This is time when she needs you to cater for all her needs. Even the ridiculous cravings and never ever say 'you are bigger than before' or your nose is huge. They are very sensitive during pregnancy" he advises.

"I won't" I don't mention the drama last night.

"Good. You are a lucky bastard" he laughs.

I know it's true. Thembeke could have told me to get lost but she didn't.

We walk up to Bonga's apartment. He jumps a bit when he sees Mluleki.

"Sit" he commands.

"Mlu" he tries to laugh but we all know he is scared.

"Sit" repeats Mlu before he sits down opposite him. Bonga's eyes grow even larger when Mluleki pulls out a knife and place it on the table.

"Come on gents. I was just playing with her" his voice is shaking.

"Just sit down" says Mluleki still sounding calm. I want to laugh but I don't. I don't want to piss him off.

Bonga sits down. I also sit on the armrest and make the call.

"Is it done?" I ask.

"Sure boss. Already forwarded it to you" replies Tiko.

"Thanks man" I end the call and check the messages. The video is there.

"I have a surprise for you. Well for your girl in fact. She loved it" I pass the phone to Mluleki who pass it

to Bonga.

He presses play and her screams are loud. She is cursing but that's all she did as my man carried her off the crowded mall and dumped her on the trashcan.

"Nqubeko....."

"Don't. You crossed the line Bonga. You see, Thembeke is off limits. Next time you do some shit like that I'll kill you myself" I warn.

He looks at the video again and I can see the anger in his eyes.

"I hope we won't be having this petty little problems Bonga. You need to grow up at some point" says Mluleki.

"But I was just playing with her. I didn't mean any harm"

Mluleki manages to get between us before I have my hands around his neck.

"Cool it" he yells and push me back.

Bonga grins behind Mluleki. I want to wipe that grin

off his face.

"Okay" I move back and sit down.

"Thembeke is very important to me Bonga. If you do anything to her I'll kill you before Nqubeko does. If you even try to touch one single hair on her head you are dead" threatens Mluleki. The stupid grin is gone replaced by fear. That's why I keep Mluleki close.

"I heard you man. Now get out" he replies.

We laugh and don't move. We are waiting for the girl to arrive.

"By the way I heard that the footage will be on the news. I hope that's wide enough for you" I pick up my phone.

"But Thembeke was ruining my girl's birthday surprise" he barks.

"And you thought why not humiliate her in front of your hoes?!!!"

"I was trying to wake her up. She is too wimpy and we both know you love them feisty Nqubeko. She is

not exactly the type you love" again Mluleki stops me when I try to strike him.

"Nqubeko" warns Mluleki pushing me back.

"What? Did I strike a nerve? She is a wimpy woman-child with no personality of her own"

"Shut up!!" I try to push Mluleki but he is strong so he doesn't budge.

"The truth hurts. You married a wimpy child that will never grow up no matter what. She will always be a crying baby and you being the father figure to her" he continues.

I don't get why Mluleki won't let me beat him up.

"I bet she home right now weeping because she was humiliated. My men said she even smell like baby powder" Mluleki stops trying to stop me and punch him in the face. I take that as my cue to do the same but he stops me.

"He is not worth it" he warns.

Bonga hold shirt under his bleeding nose. He doesn't say anything at all to Mluleki.

"What? Did he strike a nerve?" I mock him.

The door fly open and three ladies walk in. They stop dead on their tracks when they see us. The crying one stops when she sees her boyfriend's bleeding nose.

I take my phone and snap few photos for Thembeke. She is covered in dirt and smells like rotting food.

"Don't make me come back Bonga. Thembeke is off limits" warns Mluleki before he pushes me forward.

"Just fuck off" he replies.

Mluleki laughs and we walk out. We walk quietly into the parking lot. I am thinking about what Bonga said about Thembeke.

"Nqubeko. Even if she is extremely sensitive and cries a lot but you know why you love her. Don't let boys like Bonga make you doubt her" says Mluleki as if he is reading my thoughts.

"What if this is not something that therapy will fix?" I ask

"What do you mean?"

I lean against the car and look at Mluleki "We suggested therapy because we thought Thembeke cries a lot so she has some unresolved issues.

What if there is no unresolved issue. What if this is the way she is. That she is a sensitive person by nature. Maybe the crying is just the way she is"

"But letting her go to therapy won't cause any harm Nqubeko. If it's her nature then fine" he makes it sound so easy.

"But if it's her nature then i'm an ass for letting her deal with this when she doesn't need it. Maybe I just need to get used to seeing her cry about small things in life. No one said all women will be like Nobuhle. Wild and confident all the time"

"Just go home and make love to your woman. If she doesn't want to continue with therapy it will be her choice. Let Thembeke live the life she wants Nqubeko. Your job is to protect and provide" he squeeze my shoulder and then walk off to his car.

I get into mine and head home. Thembeke has a therapy session in an hour.

ThembeKa

Today I woke up sore but after taking the meds and taking a hot bath I began feeling better so I cleaned, did the laundry before preparing for my session. I am excited to share the news with Dr Ngcobo. To show positivity I pick my pink and white dress and wear white sneakers. I don't wear a weave today instead I comb my hair neatly and wear earrings. Nqubeko arrives as I stand in front of the mirror looking at reflection. He stops and stare at me and then a smile spread on his lips.

"You look good. I love the dress" he walks further in and stands behind me.

"Because it's on the knees" I reply and he laughs. I know him too well.

"That too but it brings out the sexiness on you" he kiss my cheek.

"Thanks my love. You have less than 45 minutes to get ready or i'm leaving without you" I try not to giggle when he kisses my neck.

"About that. Can you sit down" the playful Nqubeko is gone and replaced by a serious Nqubeko.

"What's wrong?" I sit down and anyway. He pulls the ottoman and sit down with his knees on each side of me. "You are locking me in" I point his legs.

He laughs and pull my legs up and then put them over his thighs. "Nqubeko" I complain but he gets up a bit and pull the ottoman even closer and then pull me to his lap.

"Better?"

"No. I'm not wearing any panties" I whisper before putting my arms around his neck.

"Even better" his hand pull my dress up.

"Stop it. You said we are talking" I slap his hand away.

"It's about the therapy. I need to know Thembeke. Are you okay with it?"

"That's a strange question. Did something happen?"

"No. Nothing happened. I'm just wondering. Are you okay with going there or you are going because we suggested it" I can see the seriousness on his face.

"I am going because I like it Nqubeko. Dr Ngcobo is nice" this is my second session so I don't get why he is talking as if I should stop going.

"So you are 200% okay about going?"

"Yes I am"

"That's all that matters my love" he wraps his arms around me and whisper in my ear "I can get ready in two minutes. Use the rest of the time for something more fulfilling"

"Forget it. I am not smelling sex during my therapy Nqubeko" I try to get out of his grip.

"You won't. I'll personally wipe you and i'll put on a condom so you won't be wet with my cum"

"And you will make me come twice?"

He doesn't reply instead he gets up with me still on his lap and yanks the drawer for the condoms. I let out a laugh because in the coming months this won't be possible without him breaking his back.

"I love you" he says as he ease me down to bed.

"I love you too" I smile at him.

Chapter 52

Thembeke

I arrive at Dr Ngcobo's office and find her having tea. She is drinking Five Roses and I can see the tag hanging on the side of the white teapot on the tray. She smiles and ask me if I want a cup. I don't hesitate, I say yes and watch as she pours the tea in the extra cup on the tray. The smell takes me back year ago when my grandmother used to have her evening tea and always pour the last cup for me. It was something I looked forward to but after she passed on the teapot was thrown out and they

never bought the Five Roses teabags again.

I take a sip and smile as the feeling warms my heart. She continues to sip hers while I drink mine.

"You look different" she speaks when I finish the tea and put down the cup.

"I'm happy. I'm pregnant" I can't help but laugh. She surprise me by laughing too

"Congratulations" she adds still smiling warmly.

"Thank you. Ever since I heard I've been happy. Even though the humiliation happened but still the baby is fine and it's in a right place so I am very happy" I explain and my hand automatically goes to my stomach.

"The humiliation?" She asks as she write down on her notepad.

"Yes. I was thrown out in a party. It was a mess. They even posted the video on Facebook. My back got bruised but i'm fine. Nothing happened to the baby" now that's all that matters.

"That must have broke your heart" she pulls the

drawer and hands me a new box of tissues. I wasn't aware that I am crying now.

"Thanks" I take two and wipe my eyes "I was heartbroken but finding out that there is a baby and that the baby is fine made it all better" I wipe more tears.

"So you are no longer heartbroken?"

"No. I'm happy about the baby"

She smiles and write down again.

"You said the baby is in a right place. What does that mean?" She asks as she puts down the pen.

"In the womb. I miscarried before and almost died so I had to be sure that the baby isn't in a tube like before. It's not so I am happy. I hope it's a boy"

"Any particular reason why you wish for a boy?"

I take a deep breath and explain that a boy might be stronger than a girl. He might be able to fight the unfairness when people try to outsmart him. He won't be subjected to arranged marriage just so the family can make a quick buck. I know now that

Nqubeko married me for different reasons but my family said yes for one reason only, to make money. If the baby is a boy then he will pick his own bride. Make his own life and live it in his own terms.

She nods and write down on her notepad.

"Would you say your life would be totally different if you were stronger than you think you are?" She asks.

I think about this for a moment. If I was stronger I would have done something to avoid being married at 18. I tell her that and she nods allowing me to continue.

"Not just being married but also growing up altogether. I struggled to make friends. I wasn't brave enough to approach anyone to be my friend. Even those I talked to at school it didn't go anywhere because I lacked the power to try"

"I see. So what about the friends you've made as an adult?" She asks and I laugh.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to laugh. I've only made one friend as an adult. Not counting Phili because she is

my cousin but she is like best friend/ cousin. Then Pretty befriended me. I don't know why but she is okay. The friends I thought I had before were on Nqubeko's payroll so the friendship was fake. It was a part time job for them"

"He paid them to be your friends?"

"Yes. So their friendship doesn't count" I take another tissue and wipe the nose.

"That must have hurt when you found out"

"It did. That's why I wasn't okay with Pretty at first. I thought Nqubeko paid her. But he didn't. But still I don't think we will move from friends to best friends" I come clean.

"Why?"

"Because she took me to that party and Nombuso was there. Nombuso is the fake friend I had. She kept harassing me and the suddenly I am being thrown out and she is not. I am not saying she is two faced but obviously she is in their circle so it's best for me to keep her in a distance it's fair. If I was cruel I was going to cut her off but i'm not cruel. I'm

just going to keep her in a distance"

"Have you talked to Pretty about this?"

"Not yet. I don't think it's an okay thing to do anyway"

"Can you explain why you think so?" She puts down her pen and stares at me.

"Because i'm not a cruel person"

"But voicing your concerns is not being cruel especially when it comes to friendship"

"She will think i'm accusing her of something. Pretty did nothing to hurt me. If she happens to be friends with people who are friends with Nombuso she doesn't deserve punishment" She nods and write down more on her notebook.

"I'm doing okay with just Nqubeko and my cousins as my close friends" I add so she doesn't think i'm spineless.

"I see. Tell me about Nqubeko. Is he excited about the pregnancy?"

"Very excited. He knew before I even knew and he

was scared that I'll yell at him if he told me" I laugh just thinking about this.

"So he is looking forward to being a father and a partner?"

I nod and look at the time. It's still early.

"What about you? Are you looking forward to being a mother?"

"Yes I am. There is a scared part of me though"

"Why so?"

"Because being a mother is scary. The baby can't talk and say I need this and this. So as a mother I will have to figure it out. I think that is scary"

"But for all mothers it's like that. Scary"

"What if I fail? Not that I wish for failure but i'm wondering you know"

She smiles and put down her pen.

"It's natural to be scared. Most women go through this. You won't fail" her tone is assuring.

"I hope I don't. They gave me some reading

materials. I'll do some reading and research so I am ready for everything"

"Thembeke, you don't need to put pressure on yourself about that. You have months to go. By the time the baby comes you will be ready. You shouldn't stress until you no longer enjoy this moment fully" she smiles and I smile back while brushing the belly that's still flat.

Chapter 53

Nqubeko

"Do you need anything else?" I ask after collecting the dishes after we finished eating.

"No thanks. I just need to sleep" she replies and then yawn.

"Go to bed. I'll do the dishes" I reply before going to the lounge with my coffee.

"Are you sure?" She stands up. I can tell she really wants to sleep even her eyes are full of sleep.

"Yes i'm sure. Go my love" I put the coffee down.

"Thanks Mbonambi. It's been a long day. Who knew that therapy can be this tiring" she walks towards me and plant a kiss on my cheek after standing on her toes and me bending down a bit so she doesn't strain herself too much.

"I'll come tuck you in a minute" I tease her as she continues to the bedroom.

I turn down the TV and turn on the outside lights before checking if all doors are closed before going to check if she is sleeping okay. To my surprise I find her sleeping over the cover with one shoe still on her foot.

"Thembeke" I call out thinking she is trying to trick me into thinking she is sleeping. All I get is a snore.

"You can't be sleeping already" I walk further in and she is sleeping. Her mouth is slightly open and she is seriously sleeping.

"Thembeke" I gentle wake her up.

"What's wrong?" she looks alarmed.

"Nothing baby. Roll under the covers" I slip her shoe off. She shift just a bit before her eyes start dropping again. "Thembeke. Shift" I wake her again and even offer a push until she is sleeping in a good position. She mumbles something I don't get.

"What?" I ask while pulling the cover beneath her.

"Goodnight Gogo" she speaks again and this time there is a smile on her face.

"Thembeke"

She doesn't reply instead she starts snoring again. I kiss her cheek and charge her phone before going back to the lounge.

My phone start ringing just as I was about to call Mluleki. It's Sonto.

"Yes" I answer. She doesn't call unless there is an emergency.

"Where are you? The Khumalo's are planning to send Fanele here to report the pregnancy and demand lobola as well" she is whispering.

"Where did you hear about this?" I also lower my

voice because I don't want Thembeke to hear this.

"News fly broe. The person who heard didn't know I am related to you so she was gossiping and I heard from her. Apparently they say you and Thembeke are divorced so it means you should marry Fanele. I thought you were coming home soon anyway. Mum said you should come for a cleansing for the wounds" she finally stops talking.

"I am coming home soon but I can't leave Thembeke alone and I can't take her to her cousins because she is fragile right now" I don't want to say she is pregnant. It's too soon to tell people.

"Then come with her" she suggests.

"She is not ready yet" I can't mention therapy to my family. I don't want them to think she is broken and make her feel uncomfortable.

"What are you guys hiding?"

"Nothing. My accident really scared her so I need her to recover fully" that's partly true anyway.

"You get shot and Thembeke is the one needing

recovering? You really do treat Thembeke like a new born baby" she laughs.

"She is my baby don't be jealous Sisi" I laugh too.

"She is not a child Nqubeko. We will treat her alright. J ust come with her and I think it will help with her family. If they find her here with you they will know that Fanele has no chance"

"I know but I can not send her cousins to the wolves. If I insult them they will take it out on her cousins there. Dabula is just a young man he doesn't need drama" I need to arrange for them to move first but I have to wait until the school year is done so the kids can be transferred from their old school to new school.

"So what are you going to do?" She asks

"Don't worry about it. J ust know that I am not paying lobola for Fanele. I might pay for the child but it will end there"

"Okay broe. I was just giving you the heads up"

"Thank you so much Sisi. I appreciate everything"

"No problem. Say hi to Thembeke for me. Bye" she ends the call and I am left fuming. There is something wrong with this family. No sane family would push for something that's clearly not happening in such a manner.

I need to push for Dabula to get in and also push for the kids to get into the new schools before uprooting them. Then I can show their family that I will not be conned, not by them.

The coffee I made with an intention to drink is no longer appetizing so I rinse it out in the sink and wash the rest of the dishes. Thembeke always leave the kitchen spotless so I do the same. Leave everything in it's place before turning down the lights.

"Nqubeko!!!!" Her screams fill the house.

I run to the bedroom and find her sobbing while bending over with her hand on her stomach.

"Thembeke. What's wrong?"

"There is something wrong with baby" she continue to cry.

"Let's get you to the hospital then" I try to get her to stand up straight but she doesn't want to. I decide to carry her to the lounge.

Finding my car keys take me longer but I manage to find them and carry her to the car.

We arrive to the hospital in a blink and they rush us in because Thembeke is hysterical now even the nurses have a hard time trying to find out what's wrong. She keeps saying there is something wrong with the baby. They force me to wait outside while the doctor's disappear inside with her. I can hear her cries for a while before it goes quiet. I pace the floor for a moment while my eyes are fixed at the door. I hope I was fast enough and if it's something seriously wrong they will help us before we lose the baby. My mind starts drifting to the possibilities of miscarriage and I don't want that to be real. Both of us won't be able to handle it.

The nurse drags me to the reception area to fill up the forms. I don't want to sit down and write them but I do so because she is watching me like a hawk. I fill all details and return the forms to her before walking back. The nurse walks out and avoids looking at me. I don't even chase after her as she hurries down the passage.

When the door opens again two doctors walk out. I stand still and wait for the news.

"She is resting. Mr....." one Doctor speaks

"Mbonambi. So what was wrong?" I reply quickly.

The other doctor nods and excuse himself leaving me with the other.

"Nothing. Can we talk in private?" He asks.

"Is the baby okay?" He said she is resting. Is she tired after losing the baby or there is something more.

"They are both fine. Shall we?"

"Okay"

I follow him to his office and sit down before he

even says I can sit.

"Mr Mbonambi. The baby is fine. Thembeke is also fine. There was never anything to be alarmed about" he sits down and open the drawer.

"But she said there is something wrong with the baby"

"Was she sleeping when it happened?" He asks and I nod.

"So it was a dream?" I ask and he nods.

"A bad dream and when she woke up she felt some pain in her stomach and assumed it was a miscarriage" he explains.

"I don't get it. She was wide awake when she was crying" I argue

"And she was convinced that she was bleeding. She isn't bleeding. The heartbeat is good. Everything is fine Mr Mbonambi"

I stare at the Doctor because I don't understand what he is talking about. How can Thembeke be this freaked out over a bad dream?

"She miscarried before?" He ask and I nod "I see, Mr Mbonambi your wife went through a traumatic experience when she lost the baby. She needs....."

"She is already attending counseling"

"When did she start?" He ask while looking at some pamphlets.

"It hasn't been long but she had an appointment just earlier today. And she is very excited about it"

"I see. I'll talk to her when she is awake. Sometimes when a person goes through something traumatic we see them function well and think everything is well when in fact it's not. What we just experienced is a symptom of something very serious and she will need all the help she can get" he hands me the pamphlets.

"I am supportive"

"That's good. Sometimes people think things like pregnancy and child birth are all natural so they tend to let women deal with it alone. That's not right. She needs to know that you are in this together and that whatever happens you are both in it together"

"I'm very much involved" I assure him just in case he thinks i'm taking a fat chance.

"I was going to recommend therapy for her Mr Mbonambi. Since she is already attending one I am obligated by law to involve her therapist" he looks at me as if he thinks I'll refuse but I won't.

I finally get a chance to see Thembeke after an hour of waiting. She is still sleeping so I pull a chair and sit next to her. I'm confused because she was doing okay earlier when she went to bed. She was tired and sleepy but she was fine. Where did the panic come from now? Why? Is it the punishment that I wasn't there that day? I thought we were past all that but now it seems like we are not. I ask myself all these questions but I get no answers. Is this what Thembeke is all about? Emotional and sensitive? Does this mean everything she goes

through will leave a lasting effect on her? Does this mean all the tears I've made her cry will some day come back to haunt me.

Chapter 54

Thembeke

Expect Nqubeko to yell at me for causing the drama but he doesn't do that. The Doctor explains that I was just having normal cramps and I thought it was a sign of something being wrong with the baby. I keep expecting them to tell me I was overreacting but that doesn't come. He says that it's because of the traumatic experience I went through when I lost the baby that's why I panicked. It makes me feel better than I am not a case they have never heard of before.

Nqubeko thanks them and help me with my shoes before we both leave the ward and sign my release papers. We walk quietly to the car.

"I'm sorry for everything" I speak when he gets in and starts the car.

"There is nothing to be sorry about Thembeke" he doesn't even look at me.

"But I embarrassed us both"

"You didn't embarrass us Thembeke. What happened was beyond your control so don't apologize" I look outside the window and feel the tears burn my eyes. If it's nothing then why does he look so angry.

"Do you want breakfast?" He asks after a moment. I shake my head and wipe the tears with my other hand.

"Are you in pain again?" He asks as he slows down the car.

"No" I reply and wipe my eyes harder but it's no use.

"Stop wiping them. Just stop" he pulls my hands away from my face "Breathe and try to calm down" we are driving slow now. Cars keep passing us while other drivers add an insult as they drive past.

"We should get home. You need to get some sleep" I suggest and try not to blink so the tears would stop streaming down my cheeks.

"It's been a long night" he smiles and stops the car on the side of the road.

"Why are we stopping?"

"What did you dream about last night?" He asks as he take my hands to his.

"The attack. Those guys carrying me outside. It was so scary and so real" I try not to tremble as the memory of the dream and the reality came back.

"That's why you woke up screaming?" He doesn't let go of my hands.

"Then I felt the pain. Then I thought it was happening again" I don't add that I thought he was gone because I was alone.

"Tell me Thembeka. Did you think I was n't home when you woke up?" He asks and I look down feeling embarrassed.

"Yes I did think so. I thought I was alone"

I hear him exhale before he let's go of my hands.

"I had a bad dream Nqubeko. At first it was like I was watching these kids chase after this young girl. I was yelling at them and trying to stop them. When I finally managed then those people started grabbing me. I was so scared. It felt like that day and then the pain just came. It was scary"

"It's okay my love" he wrap his arms around me.

We sit there quietly until my tears stop flowing and then we continue home.

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I make us some cereal and tea before we both go to bed. I am not sleepy but I can tell that Nqubeko is tired so we cuddle. I am feeling a little horny but Nqubeko isn't reading between the lines today. Even when I put my leg over his he doesn't do anything.

"I think we should go home for a bit" he suggest his

eyes both closed.

"Why?" I don't want to face my family about Fanele and how I should step aside for them.

"I meant my home Thembeke. I want you to come with me" he open one eye and find me staring at him.

"Why? What will I say to your parents?" I try to sit up but he stops me and pull me back down to bed.

"About what? You are my girlfriend and you are visiting. It will be good"

"But I was your wife and then got divorced" he laughs and kiss my forehead.

"Now you are my girlfriend. Let's go baby. I think being around my mother will do you good. You said goodnight grandma last night. Do you remember?"

"I don't remember. I was thinking about her before I slept. In therapy we were talking about her" it made me miss her.

"Then come with me. I know my mother is not your grandmother but I know she loves you and would

be happy to see you" he begs.

"How long are we going to stay?"

"A day or two. We won't stay long"

"Okay fine" he open both eyes and smile "Thank you MaKhumalo" then he start tickling me. I laugh and try to get away.

My phone stops all activities as Nqubeko reach for it and hand it to me. It's Phili.

"Cuz"

"Hey Cuz. Are you okay?" She sounds like she is running.

"Yes i'm fine. Why? What's wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong. It's windy and i'm rushing home" she laughs.

"Oh okay. I'm fine too" I don't tell her about the drama last night.

"I miss you. I even had a dream about you last night. You and Nqubeko. You had a baby. A baby girl" she laughs.

"Maybe we are having a girl" I laugh too and I can see Nqubeko smiling a bit.

"I am so happy for you. When are you coming home?"

"Nqubeko wants us to visit his family soon. I think we will make it one trip" I can see him protest silently.

"That's good. Remember to keep it a secret until you start to show" she advises.

"I will girl. I'm a little scared you know"

"Because of the previous miscarriage?" Phili is smart. That's why I love talking to her.

"Yes. I don't want to lose this baby Cuz"

"And you won't. The miscarriage wasn't your fault Thembeke. Don't stress yourself too much about it. And talk to your therapist about your fears" she advises.

"I will. So do you need anything when I come over?"

"No. Thembeke you can come home without us needing anything you know. Just come as you are"

she laughs.

"Okay fine. I'll ask Celiwe if she needs anything" I laugh too.

"Don't get me started on Celiwe. I'm planning to send her for some classes at the clinic. She is starting to look in the mirror and I've been telling her she is beautiful and that I love her so she doesn't hear this from some boy with dark motives" she is no longer laughing.

"So the clinic will help how?"

"The nurse there give them classes and invite teenage mothers to talk about what it means to be a parent while so young. It's a good program and we as parents also add with advises at home. Make the communication channels stay to avoid the nasty surprises"

"I think that's a good idea you know. Do send her and also allow her to be a kid Phili. We don't want her falling pregnant but we also don't want her missing out of growing because of this"

"I know girl. I'll be careful. Just come visit so we can

stay up all night and laugh"

"I'm coming. I miss you guys"

"Yeepee. I can't wait" she giggle and I laugh too.

Nqubeko also sits up and wraps his arms around me.

"Hi Phili. Bye Phili we will call you later" he speaks on my ear.

"Bye guys" replies Phili before she ends the call.

"That was rude" I put the phone down and try to get out of Nqubeko's grip.

"Where are you going. I'm not done with you yet" he laughs and pull me back to him.

"Are we going to have sex now?" I ask while trying to take my top off.

"I love this pregnancy" he raise his eyebrow and laugh.

"I love it too" I undo his buttons instead.

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Nqubeko

I wake up gentle and make sure not to wake Thembeke after we both dozed off after the sex. She seem to be sleeping comfortable so I pull a blanket over her and take my phone to the lounge. The first call is directed to my mother. She answers after the first ring.

"Are you sitting next to the phone?" I tease her.

"I was sending a message to Sbahle and Sonto. Is Thembeke okay? I had a strange dream about her last night" this makes me sit down. My mother doesn't just talk about dreams for no reason.

"What was it about? The dream?"

"She was carrying this large basket of fruits. Yellow peaches and bananas. A fruit basket Nqubeko" her tones is loaded with a warning.

"Maybe you were thinking about her before you

went to bed"

"I doubt it. Her carrying a fruit basket means she could be pregnant. I hope you are using the rubbers when you..."

"Mah please" I stop her before she goes too far.

"What? You maybe be old but you are not old enough for me to...."

"Mah. I want to bring Thembeke over for a visit. As my girlfriend. I heard that her family want to send Fanele there to demand a way forward but I am not marrying Fanele. It's Thembeke only" I can hear her breathing and she sound calmer. My mother loves Thembeke. Sometimes I do think given a choice she would pick her over me.

"That would be great. I don't want you to string her along Nqubeko. At some point you both do need to make a decision"

"You know how I feel about her. It's only matter of time before she says yes and become my wife again. But I don't want to push. She has to come naturally"

"That's how it's done Nqubeko. Then treat her well. She needs to know that you are her safe place" she advises.

"I am Mah. I've been wondering. How can you tell if someone has a calling?"

"I'm not sure. Why? Do you experience weird things?" She asks sounding alarmed.

"No. I'm just wondering"

"Nqubeko"

"Thembeke had a nightmare last night. She woke up hysterical and we drove all the way to the hospital because she was convinced that she was miscarrying. But there was nothing wrong. It's was heartbreaking to watch Mah"

She goes quiet for a second before she exhales.

"Is that all that happened?"

"And the crying. She cries a lot Mah. Little things set her off and once she starts she doesn't stop. But also noticed something a while back but I didn't pay that much attention to it"

"What is it?"

"When she sleeps she hold on to something and never let go. I mean if she falls asleep with her hand around your pyjamas she holds until she is awake to let go. Does that seem normal to you?"

"How would I know things like that Nqubeko. I think you are reading too much into this. Thembeke got married young after being raise by her uncles so she is bound to be fragile. J ust take care of her and be supportive" she replies quickly. It's the way she says this that makes me think there is more to this. This is Thembeke we are talking about. My mother regards Thembeke as her own child so she wouldn't dismiss something that's clearly is a problem unless there is something else.

"I am supportive but I doubt that all the damage is just our failed marriage. I think there is more. Thembeke grew up in the area Mah. I'm sure you knew her grandmother"

"Of cause I knew her. We were in the stokvel together. She loved Thembeke. She wouldn't go

anywhere without Thembeke" I can tell she is getting emotional.

"So after her passing do you think something might have happened to Thembeke? Anything at all Mah"

"Not after her passing. Thembeke's grandmother travelled from Dlebe to Gluckstad Police Station after Thembeke's aunt arrived in tears saying she caught someone in the family with his pants on his ankles while Thembeke was sleeping. Oh God not this" she exclaims and the call gets cut off.

I stare at my phone for a moment trying to work out what my mother just said. She has to explain so I call her back. Her phone rings until it goes to voicemail. I call again and and again until she answers.

"Nqubeko"

"Did something happen to Thembeke?" I demand so she doesn't think she can avoid this.

"It's not my place to say Nqubeko. Why would we risk opening the wounds Thembeke might not even be aware of. Leave it alone"

"We are not leaving it alone Mah. I need to know the truth. Did someone molest Thembeke as a child!!" I yell and my eye catches a movement before I notice Thembeke staring at me.

Chapter 55

Nqubeko

"Thembeke" I end the call and slip the phone back to my pocket.

She doesn't reply but her eyes are all out. I know she heard me and she is going to start crying in a moment. "Baby" I walk closer and catch her before she goes all the way down. We both slowly go down until I am sitting first and she is half sitting on me and half on the floor.

"So the bad dreams are that?" She whispers and bury her head on my chest.

"You had another bad dream?" I wrap my arms around her.

She doesn't reply right away instead she gasp for air a few times and then let out the most heartbreaking cry. I hold her tight as she continues for a while and then her breathing goes soft. It's the pills they gave her. The nurse did say she will sleep a lot. But I know it won't last. She will wake up soon so I hold her like that for over thirty minutes before she is up and continues to cry. At least now we know where this come from.

"Let's get you to bed" I whisper. The floor is starting to get to me.

She doesn't protest. She gets up and pull me up before we both walk to the bedroom.

"We should go home" I suggest. What I real mean is we are going home so someone can answer for all this.

"My home or yours?" She ask before she lays her head down on the pillow.

"Mine but we will go to yours if you want" I reply and play with her hands.

She nods and goes quiet. Her eyes are looking

around for a bit and then they come back to me.

"For a long time I used to have this dream. Especially if i'm upset but I never took any notice of it"

"What do you dream about?" I ask and fix the pillow so I can lay my head down next to hers.

"Boys. A group of boys chasing me. Then they push me on the ground. Someone is above me and pinning me down. I can't break free. But sometimes it won't be me. It will be like i'm watching this happen to someone else. A young girl and I can't help her" she takes a deep breath and let it out in gasps.

"So it's probably a memory. We have to talk to Dr Ngcobo about this. Maybe she can help you forget them or recall them. I don't know what's best right now" I tell the truth. I want her to be alright but I also want to punish the person behind it.

"I'm hungry" she whispers and I laugh. Maybe we will be okay some day.

"Let's go make something to eat" I get up first and

pull her up.

She makes a sandwich and I settle for the coffee. We stay in the kitchen as she eats and me looking at her when she isn't looking. Someone broke her spirit and almost got away with it. If it wasn't for my mother spilling the beans it would have taken us time to connect Thembeke's dream to the reality of a suppressed memory. It would have taken Dr Ngcobo some time to figure this out if it wasn't for my mother.

"Nqubeko do you think i'm broken?" She asks her voice sounding like it's coming from a different person.

"No. You are not broken" I reply and hold her hand.

"So you still love me the same?"

"Yes. Nothing will make me stop loving you" there is

a smile on her face but it doesn't stay long.

"And if we have a girl we are going to protect her. Same as the boy. We will teach him to never hurt girls"

"Yes we are" I smile back at her.

"I'm not sure how I feel. Scared, disgusted and confused. Nothing could have prepared me for this"

"I know baby. I know" I push the chair back and pull her into my arms. She holds on to me and I try not to think of all the times she did this in her sleep. I used to think it's the way she is but now I can see it's not. It was just a way her head was telling me there is a problem buried deep inside her.

We sit like that for a while before she pulls away and collect the dishes. She washes them and I help with the drying before we both go back to the bedroom.

"We should pack" she suggests and I nod before taking the suitcase and look at her because we are about to argue about the clothes. Me wanting her to be warm and her wanting to be comfortable.

Thembeke

Any other day this would have been fun. Nqubeko packing for me and me packing for him but today it isn't funny. We both try to make each other laugh by picking a bad outfit and asking if it's okay and then going back and forth for a bit. It's not normal. It's not us. It's like someone came in and turned down a certain light and left us in a dim place. No amount of trying is helping. Nqubeko keeps looking at me when he thinks i'm not looking. He doesn't look like he wants to run away and hide. He looks like he wants to put me down and wrap his arms around me. Then me, I want to kill someone. It sounds cruel I know but deep down that's how I feel. Someone has to answer for this and tell me why. Here I am as an adult and I've been afraid all my life. I've been

trying to navigate this life feeling like there is something wrong but I had no idea what and where it all went wrong. I try to be wild and alive but it doesn't happen the way I think it should be. The more I think about it the more I realize that Nqubeko is the only thing that keeps me in the line. I became his wife. My whole life was pleasing him and I did that without complain because it kept me in line. Even when he gave me a different life I didn't use it up. I remained the same Thembeke walking in the invisible line set by my life for me. He even bought me friends because I couldn't make them myself. Then I became my friends because I couldn't be anything else.

"Thembeke" he calls out and I turn to look at him. He smiles and pull me back to his arms. "We are going to be okay"

"Do you really think so?" I ask before wrapping my arms around his waistline.

"I know so" he kiss my lips and I kiss him back and slip my hands underneath his t-shirt and touch his skin. His hands grab my ass and pull me up. I hold

on to him until he carries me to bed and place me down.

When he hesitates I kiss him and pull his shirt up. I want this and he has to give it to me. The hesitation is gone in a second and he is back to the moment. We kiss and strip each other naked before we start going at it. It's wild and loud but for a moment everything is forgotten. We are normal again and our aim is to orgasm. When it happens it's intense for us both. Nqubeko holds me tight and breathes in my ear as he keeps telling me he loves me.

"I love you too" I reply as I settle back into my body. The reality is back and hard. It happened and there is no way around it.

We lay there for a bit before he pulls out and pulls me up. There is no sleeping in. We are going home so we have to get a move on.

We get into the shower and he takes over by washing me. I also wash his back and we share a kiss in between but it doesn't change into more so we exit the bath and go get dressed.

"Is this going to be warm enough?" He points the dress.

"I'll wear a long sleeve top" I reply and check the drawer for the top. I find a grey one and it seems to match my mood.

"This or this?" He picks up his own long sleeved shirts. A grey and white ones.

"White. I like you in white" I reply and put on my bra. He reaches over and fix the straps.

"I like white too" he laughs.

We continue to get dressed quietly until we are both done and then fix the bed before Nqubeko carries the bags to the car. I pack up a snack for the trip and check that everything is unplugged beside the fridge.

"I think I forgot my charger" he says before he goes back inside. I wait next to the car while looking at my phone. I have to text Pretty and also call Dr Ngcobo's office to reschedule my appointment. I wait a few more minutes but Nqubeko isn't walking out so I walk back in. I find him in the kitchen

staring outside the window.

"Nqubeko"

He doesn't turn right away and I pretend not to see when he wipes the tears in his eyes.

"Sorry I got caught up" he speaks in a weird tone.

"It's fine. Do you mind if we warm up some sausages?" I ask and open the fridge. He laughs and search for a Tupperware container. I warm them up and put them on the container before we leave the house.

We are using his car so I do put my feet up and he laughs. I ignore him and help myself on the sausages.

"They say the smaller the feet the less chances of natural birth" he looks at my feet. I look at them too.

I do have small feet.

"That's not true" I argue.

"You are a size 3 Thembeka. For a woman your age that's small baby. You have tiny feet" he squeezes my big toe and I wiggle them.

"Stop it" I laugh.

"I love them though. Tiny sexy feet"

"I love them too and if I can't have a natural birth it's fine. We will get the best Doctor to help me give birth" I try not to think of the pain people say child birth comes with.

"I'll get you the best painkillers money can buy" he winks and we both laugh.

"Good because i'm hungry and I have to keep eating" I wipe the fat on my mouth before he hands me the tissue "Thanks"

"We need music so you don't fall asleep and make me sleep too" he turns the radio on. I don't mind so I continue eating while he drives.

Nqubeko

We reach home late in the evening. I find my mother cooking in the fire while Sonto is busy giving her daughter a bath.

"Where is MaKhumalo?" My mother asks without even greeting me.

"In my room. Hello to you too" I reply and pull a small bench to sit down.

"Don't hello me. It's cold. Go get her" she pulls down the grass mat and add a blanket over it.

I get up and go get her. I find her asleep even snoring a bit. I stand there for a moment before going back to them.

"And?" She asks.

"She is sleeping. It was a long trip" i sit back down.

My mother and Sonto eye each other.

"Where is Melikhaya?" I ask to get them talking.

"At work. They will probably come after month end. There is a ceremony in Josiah's house" I roll my eyes at that. My family will never stop entertaining that family. No matter what.

"They have time" I reply and extend my hand to the kid. She grabs on and wants to climb on to me but she needs to get dressed first. It's cold.

"You shouldn't be like this Nqubeko. You always act like an outsider. To make it worse you even have Thembeke not familiar with the others" preaches my mother. I don't remind her that she actually loves Thembeke more.

"Thembeke is fine" I reply and look at Sonto as she gets up and hands the now dressed child to me. We all remain quiet as she picks up the bath water and leaves the room.

"She knows. She heard me" I tell my mother. She stares at me and shake her head.

"We just opened wounds she doesn't even know she has Nqubeko" she looks wounded.

"That's the problem. Thembeke didn't know but she had been dreaming about this for years. It was just hiding somewhere in her head and now she is attending therapy so it was going to come out Mah. It's the truth" I try not sound emotional.

"So what are you going to do?" She pokes the fire and puts down the stick.

"I'll sort it out. Just keep her company for me. I'm going for a drive" I look at the clock and it's almost time. Mluleki is probably close now.

When Sonto walks in my mother wants to argue but she can't so she keeps quiet.

"Sonto can you please keep an eye on Thembeke for me. She is sleeping but when she wakes up, tell her I'll be back" I instruct before handing the baby back to her. She complains and wants my hands but I can't delay. I'm too angry to play with her.

"Tomorrow it's you and me baby girl" I touch her chubby cheeks and she laughs. An innocent baby

laugh that makes me think about Thembeke as a child.

"Do that Sonto please" I walk out and head straight to the car.

It's a dark night because of the fog and the drizzle but I find Mluleki exactly where I directed him. He looks pissed judging by the way he keeps flicking the cigarette he is smoking. I bet he has smoked several already but I can't tease him about that yet. He nods and turn it out before he opens the door and takes a gun from the seat.

"How is she?" He asks as he put the gun on his belt.

"Sleeping. She tries to act all tough but I know Thembeke. The light in her eyes is gone. Even her laugh is not all there"

He doesn't speak instead he starts walking. I follow.

We can see the home but we didn't park close by. That would have alerted them so we will drop in on foot.

We walk quietly until we reach the gate. It's not locked so we walk in. Mlu takes his hat off.

"For the ancestors" he mumbles.

I laugh a bit as we approach the main house. The TV is on we can see it in the windows and hear voices.

I knock and the house goes quiet before someone unlocks the door and opens it wide. I walk in first and everyone turns around to look at us. Fanele is sitting on the couch with a blanket around her.

They offer us seats and someone has some sense to turn down the TV. I look around. Three men and four women. The rest are probably the kids and the grandkids. Its a large family.

"Aw Mkhwenyana" says the same man that came to my home demanding lobola for Fanele.

Mluleki greets and flashes a smile. He can be

charming a bit.

"We weren't expecting a visit this late. Especially from you" the man continues.

"It's not a social call. I'm here on something serious. I need all the kids to give us some privacy" I request and make sure to look at everyone I am daring to get lost. The younger ones get up reluctantly

"Including you Fanele and the rest of you. Go to the bedroom" I demand no longer polite.

"Aybo what is this?" The man complains and I pull out my gun.

"I'm not playing. Get out people or you want to stay. If you stay and you don't tell what I want to know you will not get a chance to get out!!" I shout and point everyone to the passage.

The ladies get up and hurry out of room. One of them grab her phone but I grab it first.

"If you call the police or anyone else then know you are responsible for their blood. I am not playing" I warn her before letting her phone go. She puts it back down and leave the room. The older ladies

remain sitting.

"Stay put and close the door in there" instruct Mluleki to the leaving group. They disappear in what I assume is the bedroom and we hear the lock go in place.

"Sorry about that" I put the gun down and sit down again.

"What's going on?" The man asks his voice shaking.

"Someone molested Thembeke as a child. I know that her grandmother had to go all the way to Gluckstad for the police because a monster in his house had molested Thembeke and you wanted this to remain hidden. I am here for that person. Hand the person over and we will leave with them. Simple like that" I explain. One last starts crying another tell her to shut up. One man gets up but Mluleki shows him the gun.

"Don't think of this as a negotiation. It's not. You see. If you don't hand over the monster I'll go to that room. Take one kid. Cut the fingers one joint at the time while you watch. I don't want to hurt the kids

so don't make me. Hand over the person" I demand.

One lady looks at the gun on the table and her mouth trembles.

"Okay. You probably think i'm kidding. When it comes to there things I don't kid" I pull out my pocket knife and stand up.

Someone starts whistling outside. One lady screams at the person to run. Mluleki as at the door before I can get past the coffee table.

"Please don't kill him. They were just kids playing" the woman sobs. I step outside and watch as Mluleki wrestle someone to the ground. After a while they stop and he drags him back to the house.

"Get in" he shoved him in and the ladies all start crying. They should. The man is bleeding on the nose and mouth.

"Shut up. He is not dying" I yell.

The noise die at once and the man gets up.

"Sit old man. You mean absolutely nothing to me so don't attempt me. Is this him?" I point the man on

the floor.

They keep quiet.

"I won't ask again" I demand.

"We can sort this out as family. He was just a kid playing with the other kids. They took it too far" the second man has found his voice.

"Wait a minute. If he was just a kid then we are talking about different occasion" My mother didn't say it was the kids. She said an adult was caught red handed.

"Nqubeko" says Mluleki looking at me.

"It happened more than once. So who was caught with his pants down? Was it you?" I point the quiet man and he shakes his head and without hesitation he points the ringleader. The same man that came to my house talking about lobola.

"He did the same to Phili" the man says.

We all stare at the now pale faced man in the house. He looks so caught out he keeps gasping for air.

"It was you father" a tiny voice asks and we all turn

to the direction it came from. It's a tiny woman with Thembeke's eyes but she is light skinned and more skinny than Thembeke.

"Sngobile" the woman says in a shocked voice.

"My daughter wasn't lying. You did do those things to her" she walks further in. Her eyes shining with tears and her hands closed into fists.

"So you are an old pervert. going after the kids?"
Asks Mluleki with a disgusted voice.

"That's why you hate Phili so much. You abused her" she asks

"Sngobile I can explain" he starts to speak but she screams at him. I move aside so she can get past.

"You can't. You drove my daughter to suicide baba. Your own grandchild. And you watched me go crazy not knowing what happened. It was all you"

"Sngobile please sit down" the woman joins in and Sngobile picks up the gun on the table.

"Sngobile....." Mluleki starts but she fires a shot before he could finish. The gun is quiet because of

the silencer but we all stare at the man with a shocked look on her face and his hand covers his chest where the bullet went in.

The silence washes over and then they start crying. The women screaming. The kids in the bedroom join.

Sngobile turns around and her eyes are fixed on me. I reach out for the gun but she turns and aims at the bleeding man on the floor. Without missing a beat she fires another shot at him and he doesn't even make a sound. When she holds the gun towards her own head I jump in and wrestle it off her hands. It goes off but I am not hit. It also doesn't look like Sngobile is also hit.

"Nqubeko" yells Mluleki looking behind me.

I turn around and it's Fanele. She is staring at me with her eyes wide open. When she moves her hand on her stomach her hands are bloody.

"No. No" I rush to her and hold her before we falls. The bullet went through her stomach.

Chapter 56

Nqubeko

We make it to Nkongeni hospital and they rush her inside. She is still awake but doesn't seem to be aware of anything but her stomach.

"Let them work on her" says Mluleki pulling me back when I start to walk into the emergency room with the nurses and doctors.

I stop and step back. My hands are covered in blood. I stare at them and try to wipe them in my pants but it's drying up so nothing happens.

"Why did she leave the bedroom" I ask to Mluleki and gives me a shrug. He also doesn't know.

"Over here" I heard a female voice and look up. It's Sngobile barefooted with Phili and Dabula behind them.

"How is she?" Asks Phili looking pale and shivering.

"They are still working on her" replies Mluleki before he places his jacket on her shoulders.

"Thanks" she holds it tight around her and I remember Thembeke at home. She will worry about me.

"I need to call Thembeke" I tell them before searching for my phone. I can't find it and Dabula hands me his phone. I nod a thank you and walk away from them.

Thembeke's phone rings once before she answers. She is clearly awake.

"Dabula" she sounds like she is panicking.

"It's me my love. Are you okay?"

"Nqubeko"

"Yeah it's me" I lean against the wall.

"I just had a really bad dream about Fanele and you. Where are you?" I can hear Sonto and her daughter in the background.

"We are at the hospital. Something happened to Fanele"

"Is the baby okay? Is she okay?" She asks quickly.

"We don't know yet. They are working on her as we speak" I reply and try not to imagine all that blood and the fear in Fanele's eyes.

"Are you alone?"

"I'm with Dabula, Phili, Mluleki and Sngobile" I check if they've moved where I left them and they haven't.

"Okay. I'll pray that she and the baby are okay"

"Thanks baby. Have you eaten?"

"Yeah I ate and before you worry. I am under the blankets so I am warm" she laughs a bit.

"I love you baby" I try not to sound emotional so she doesn't worry about me.

"I love you too. They will both be okay"

"Yeah baby. They will be okay. I'll call after an hour"

"Yeah you to that" she reply and yawn.

"Stay warm okay" I add before ending the call. I don't immediately walk back to the others. I stand there and close the eyes. Does this make me a hypocrite? That I now want to ask God for help

when I've always be the solver of my own problems. I am not sure but still I do say a silent prayer for Fanele and our baby.

"Have you told Thembeke" a tiny voice draw me out of my prayers. I open my eyes and it's Sngobile.

"Not yet. I didn't tell her everything" I can't help but look at her. She does look like Thembeke only Thembeke has grown while Sngobile is still small.

"Okay" she smiles and her eyes are shining with tears.

I shrug my jacket off and place it on her shoulders. It swallows her up.

"How old are you?" I ask out of curiosity.

"27. Me, Phili, Thembeke and Slindelwa got the small frame. They say we got it from our great-grandmother but like Thembeke she gained some weight and her hips came out. We never did" she laughs a bit.

"But you ladies are fine. Tiny but fine" I look up and Mluleki is standing behind Phili in a protective

manner. I think Dabula sees thing because he is standing just close. The boy is a protector.

"Have you been in jail?" Her question snap me back to her.

"Jail?"

"Yes. Well I know i'm going to jail. So have you been there?" I forgot about the big drama we left behind.

"Not the female side of it. Do you work?"

"Not since my daughter killed herself. I couldn't function. I didn't know what was going on. Been at home since then" she wipe the tears with the back of her hand.

"I take you don't have a lawyer?"

She shakes her head and stare at her tiny feet.

"Why are you barefooted?"

"When Dabula arrived with the car I just left" she hides one foot behind the other.

"Dabula can drive?"

"Yes but his friend drove. He is heading to section A.

He left us here and continued with his trip"

I nod and look up to her face.

"So how come you look like Thembeke?" A smile spread in her dry lips.

"Because Thembeke looks like our great grandmother plus her father here and there. Me, I look like her and him a bit. Too bad one can't pick a parent" her voice trails off.

"I'll get you a lawyer. A good one. You will have to work with him to get you off Sngobile. Do what he says and how he says it. Forget your personal feelings on the matter. Listen to him" I will have to call Sandile and tell him.

"How much will that cost?"

"Forget that. Just focus on you. And jail is tough. I assume the female side is tough too but you will be fine" I put my arm on her shoulder for comfort.

Surprisingly she wraps her arms around me. This move take me back to Thembeke being my new wife. A cockroach walked into the house. She was seeing one for the first time and when she tried to

hit it, the insect being winged and all just moved to the wall. She screamed and I came running. Found her staring at her chest rising and falling. I killed it and without any warning she turned and wrapped her arms around me. I held her back looking at the top of her head inhaling lux. She was still tiny like her.

She pulls away and wipe the tears in her eyes.

"Let's go back to the others" I suggest and she starts walking first.

"How is Thembeke?" Asks Mluleki shifting even more closer to Phili.

"She is fine. I didn't tell her the whole story. Just that we are here" I reply and sit down on the bench. Sngobile joins me and then Phili also sits down. I look at Mluleki and he does exactly what I think he will do. He sits down next to Phili. Close enough for her to lean against his shoulder. I don't dare look at Dabula because he has no chance now. But I do look at Mluleki and find his looking at Phili's side of the face. He is my friend and I trust him but Phili is

like my family now. We are going to talk about this.

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Thembeke

I wake up and make the bed before washing up. The water is cold but I have no idea what to do. I'm no longer married to Nqubeko so I can't just walk into the kitchen.

"Thembeke" someone knocks gentle and push the door open. It's Nqubeko mother. Luckily she finds me dressed.

"Morning Mah" I greet polite and she smiles before she sits on the chair.

"Morning mtanami. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes we slept well. With Asanda talking when she couldn't sleep. Her baby talk is charming" I can't

help but laugh. She even points at things when she makes the noises. Once she starts talking I feel for Sonto.

"She takes after Sonto. She also can't stop talking" she laughs and then stops "Please sit down. I want to talk to you about something important"

I don't reply instead I stop folding the sleepwear and sit down.

"I told Nqubeko what your grandmother did. It wasn't my place but when he said you are not doing well I thought it could be that. I'm sorry mtanami"

I nod but I don't know why I am nodding. It seems like people know things I don't know about me.

"It turns out that Nqubeko went to confront your family in Dalton. There was a big confrontation and two people died"

"Dead?" I stare at her in shock

"Yes. Fanele got injured by mistake and she is in the ICU in Nkonjeni hospital"

"And Nqubeko? My cousins?" I stand up but she

waves me down so I sit back down.

"They are fine. They are all at the hospital waiting for Fanele"

"So who died?"

"Your uncle and one of the cousins. But I don't want you to worry about that right now. I want you to focus on this" she points my midsection and then smile.

"How do you know?"

"I'm an adult Thembeke. I can see it. But it's too soon to tell people so just take things slow and nap when you need to. This is your home and as mother I have to take care of you"

"Thank you mah" my stupid eyes are going to start watering.

"And you can come to the kitchen. It would be stupid of me to say don't. You've been part of this family for years already. So continue like the last time. Just take it easy and don't tell people this early. Pregnancy is respected my child" she stands

up and squeeze my shoulder before she walks out. Sonto walks in after her and find me wiping my eyes.

"What's wrong?" She asks

"Nothing. Sometimes i'm a cry baby" I laugh and look at her.

"And you should. With a man like Nqubeko what else is there to do. J ust be a spoilt cry baby and let him worry" she laughs too.

"He worries a lot"

"Its his nature but when it comes to you I think it's his job. I'm glad you guys fixed things. It was driving him crazy to be away from you" now she sounds girly and it's nice but this is her brother.

"I am glad we are back again. It wasn't good for me too" I try not to remember Kwanele.

"Let's go have breakfast. Asanda is bothering my father for now"

I stand up and take my phone. It starts ringing and it's Nqubeko.

"Nqubeko" I answer.

"You tell him I said he better sleep with both eyes open because what he started is far from over. Him and that slut will get it" threaten the person in the other end.

"Who is this?"

"Doesn't matter who I am but I am telling you that you boyfriend and that slut better watch it. And while at it tell that whore and her brother that we will burn down their home so they better take their bastard kids and run. You don't murder family and then expect things to remain the same. Nx" line goes dead.

I stare at the phone and look at Sonto. She heard because the volume is up on the phone.

"Call Nqubeko"

"That was his phone. They are using his phone" I unlock my phone and dial Phili's number but then I remember Dabula's number and Nqubeko used it when he called.

I make the call and Nqubeko answers.

"Thembeka"

"Nqubeko. Someone called using your phone. He is threatening to hurt you and someone else. And he also threatened the kids....."

"Calm down Thembeka. They called Dabula's phone" he sounds calm.

"Nqubeko. They will burn down the house. Our home" I yell at him.

"They won't. Have you eaten?"

"Nqubeko!!!"

"Thembeka. I'll be home in a bit. Do me a favour. Have some breakfast and keep warm. We will talk when I get there" he ends the call.

I make the call again and he answers in the first ring.

"Who is the whore he is talking about?" I demand.

"One of your cousins. She shot and killed her father and her brother for raping her daughter. The child committed suicide when it happened. Her mother

took the gun and killed them. Fanele got shot by mistake. Turns out the man also abused Phili as a child. He was a dirty old man. Now the family is acting like she killed an innocent man. But don't worry about them"

"How can I not worry? They are threatening to kill you and her and burn down our home"

"Thembeke. I don't just own a gun. I know how to use it. No one is coming after me and if they come they will find me ready. Now do me a favour. Eat, keep warm and kiss Asanda for me. I'll be home in a bit" he sounds like he is smiling.

"How is Fanele?"

"Out of surgery. The bullet missed all the major organs and come out clean. They will be okay"

I take a deep breath and sit down.

"That's good. What kind of family is this?" I stand up when I feel some dampness in my underwear.

"They are dirty but don't worry about them" i'm no longer listening to Nqubeko because I am busy

turning my skirt around. When i'm done I stare at the red stain. I'm bleeding.

"Nqubeko. I'm bleeding" I whisper while staring at the stain.

"What do you mean?"

"I think there is something wrong with the baby. There is blood" I say this loud enough for Sonto to hear and walk back into the bedroom. She sees this and stares at me.

"Okay, are you in pain?" Asks Nqubeko.

I listen for a moment. I don't feel any pain I can only hear my heart beating painfully in my chest.

"No. I'm not in pain"

"Good. The Doctor said you can spot during pregnancy. Is it coming out too much?" He sounds so calm.

"No I don't feel it just a stain in my skirt"

"Okay that's good. As long as there is no pain and it's not too much blood. Change the underwear and look for pads in the wardrobe. I didn't throw them

away. I'll be there now and take you to the Doctor" he instruct. I nod as a tear drops from my eye.

"Thembeke put the phone on loud speaker and do what I tell you" he repeats.

I do as told and change everything. Sonto puts the clothes in the laundry bucket and pour water.

"Still no pain?" He asks after a moment.

"No" I reply

"Good. Take your bag. I'm turning in the corner"

Sonto hands me my handbag. I check my wallet and put two pads in just in case.

We both look up when we hear the car. Nqubeko is here for real. I let Sonto lock up while waking to the car. There is Mluleki driving. He smiles at me as I approach the car. He is one person who always looks at me like he is enjoying some inside joke when he sees me.

"Sonto. Please take care of him and let him sleep in the room. We will be back" says Nqubeko to Sonto as Mluleki exit the car.

"MaKhumalo" says Mluleki giving me a nod and a smile.

"Hi" I smile back and get in the car.

"Still okay?" Asks Nqubeko starting the car.

"Yeah. No pain"

"Good. Let get you to the Doctor and have him confirm that its normal"

I nod and look at Sonto and Mluleki walking into the main house.

"Why does Mluleki always looks at me like he is enjoying a private joke?"

Nqubeko laughs and turns on the radio.

"When you are 15 or 16 some boy was teasing you about your tiny feet. You were carrying a bucket of water in your head. You managed to put it down and chased the boy down the field. When you walked back up you struggled to put the bucket back into your head...."

"He walked over and helped me" I finish for Nqubeko. The memory comes back to me.

"Yes. So since that day he developed this soft spot for you. When you chased that boy he was the one cheering for you. He thinks even though you are sensitive and all but you are capable of fighting back"

"Do you think the same?" I ask while eyeing him.

"Baby girl. Mluleki and I will never have the same views when it comes to you. As your man my job is to protect and solve all your problems. Not to push and see how far you will go. Do you still feel the blood?" He looks at my thighs.

"I don't feel anything"

"Check"

I stare at him. Is he really suggesting I check my vagina in the car with him?

"Thembeke I know how it looks like. Just check the pad for the stain" he makes it sound so easy.

"We will check when we get to the Doctor"

"Open your legs and let me check if you are feeling shy about something" he demands and I push the

skirt between my thighs and squeeze them.

"You are not doing that. Just drive" I laugh when he laughs too.

The oncoming car makes a bad turn and blocks the road. Nqubeko and I look at each other.

"Maybe they are having car trouble" I suggest even though everything in me says there is more.

The door opens and someone stumbles out and someone pushes them forward. Nqubeko stops the car and grabs something in the back seat. When he opens the door I see it's a gun.

"Stay in the car" he instructs.

"Nqubeko don't go"

More people come out of the car and I see bags being thrown out and then I see Celiwe and two boys rush to her side.

"It's the kids" I yell and open the door.

The man get back in the car and one of them kick Dabula before he falls forward. Then they drive away.

"ThembeKa!!!!" yells Nqubeko as I run to my family. The kids also start running towards me leaving Phili kneeling next to Dabula.

When they reach me they start crying. Nqubeko tells them to get the car and continues to Phili.

Celiwe holds their hands as they continue to the car and get in. Nqubeko helps Dabula up. He has a swollen eye and another bruise on his forehead but he looks okay.

"They beat him up" says Phili holding her elbow.

"Is your arm broken?" Asks Nqubeko.

"No. He yanked it but it's not broken" she replies and start picking up their bags.

"Who are those people?" I ask while helping her carry them to the car.

"It's Sdumo and his thugs. He arrived this morning and they set our house on fire. Its his father who died" she explains and wince when she moves her arm too fast.

"Can you gibe me your phone ThembeKa" says

Nqubeko.

"It's in the car"

He nods and pick up the rest of the things as we all walk back to the car.

"Where is Sngobile and Mluleki's car?" He ask to Phili.

"They took the car and took Sngobile too" she replies.

Nqubeko doesn't say anything until we reach the car. We help Dabula get in then I squeeze in with the kids. Nqubeko takes the phone and makes the call.

"Are you calling the police?" Asks Phili

"No. This one needs me to solve it" he replies and close the window and then close the door. He doesn't want the kids to hear him makes the calls.

When he is done he waits for a while. I open the door and get out.

"Nqubeko"

"I'm waiting for Sakhile to come get the kids. Me,

you, Dabula and Phili will continue to the hospital.
The kids will go home to my mother"

I nod and lean against the car with him.

"It's not your fault" he says just as I was starting to think it's my fault.

"Then who?"

"Them for abusing the kids in the family. Then Sdumo for poking me in the eye"

"Are you going to kill him?" I lower my voice.

"Yes" he replies and then pull me close to him "all of them"

"They have Sngobile" I don't even know her.

"Don't worry the police are heading there to pick her up for murder. She will be fine behind bars" I don't reply. Its a big mess. My family is rotten and I married a criminal. There is nothing to say for now.

Chapter 57

Thembeke

We leave the Doctor's place quietly after the Doctor explained that I'm fine and that sometimes a woman do spot during pregnancy especially when it's this early. He also adds that I need to rest and Nqubeko agrees with him. I'm happy to be safe but i'm not sure about resting. How do you rest when there is so much happening around you.

Dabula is resting in the car and Phili has a sling thing supporting her arm because it's not broken.

"Are you okay?" She ask as we get in the car.

"Yeah i'm fine. He gave me some pills" I reply and try not to disturb Dabula's nap.

"Can we get something nice for the kids. To cheer them up after all this. I know my mother will cook but they deserve something nice" says Nqubeko starting the car.

"Some chips will do" suggests Phili.

"And a toy or two" he adds.

"The boys love cars. Celiwe is still into dolls" she

replies before she looks out the window.

The car remains quiet until Nqubeko goes inside the shop leaving us in the car.

"I don't get it. Your father is a rapist and you attack the innocent people for it? I mean, what did we do? Why burn down our home?" Asks Phili as tears stream down her cheek.

"I think he is a bully and he thought why not attack the helpless kids" it makes me angry just to think about it. That place was our home. Yes it was bad and we needed to fix it or restart but it was home. Our home.

She let's out a sob and I search my bag for some tissues. I'm cry baby so I always have them ready.

"I think we have to involve the police, the elders in the area and the whole family. This can't go on unsolved. We deserve some answers" I add as she wipes her eyes.

A knock on the window makes us jump. It's Tiko with Mluleki behind him.

I open the window and he smiles at me. This man has seen me at my worst.

"Hey guys" I greet them.

"Hey Sisi. Are you guys okay? Where is Nqubeko?"
Ask Tiko

"He went inside" I reply and get out of the car. Mluleki also helps out Phili whom I had no idea needed help since her legs are fine. It's just an arm.

"Is he okay?" He points at Dabula.

"He needs some proper rest but he will be fine. Have you heard anything about S'nqobile?" I ask to Mluleki because I doubt that Tiko knows yet.

"She is fine. The police went to get her. The kids are fine too. How serious is this?" He points at Phili's arm.

"It's not broken. Just painful" she moves her hand as if to show him that it can still move. Tiko and I look at them and I don't know what he is thinking because I am thinking he is standing too close.

"You guys are here" says Nqubeko walking towards

us. That was quickly judging by the number of plastic he has.

"That was fast" I comment and he laughs.

"I went straight to the the things I needed and asked for help" he loads them in the back and then they move to a distance before they start speaking quietly. I don't even look at Phili right now because I sold Nqubeko as this proper stand up guy who does business and owns a gun. A licensed gun that he carries for protection because business people do that. This is a different Nqubeko and i'm starting to think I don't know him at all.

They speak for a while before Nqubeko comes back and tells Phili to ride with Mluleki because of the space in the car since Dabula is sleeping. She doesn't protest. She walks off to him and they walk back to the car.

"Get in the car Thembeke" says Nqubeko as I stare at them.

"Why is your friend suddenly close to my cousin?" I ask as I get in the car.

He doesn't reply instead he gets in the car and start driving.

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We arrive back to Nqubeko's home and find Celiwe sitting outside on the chair hugging her legs. She stands up when she sees the car and then I see two heads appearing at the doorway. It's clear that they were scared and being in a place that isn't their home must be scary.

"I think we have to take them to Durban with us. Find them a new school. It will take them a while to adjust but they will. They are young" says Nqubeko quietly as he stops the car and opens the door.

The bitch in me says keep your mouth shut like he did when I asked about Mluleki.

I open my door and get out. Celiwe runs to me and wrap her arms around me. I brace myself for the

boys as they also run towards me. Its a group hug that ends with loud sobs of confusion and fear. I manage to calm the situation down and take them to the kitchen while Nqubeko takes Dabula to the room so he can sleep on the bed.

"They didn't even eat. They thought you guys weren't coming back" says Sonto as we walk in.

Celiwe smile shyly and takes a seat on the chair. The boys don't let go of my hands.

"It's been hectic" I reply and manage to free one hand the pull a chair to sit down. Now they are both standing on each side of me. At least there is no more tears

"Tell me about it. My father has gone to talk to the chief so this can be resolved without getting uglier and innocent souls getting hurt" says Sonto pulling out the chair and then picking one boy up to the chair and then doing the same to the other. I watch this. She does it so easily and they don't climb down or protest.

"Do you think it can be resolved? S'ngobile is in jail

as we speak"

"More reasons why it should be resolved quickly to avoid more drama and more scandals being exposed to the public" she opens the microwave and takes out the plate filled with food before she dishes into three bowls and then hands the little people food. I wonder if I'll ever be like her. Know what the kids needs and handing it without making a big deal about it.

"Oh well we lost our home. Honestly I don't see us being all forgiving after this" I don't mention the real reason because it's painful to think about. Who rapes all the kids in the family. Even a grandchild to the point of suicide? I know that I don't want to claim any relation to someone like that.

"How did it go with the Doctor?" Ask Nqubeko's mother before she even appears from the passage.

"It was okay. I just need to take the pills, rest and try not to think about my family which is rather hard" I explain.

"That's good. That everything is okay. That's really

good. The family crisis is hard not to think about but do try. Sleeping will also help with less thinking" she suggests before she looks at Celiwe and then back the boys "When you are done eating come to me I have something to keep you kids busy for a little while" she smiles and then walks out.

"It's the cartoons. She believes that kids should be allowed to watch cartoons. It keeps them busy" says Sonto before she laughs. I laugh too. Sometimes grown up do see the simplest things we overlook sometimes.

Nqubeko walks in with the plastic bags and tell the kids that it's their treat.

"Thank you for this" I point the plastics.

"It's nothing. Dabula is sleeping. If you need to sleep I think you will fit in the couch in the lounge. I'm going to Mluleki. I'll be back with Phili" he doesn't wait for me to say anything as he kisses my cheek and leave quickly. I look at Sonto and she shrugs before she focus on her baby's milk.

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The day goes by fast. I make the fire and boil some water so the kids can bath in a warm room. They watched TV until they slept in front of it and then I had to be cruel and wake them up for a bath. The boys are quiet they don't even tease each other or play wrestling. Celiwe has been playing with Sonto's baby. Nqubeko hasn't been back with my cousin and Dabula woke up and talked to Nqubeko's father when he came back from the chief. I haven't had time to ask him what they talked about yet.

As the kids bath I search the bags for their clothes and also take in my things from the laundry line before I have to do it with Dabula in the room.

As I leave the room another car drives in and I can't see who it is because the windows are dark but when it stops Nqubeko gets out followed by Mluleki and then Phili.

Nqubeko takes them to the lounge where the elders

are and I am forced to be patient about this because I have to show some respect but deep down I am dying to know what are they doing.

I manage to get the boys all dressed while Celiwe dresses herself and then Sonto brings them food so they can eat while it's still warm.

Phili walks in after a while. The kids silently move close to her as she sits down on the grass mat. Sonto hands the me baby and leave the room.

"Thank you for taking care of them" says Phili quietly.

"It's fine. They are scared a bit. I know I would be too if I was them" I reply and look at Celiwe. She is just nibbling her food.

"I am scared too" she replies and wipe the tears before the kids can see them.

"Have you heard anything from them?"

"Yeah we went there. Also went to the police. I had no idea they did that to you too Thembeke. I thought it was just me and I tried my best to move

past it. To forget everything about that. Now it turns out it's not just us. Who does this to family? To another human being? To the kids?!!" She starts raising her voice and both boys look up at her.

"He got what he deserves" I whisper and poke the fire with a stick.

"He got off lightly. He deserved more than that" she adds and takes the spoon from the boy and start feeding them both. Celiwe also starts eating her food.

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Nqubeko solves the sleeping mystery. We are sleeping on the floor in his room because he doesn't want his brothers having anything to complain about when they hear we used their spaces. Mluleki offers to go find a place too book into but Nqubeko's mother is not hearing it so he

stays and he is going to share the bed with Dabula. They give us very thick sponges and we sleep in the lounge in Nqubeko's room. Well the kids sleep but the rest of us stay up and try to talk about everything else but the situation we are in. I fall asleep first and only wake up when I feel Nqubeko's arms pulling me back to him.

"Morning" he speaks and I open my eyes to check if it's really is the morning. I feel like I just closed my eyes.

"So soon" I complain and close my eyes again. He laughs and pulls me even closer and then take me hand to his.

"Yes so soon. Everyone is up. Its just us" he whispers that last line and then my hand touches his hard on.

"You are not getting sex from me. Forget it" I take my hand away.

"Aw come on Thembeke. You and I have been fucking like rabbits for so long. You can't change the rules now" he kisses my ear.

"I can and I have. You never told me about this Nqubeko" I point under the couch. He knows i'm talking about the gun because I saw him put it there last night.

"I think I did and you've seen it more than once" he stops touching me and lay on his back.

"But you didn't tell me you actually use it. That you and Mluleki are into some gang things. And that car outside. That's not your car and Mluleki carries more than one gun. Something tells me you also carry more than one gun. Who are you?" I point at him before sitting up so I can look down at him.

"I'm your man. So what if I carry more than one gun when I feel threatened" he smiles like its some kind of a joke.

"So you and Mluleki are not just friends. He is your partner in crime"

"He is my friend. They are all my friends and Thembeke, carrying or owning several guns doesn't mean I'm a gangster. Kids do that. I use these for protection. In business protection is required" he is

explaining like he is talking to a child. Only a child would buy something like this.

"How many people have you shot?" The smile on his face is gone.

"Don't ask questions like that Thembeke. It's not allowed"

"I think I deserve to know. To know what I am getting into. I refuse to be some gangster wife Nqubeko living my life in some bubble because someone is always ready to pop it for some revenge the innocent people get dragged into, in these gangster lifestyles" he stares at me and says nothing for a moment.

"I have a family that needs me full time. The pregnancy that's starting to scare me. So I don't have enough space to learn and memorize the codes of the gang world like those hardcore gang wives" I continue just in case my point didn't reach the destination it was directed.

"I'm not a gangster Thembeke. Stop saying that. You are insulting me"

"If not then what are you? A criminal?" I whisper.

He look wounded as he looks away.

"Look. I know that you did things in your past. I'm not judging you but Nqubeko you came out better. You are a business man and you are doing well. So why would you set yourself back by doing shady things in the dark?"

"If you must know, I don't do shady dealings in the corner. I am forced to carry guns with me because i'm always thinking 'I have to go back to Thembeke' so I can't afford to be out there unarmed just in case someone decides to take a chance. Yes there are people who would love to see me gone. But I don't want to be gone and leave you here alone. Does that make me a criminal? I don't know. But I know that deep inside me it makes me a lover. Someone who loves someone so much they don't hesitate when it comes to them and they safety and happiness" he replies quickly and then gets up. I'm touched because I didn't see this conversation going this way.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you"

"But you did" he doesn't even look at me.

"I'm sorry. I was just asking so I can know"

"Know what? You accused me of being a gangster and then you say I am a criminal. Doesn't sound like a random question to me. Unless you are looking for ways to dump me because I happen to own some guns" when he says that i can feel my stomach twisting. I don't want us to have a full blown fight. Not now.

"I'm sorry Nqubeko. I don't want a break up. I just wanted to know"

He stops fixing his belt and looks at me. He takes a deep breath and pull me up and then we sit on the couch.

"I'm not a gangster. Sure sometimes i do find myself having to deal with some shady things but it's business. In business, a lot can happen Thembeke so protection is always a better option. Do i go around abusing people and making life unbearable for others? No i don't. Everyone i've

killed gave me a reason for it and it was either me or them. That's who i am and you are living in a bubble Thembeka. A bubble i created when we got married so it's my job to take care of it and make sure it doesn't pop no matter what"

Chapter 58

Nqubeko

Dabula, my father and the Chief wants a meeting with the family. I disagree but my voice holds on authority when it comes to the Chief and my father so I just nod and offer to drive people to Danny Dalton. We leave the ladies at home and drive to Dalton with Mluleki, Dabula and my father. I ignore his suggestion of calling uncle Josiah to come with us. The situation is bad enough without him acting like he knows it all.

We leave Dlebe quietly and the silence last until we reach Dalton. The little path leading to the their home is crowded with cars. The Chief is there

already and their Chief is also there and the real surprise is the police cars. Someone was smart enough to call the police just in case things get out of control.

We exit the car and follow each other to the yard. Mluleki takes his hat off and I almost laugh at him for this.

"The thugs from Durban" someone yells and I act like i'm not hearing them.

They picked the area under the tree. We walk there and take the available chairs while the ladies are sitting on the grass mats. I assumed the ladies wouldn't be allowed to attend but I guess I am wrong but I am glad that I left Thembeka behind. I don't want people digging into their old wounds.

We sit down and the quiet conversation dies down. They sing the praises for both Chiefs before the meeting starts.

Someone from the Khumalo's is called forward to speak. We all wait as Sdumo moves forward.

"Thank you Ndabezitha. My family was attacked by

these thugs from Durban. They shot and killed my father and my brother" he point at us and people start talking at the same.

"Quiet please" says the local Chief his voice sounding calm. The noise dies down and he nods to Sdumo to continue.

"They were armed. They locked the kids inside the bedroom and pulled out guns to my father and uncles" he continues. Mluleki mumbles something under his breath.

"Did you call the police?" Asks the Chief.

Sdumo looks uncomfortable for a moment before he starts stuttering.

"We can't hear you. Please speak up Mr Khumalo" says our Chief.

"No we didn't Ndabezitha" he replies.

"Did they tell you why they attacked the family?" Asks our Chief. Sdumo looks around and the women he is looking towards also look down.

"Please speak up Mr Khumalo" says the local Chief

and Sdumo looks wounded. He looks at me and I stare back at him. I can even see the spot I'll aim for when I shoot him.

"Phili is a cheap whore everyone in this place knows it....." He doesn't finish because Mluleki is off the chair and is charging towards him. The man between us are fast so they stop him before he reaches Sdumo.

"Order please" yells the man next to the Chief.

"Get your hands off me" says Mluleki pushing the hands off him.

"Sit" says the policeman joining in.

"Nx" says Mluleki before he walks back to his chair. I try my best to remain serious but deep down I want to crack up with laughter. Sdumo is a coward.

The noise stops and the Chief signals Sdumo to continue. He clear his throat and look at his aunts.

"They were accusing them of sexually abusing Phili and Thembeke. It's a lie. Phili was sleeping around when she was still in primary school" continues

Sdumo.

"Is Phili here?" Asks the local Chief.

"No. They are hiding them in Dlebe" he replies. The noise starts again but the Chief raises his hand to stop it.

"Who is hiding them in Dlebe?" Asks our Chief.

"Them" he points at me.

"Mr Mbonambi please rise" says the Chief. I stand up because he can't be talking about my father.

"Ndabezitha" I say loud enough for all the faces to focus on me.

"Can you tell us what happened. Leading to the attack on the Khumalo family" says the local Chief looking at me up and down.

"I found out that Thembeke was sexually assaulted as a child. My friend and I came over to find out who it was. When we arrived it turned out that Mr Khumalo didn't only abuse Thembeke but he also molested Phili and raped his own granddaughter. She took her own life" several voices exclaim and

few men start speaking in disapproving voices.

"Did you report to the police Mr Mbonambi?" Asks the local Chief.

"No Ndabezitha. I was angry. I called my friend to come and help me confront the family about this. At the time it was just my wife. Sorry, my soon girlfriend. We got divorced a while back but got back together after working things out" I explain.

"You came armed and shot them instead of calling the police" says the Chief sounding like he is going to start blaming me for everything.

"No. We were going to confront them and then call the police. When we arrived we asked the kids to leave and asked them questions. The ugly truth came out and Sngobile appeared from the kitchen. We didn't know she was there at all. She shot and killed them because her daughter took her own life after she was abused by her grandfather. We didn't shoot anyone. She did it out of anger and I fully support her for doing what I wanted to do myself" there is no need to lie and act like I wasn't hoping

for that out come.

"But you do know that taking the law into your own hands is not good" says the Chief.

"So is raping the kids in the family" I don't even stare down for this. He needs to know that I don't care about wrong or right she it comes to exposing the perverts.

The Chief nods and look at our Chief as if he is telling him its his turn to ask me questions.

"When Sngobile shot her father what did you do next?" He asks. I find this irrelevant but I have to answer.

"Sngobile and I fought for the gun because she wanted to shoot herself. It went off and shot Fanele. We hurried her to the hospital and left the family"

"Thank you Mr Mbonambi" says the Chief. I nod and sit back down.

"Mr Dabula Khumalo please come forward" says the local Chief.

Dabula gets up and walks to the front. He looks like

a child that he really is.

"Ndabezitha" he says softly.

"Your home was burned down and you were attacked. Can you tell us what happened" continues the Chief.

Dabula explains that when they came back from the hospital they found Sdumo and his two friends waiting for them. They took him and the car. Told them they were no longer family and that they needed to leave the area. Phili managed to pack up while they went to beat Dabula up behind the school.

A hand grip my knee and I realize that my hands are closed to fists and my jaw is tight. I want to strangle Sdumo. I want to rip him to pieces. Mluleki pushes me down and shake his head. He almost touched Sdumo before. Why stop me now.

Dabula continues to tell the story and how the kids were man handled and thrown in the car. How they punched S'ngobile and almost broke Phili's arm. He starts weeping when he recalls how they watched their home burn down and to top all that they didn't

even know the reason because they live alone and excluded by the family.

This time I ignore Mluleki as I get up and launch myself to Sdumo before they even realize it. I manage to get four punches in before the policemen tackle me down. I try to break away from them but these men know what they are doing so I stop fighting and allow them to drag me away from the group.

"Chill" says the man giving me a hard look.

"Just get off me" I dust the grass off my pants.

I can't hear very well now and my ears are ringing because I am pissed off.

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The meeting goes to a break and people are told we will resume in two hours. Everyone gets up and start moving to different directions. I walk back to

the car and call Thembeke. She sounds like she is sleeping. I hate waking her up but she won't let me hang up now.

"So you are coming back?" She asks after I finish telling her everything.

"Not yet. They took a two hour break. Have you eaten?"

"Yes we ate. Your mother is a great grandmother. The kids are thrilled to have her fussing about them"

"I'm glad they are settling down"

"They are kids Nqubeko. They will be fine. We just have to be fine first and then they will also be okay" she replies and then yawn. I find myself smiling.

"Go back to sleep my love. I'll call you later"

"As soon as you are done. Promise"

"I promise. Bye my love"

"Bye Mbonambi" she ends the call. Lean back on the seat and close my eyes. I can't get over Dabula's tears. He is just a child and then some over grown coward decides to attack him. Sdumo

needs a lesson. A serious lesson.

I make a call to Thuba and he answers after a while.

"I thought you were in a meeting with the Chief" he sounds like he is driving.

"Its rubbish. Just us repeating the same thing. I am glad the ladies are not here. Imagine being expected to recall things you tried to forget"

"That's the bitter part. Having to tell the story over and over. It's so unfair"

"Tell me about it. Anyway. I need your help" I sit up straight and check if there is anyone close to the car. There isn't and I can see Mlu with Dabula and my father talking to some local men.

"Shoot"

"Sdumo is a thug. He is based in Johannesburg. I need to teach him a lesson he will never ever forget"

"Like what?" Asks Thuba sounding more interested now.

"Anything. Nothing physical to him. I want something that he will have no choice but to weep

when he thinks about it. Maybe then i'll put him out of his misery and kill him when he is down and out" Dabula and Phili lost their home. I don't count Thembeke because I am her home. But Dabula and Phili didn't deserve all this. Sdumo messed with a wrong family.

"I'll see what I can get and let you know. I take you need this soon?" He asks.

"Very soon. Sharp" I end the call just as my phone beep indicating an incoming call. It's a landline so I answer.

"Yes"

"Hi, am I speaking to Mr Mbonambi?" Asks a female voice.

"Yes you are. And you are?" I don't recognize the voice.

"I'm calling from Nkonjeni hospital. My name is Lihle. It's about Miss Fanele Khumalo"

"Is she okay?"

"I'm afraid I can't say over the phone. You have to

come in Sir" she replies.

"I'll be there now" I end the call and start the car.
The baby can't die. Not by my own gun.

Chapter 59

My legs are heavy as the doctor moves aside to let me into the intensive care unit. I don't get it. The bullet missed the major organs, the baby was fine and now the heartbeat is gone. How? The doctor explained but still it just doesn't make any sense. I take a deep breath and walk in. I can see Fanele. She is sleeping I think. This place is cold but I guess the coldness is the last thing on everyone's mind right now.

She opens her eyes as I step closer to the bed. They are red and swollen. They immediately fill with tears and they run free the moment she blinks.

"I'm so sorry Fanele" I whisper before holding her hand. She holds my hand back and her hands are dry but warm.

"Thank you for coming" she whispers back and there is a smile on her face but she is still crying
"They can't find a heartbeat so they want to take the baby out"

"We lost the baby" I say we so she can see that she is not alone. It's us both. The baby I never wanted in the first place but got used to waiting for because I was ready for everything that came after.

"It's not fair Nqubeko. The baby was fine. He was fine before"

I don't know what to say to her. So I continue to hold her hand as she continues to cry. After a while her cries go quiet and I cover her hands with mine.

"When I was out shopping the other day. I came across this big truck. The fire truck and I thought to myself. Soon I'll be buying these for our kid. I thought he might want to be a fireman. Or a policeman. I stopped myself from buying the truck remembering that it will be years before he starts playing with it" I smile at the memory as tears start in my own eyes.

"I bought few things too. A police car because I thought he will love the lights as a baby and the love the car when he is old enough. There were so many things I wanted to buy Nqubeko. But somehow I always stopped before going to far" she exhales and her nose is running.

I reach over and hand her some tissues next to her bed. She takes a handful and separate them into her hands. I watch as she blows her nose and then continue to wipe her face with the other tissues.

"Do I look better now?" She asks her voice sounding clearer than the last two minutes.

"You look good" I even smile hoping it will cheer her up. To be honest, Fanele isn't ugly at all. She will definitely meet someone available and fall in love.

"Thanks" she smiles but I can't help thinking the smile isn't for me "Have you see S'ngobile?"

"Not yet. She is still in police custody" I don't add that I have my lawyers involved so they can get her off with a lighter sentence.

"When you do see her. Tell her I forgive her. I know

she wouldn't hurt me on purpose. I won't be able to see her go to trial but I'll be thinking about her"

"I'll tell her. Plus I doubt she will be going to trial soon. The case is not open and shut. You will be recovered by then" I suggest.

"I guess so. How is Thembeke? It must be hard having to find out that the family is rotten and cruel" I can see the disgust in her face.

"She was shocked but Thembeke is stronger than we all realize. She will bounce back" I don't mention the pregnancy to her. It would be cruel to do that.

"Yeah she will. Thank you for coming Nqubeko" she smiles and her eyes remain dry.

"Thank you for Letting me know about the pregnancy. We didn't get to be parents but the fact that you came forward means a lot" I try not to think about the ugliness of the situation when it began.

"For me too. Could you get me a nurse. I think I am ready now"

I nod and go to look for a nurse. I find two nurses

standing outside and it seems I caught them on a gossip so they look embarrassed. I ask one of them to see Fanele and she hurries back inside. I follow her and stop dead on my tracks when I hear that sound.

The nurse yells something and I look over to the bed. Fanele's eyes are closed.

"Excuse me" someone bumps to me and I step aside only to bump to someone else and then a hand on my arm leads me to outside. The nurse smiles and leave me to wait outside. I spot a bench and walk over to sit down. My mind going back into the conversation with her. The quick change in her mood and then the way she cleaned herself up when her nose was running. The phone rings and it's Mluleki.

"Mhm" that's all I say.

"Aybo where are you?" He asks and I remember just typing the message. I don't remember sending it.

"The hospital. It's Fanele" I reply and look up. The doctor is walking out. He looks around and I stand

up before putting the phone in my pocket without hanging up.

"How is she?" I ask the doctor and he slowly shakes his head.

"I'm sorry Mr Mbonambi"

"She is dead?" I stare at him just in case my hearing is wrong.

"Yes. Her heart stopped"

I stare at the doctor for a moment and then walk past him to walk back inside. I find two nurses. One is busy fixing the sheet over her body. They both step aside as I walk closer and pull the sheet back. Her face looks fine. Her lips pressed together and her eyes closed. My hand touches her cheek and they are cold. I move to her neck and her neck is still a bit warm but I know it will go cold too in a moment.

"Go well Fanele. Take care of our baby" I whisper before leaving the ward. I walk a short distance and stop. It's like I can hear Nobuhle's evil laugh. Rejoicing that she managed to yank my life once

more.

"Sorry" says someone as they bump to me. I turn and the Doctor stares at me in shock before she hurries away. She looks familiar but right now my mind doesn't even want to bother to think who she is and why she is shocked to see me. I have to go back there and let everyone know that Fanele is gone.

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I manage to make it to Dalton before the meeting is finished. I can see my father looking at me with disapproval. Mluleki frowns but says nothing. I take a seat next to him and says nothing too. The Chief is given a chance to speak.

"I apologize for the delay. It's been a long day. To avoid any further delays i'll just get straight into it. We find Mr Mluleki and Mr Mbonambi guilt and they

will be fined a cow each. You don't go into a man's house armed and ready to take the law into your own house. When there is a problem you report to police or even come to me. Not to attack the family" there are voices agreeing with him. I catch Sdumo's eye and he laughs.

"Regarding the issue on the Khumalo household. The shooting and the injuring of Miss Fanele Khumalo we will leave that to the police" again I catch Sdumo grinning while looking at me but I still remain seated.

"The issue of the attack on Mr Dabula's family and the burning down their home I strongly advice Mr Dabula to go lay a charge on the police so Mr Sdumo and his friends can be held accountable for the attack. As well as the attack on Miss Philelwa and Miss S'nqobile. We are against violence and attacking two young women is disgraceful. For that I will strongly advice that the case is opened and those involved face the justice system. In this community we are against Gender Based Violence and I argue with everyone here that if you know that

someone is violating a child or a woman you have to report them. Don't look away because it's family or a friend. The victims are family too and forcing them to face their abusers on daily basis and act like it's okay, doesn't only silently kill them but it does this slowly and painful. No one deserves to be forced to love their abusers. It's cruel to force that on people. Abusers should be exposed and removed from society. They don't deserve to live with us. They don't deserve to be protected under keeping the family name clean. People like that don't deserve to be protected. As a result I've decided to banish the Khumalo family in this area. They have exactly 72 hours to leave this community and never set foot here again"

The noise break out. The women cry and the men argue. Sdumo's face is frozen in shock. I make sure he catches my eyes before winking at him.

"Silence" the policeman takes over. Few more uniformed men steps closer ready if any fight breaks out.

The noise dies down.

"From now on I am going to make sure that all the kids are protected. Starting with making sure that they are all at school. I know that this family was keeping Kwanda from going to school so he can look after the goats during the day. Working closely with the school we managed to notify the authorities and because Kwanda doesn't have any parents, his mother died two years and we've tried to trace his father with no luck, so as the leaders and the elders of the community we decided to agree when the social worker suggested a foster home for the boy. The make this even more heart warning is that the boy will remain in this area so we can all watch him grow. So him and Mr Dabula and Miss Philelwa will be the only members of the Khumalo family that will remain part of this community. We will help them rebuild their home"

Mluleki gets to his feet and the Chief stops speaking.

"Sorry to interrupt. But we will be taking Dabula and Philelwa to Durban with us Sir" everyone stares at him in shock.

"Mr..." Starts Chief

"Just call me Mluleki" he replies and other people laugh while others whisper about his lack of mannerism.

"Mr Mluleki. How are you related to this family?"
There is more laughter.

"It's a very long story Ndabezitha" he replies and I think the Chief doesn't know how to treat this one.

"Then we will make another appointment and talk about it" he says at last.

"Ndabezitha" says Mluleki sitting down. I stare at him and he hisses "shut up" before I even open my mouth.

"We've just received bad news. Miss Fanele and her unborn baby have passed on" says the Chief after talking quietly with his right hand man. There are few gasps and then cries. I stare down at my hands and try not to think about Fanele. She followed our baby.

"So this is how this is going to go down?" Asks

Sdumo his voice managing to stop all the noise. We all look up at him as he stands up.

"Sdumo" says the Chief.

"Let me speak. You had your chance" he snaps and I see men step closer to him but the Chief stops them.

"Let him speak" he says and Sdumo turns to me.

"It's funny how you are now acting like a good man when you are not different from my father. You are a rapist too. You married Thembeke when she just turned 18. Paid her greedy uncles a couple of cows so you can have sex with a child and let her play wife instead of playing with dolls. You also couldn't let her turn 21 before you started fucking her. Ask people in your area. They will tell you how it was sad to see a man marry a child 20 years younger than him and she was just 18 years old. She cried throughout the wedding ceremony and she could hardly walk the next day. We all know why. You are no better than other rapists Mbonambi. At least they don't marry them and make them fall in love

with them like you did. There is a name for that. Stockholm Syndrome. You are the rapist like my father and Thembeke is your trapped victim"

Chapter 60

Nqubeko

We make it home late in the evening. I'm glad to see Thembeke awake and watching TV with my mother and the Phili. My father goes to the bedroom because he can't be in the same room with Thembeke. She is my girlfriend after all.

We join them and Sonto goes to the kitchen to dish up our food and serve us. They don't ask what happened. I think it's because of the kids. They are wide awake so we can't discuss anything serious. We eat silently while my mother and kids keep laughing at the show they are watching. This goes on for almost 30 minutes before they start falling asleep one by one.

"So how did it go?" Asks Sonto unable to wait any longer.

I allow Dabula to tell the story. I'm glad he doesn't mention Sdumo's accusations regarding Thembeke. He is wrong. I never abused Thembeke. She was never held hostage. We just didn't communicate like couples but she wasn't held against her will.

"So where will Fanele be buried if the family is banished?" Asks Sonto.

"The family will have to make a plan. Negotiate with the Chief to at least allow them to bury Fanele with the family there. Then once they have settled wherever they are going then they can perform a ceremony to take them with" explains Mluleki.

"Or she can be buried by her mother's side of the family. There are some family members left. They weren't close but still they are her family plus she wasn't welcomed as part of the family yet. I think they were still making plans about that so technically she is still part of that family" explains Dabula.

"What about you Nqubeko? Do you know anything about her family?" Asks my mother putting me into the spotlight. I look at Thembeke first and she doesn't look like she wants to burst into tears.

"I don't know anything about her" I reply. For a long time she was just Nobuhle's assistant.

"But she was carrying your baby. You should have got to know her" says Sonto and my mother disapproves, judging by the way she looks at her but she start this topic.

"Since her carrying my baby was fraudulent no one can blame me for not knowing enough about her" I defend myself.

"But still. Now she is dead and you know nothing" presses Sonto.

"And her family will bury her. I'll help financially if they need help but I doubt it. Sdumo will probably want to show off about something so he will want to handle everything" I say and deep down I am hoping I am right. Dabula doesn't want to press charges for the assault so Sdumo is not going to

jail. It's not a train smash for me because there is nothing fun about dealing with someone in jail. I need him to be out there and free when I deal with him.

"That's swine. If I can get my hands on him" says Mluleki not raising his head to see my mother's face.

"No violence boys. The family is dealing with so much already. Just let it go. You did your parts" preaches my mother.

Mluleki nods as if he agrees but I know he doesn't.

"So S'ngobile is going to stay in jail until the trial?" Asks Thembeke.

"Sandile is skeptical about that. S'ngobile can't make bail with no permanent place to stay. Plus we live in Durban so we can put our address down. She will need to remain here until the trial. So the chances are slim" I explain and Phili looks wounded.

"But she is going to be okay" adds Mluleki clearly for Phili's benefit. Dabula will have a hard time keeping Mluleki away from his sister.

** **

Nqubeko

The sound of the door opening wake me up. I don't jump up instead I slowly move Thembeke's arm on my chest and look at the door. It's Dabula and he is walking out. He is using his phone as a lighter so I can see that he is wearing a jacket. You don't get dressed if you need to go outside to pee. He is going somewhere.

I get up and grab my gun before following him. The moon is huge so where the house light doesn't reach the moon does. I look around for a bit before seeing him walk towards the back of the main house. I make my way there and find him sitting on a rock leaning against the wall.

"Dabula" I speak first and he raises his head but says nothing but I can hear him breathing. After few

seconds I can tell he is crying.

I look around and spot another rock so I go pick it up and bring it closer so we are sitting side by side.

"Sorry. I didn't want to cry in front of Phili" he says quietly.

"Because you are a man and a man doesn't cry. I get it" I reply

"And i'm supposed to be strong for her and the kids. As a man i'm supposed to solve problems and cry like a girl" he says as he struggles to breath.

"At some point we all cry like girls Dabula. If walls could talk they would tell you that we all get to that point where we just want to scream the pain out. It doesn't make us weak"

"Then why do I feel so weak?" He asks and I look at him. He is just a boy forced into a man's shoes.

"Because there is so much going on Dabula. Believe me, I feel weak too"

"I didn't know about what happened to Phili and I don't even know how to talk to her about it. Do I

even talk to her about it or just act like nothing happened. Then the homelessness. What are going to do? The Chief offered to help us rebuild but it's more than that. How do we cleanse our home. We are part of that family and I know that people will always look at us and talk about it. How do I protect them from this?" He asks as the sobs escape his chest.

"We are taking you to Durban with us. Thembeke and I talked about this and we agree that you need to move. Not run away. But move. For a better chance in life" he opens his mouth but I speak before he can say anything.

"Thembeke has a house in Durban. It's big enough for your family. The school is close by so the kids will be fine. I know you are a man and you probably have some pride so we are going to do this easily" I want to laugh but I don't. He is bruised enough.

"Easy how?" He asks.

"I'll get you a bursary so you can study. The kids will stay with Thembeke and Phili. Once you are done

studying you will get a job and continue taking care of your family. For now that house in Durban has to be your home" I explain even though I know that Mluleki will want to be a man about this as well.

"I need a job. If I can get a job I can take care of them. Then Thembeke can just provide shelter"

"What kind of job do you have in mind? Dabula, things are hard out there. They are hard for graduates so you can imagine how hard they will be for you. You have to study. Earn a qualification so you don't wake up on day wishing you did"

"So while i'm studying what about my son? Phili? I can't expect you and Thembeke to take care of us. We had a home Nqubeko. We took care of ourselves without having to depend on anyone" he argues and it makes me proud.

"Dabula, we all go through hard times and need help. We are the help you need. All you have to do is take it. Everything else you will figure out as you go along"

"Can I talk to Phili first?"

"No problem. But we have to leave in a day or two"
he nods and takes a deep breath. I smile to myself.
He will make a right decision.

** **

Thembeke

Nqubeko wakes me up with a kiss. His lips tastes like colgate and I pull back when he doesn't stop.

"The kids " I whisper and try to look behind him just in case someone is awake and looking at us.

"It's after 7 and they are all gone. It's just me and you" he replies and kiss my lips again. I'm horny already so I welcome the kid and slip my hands under his t-shirt. He pulls away in a jump.

"What?" I ask wondering if he fought someone there and I just touched the bruise.

"Nothing. Can I ask you something" he frowns and

start rubbing his chin.

"Sure"

"Have you ever felt like you were being held against your will while we were married?"

"Huh?" The question is something I don't understand.

"I mean. Did you ever feel like i'm holding you hostage?"

"Hostage? Why would I feel like I was being held hostage?" He is being weird right now.

"Thembeke. I'm 20 years older than you. You were young when we got married so I'm wondering if maybe you did feel like you have no choice but to love me at some point"

"Okay. Where is this coming from Nqubeko? I don't understand" I stare at him hoping to see something on his face so I can understand what he is asking me but I don't get it at all.

"Do you love me?"

"Yes" I don't even hesitate or blink when I reply.

"So you are not in love with me because you feel like you have no choice?" I can feel my sexual desire slowly disappear because I just don't get what exactly is Nqubeko asking.

"What choice?"

He stares at me for a moment and then leans over to kiss my lips. I don't kiss him back at first but he doesn't stop so after few seconds I join in.

I expect the quick sex since we have to wake up and join the others but Nqubeko does it slower. I'm not complaining though because I always find the sensual sex very satisfying especially when he is emotional about something.

** **

"That was good" I whisper against his chest while trying to catch my breath.

"I love you" he replies before he rolls over and take me with so i'm laying on him instead of beneath him.

"I love you more"

"Sdumo said you had no choice but to fall in love with me after being forced into marriage" he speaks after a moment.

I raise my head and look at him.

"So that's why you are asking me strange questions?" He nods and his hand brushes my head.

"I know he was being spiteful but I can't help it"

"Meaning?"

He stares at me as his hand continues to make a pattern on my face.

"Was there ever a point where you thought about running away? Leaving me?" He asks at last.

"Run to where? When I got married Nqubeko you became my home so I never thought about running to somewhere"

He doesn't nod or say anything. A minute passes by before wraps his arms around me. I lay my head down and listen to his heartbeat.

"The morning after. Were you sore to the point of not being able to walk?"

"No. Why would I be that sore? I think you were gentle enough" I think we are years late to be having this conversation.

"And you were scared?"

"Yes I was. I mean I was 18 Nqubeko. I was a virgin and had no idea what exactly was coming. When you asked me if I was okay with it I said okay and it was really okay" I can feel him exhale and his hands tighten around me.

"Thank you MaKhumalo. You have no idea how much it means for me to hear you say that. When Sdumo said all that I couldn't help wondering if I've been looking at things differently. That maybe i'm seeing what not there at all"

"So Sdumo attacked you?" I was listening last night as they spoke but to be honest I didn't hear everything. I was so sleepy it wasn't even funny.

"He tried to imply that i'm a pervert too for marrying you at 18. Saying the morning after you were so

bruised walking was difficult for you and that you only fell in love with me because you felt it was the only option to get your freedom back. He called it Stockholm Syndrome"

"Stockholm syndrome?!"

"I was shocked too. Then this morning I started wondering if I wasn't living in a fantasy"

"Well I have no idea what that implies but I know for sure that i'm with you because I love you"

"Even though i'm years older than you and you are this tiny woman next to me?" I know he is teasing because I can hear a laugh in his tone.

"Soon i'll be a fat woman next to you. You wait until I gain more weight" we both laugh and his hand reaches lower on my thigh before he shifts me until my legs are on each side of him.

"I can't wait. I think you will look fine even then. All thick in the right places" he drops his voice into a sexy whisper and I find myself giggling. He pulls me up and covers my mouth with his. We kiss until I pull away and move myself lower until I feel him

hard against me.

I pause and stare at him as he stares at me. Sdumo is wrong. I don't know what Stockholm syndrome is but it can't be this.

"So what are you going to do to Sdumo?" I ask while slowly lowering myself on to him. His hand grab my ass.

"Make him pay" he replies quickly.

"Pay how. I want details Mbonambi" I balance my arms on his shoulders so my boobs are almost on his face. His hand comes up and pinches the nipple making me tremble just a bit.

"First I'll close his source of income" I nod and start moving my waistline to spell "C"

"And then?" I want to do this slowly but I can tell that I underestimated how much I really want to reach the orgasm.

"Make sure he has no friends to turn to" he continues and I continue to make the "O"

"Baby" he whispers and his hands grip my ass

harder than before.

"And then what?" I do another "C" and feel myself begin to rush.

"Desperate people make mistakes. He won't even see me coming"

A moan escape my own lips when I do the second "O" and Nqubeko starts moving beneath me.

"And then?"

"Dammit Thembeke" he pulls himself up and wraps both hands around me before he starts moving me up and down on him until I start shaking and an intense wave of pleasure washes over me. I hold him tight as he reaches his own orgasm.

"Then i'll kill him" he whispers in my ear before he takes me down with him. I'm too out of breath to speak and I nod and try calm down.

Chapter 61

Thembeke

It's been 2 months since my cousins moved in with me. It's been a real adventure watching the kids adjust to a new environment. Dabula struggled at first but after the regular evening drives with Nqubeko he started to feel at home. Thanks to Nqubeko's connections, we were able to get the kids to attend the nearby primary school even though the headmistress said she can only take them to grades lower than theirs just so they can finish the year and start proper the following year. We agreed because we weren't blind to the change they needed to adjust to. It also didn't help that it was now a mixed school and the boys feared their white teachers. Celiwe was different. First day she came back bragging about two friends she made. So the first weeks of school was hard with the tearing each time I dropped them at school but the teachers were kind so after a while there was a smile after a wave and 2 months later I'm the only one doing the emotional wave at the gate.

"They are fine" says Nqubeko laughing a bit.

I quickly blink the tears away before turning to face him. As always, his eyes fall on my growing stomach first. It's definitely growing I even have love handles and a perfect cleavage.

The school bell rings and the little groups start moving away from the play area.

"I never thought dropping people at school can be this emotional" I open the door as Nqubeko open his side.

"It's not. It's probably a Khumalo thing" he teases while watching me put on the seatbelt. Lately he is obsessed about me wearing a seatbelt.

"Whatever" I roll my eyes and rub my stomach. It's very itchy and some pregnant ladies I was with in that horrible 'I joined too early' mummy and baby class I attended last week, they said I shouldn't scratch the itching instead rub the area so to avoid stretch marks. I've been rubbing but it just doesn't have the same effect and Nqubeko said stretch marks look fine on anyone so I shouldn't worry about having any. I believe him because he also has

stretch marks on his waistline. But still I rub from time to time.

"How was the class? I asked before and you only yelled at me. I think you are calmer now" he starts the car and I look out the window just thinking about those women there.

"It was horrible" I try not to cringe.

"More details Thembeke"

"They made us watch a video of the actual birth. Can you believe it"

"What's wrong with that? Maybe they are preparing you for the actual birth"

"By making me watch another woman's vagina pop up a baby?" I stare at him and I can see his mind making the images as he starts imagining it.

"Wow. That's way too much info" he makes the face.

"Exactly. And then they started talking about the fancy things you can buy for the baby. Then what to wear during pregnancy. I was wearing a legging Nqubeko and they all looked at me like I was doing

something against human nature. Two ladies started talking about where to buy perfect maternity wear. It was horrible and I couldn't eat beef curry without them telling me why the curry is not good. One lady even suggested that I should drink some herbal tea for clear skin because my face is oily"

"You didn't get all emotional and started crying, did you?"

"I only cried once I was driving home feeling horrible about going there in the first place. From now on i'm attending my check ups and staying home to enjoy eating" I say the words with my stubborn face on and Nqubeko laughs.

"That's my girl"

"So can we have dinner tonight? Just us in your house?" I'm horny and it's not funny. The last time we had sex was over 3 weeks ago. Lately Nqubeko comes to my house for dinner and then leaves. He also told me things were hectic at work so he has to go to the office daily.

"And you are staying over?" He asks after a pause.

"Yes. Phili went out last night so she will be home" she and Mluleki went out for dinner for the fifth time since we came back. Dabula stopped sulking about it when he found out. I must say I was glad he found out because it was becoming harder for me to lie about Phili going to bed early and then having to stay up pretending to watch TV while waiting to let her in when she came back. Yesterday she left late with no plans of returning and when she came back this morning she was quiet so I'm going to drill her when I come back from the doctor.

"Then I'll make sure you get the beef curry you love so much. Some apple juice" he replies and smiles at me. I smile back feeling like my worries are just my imagination. Ever since the big drama back home i've been feeling like Nqubeko is strange. I can't really put my finger on it but he seems strange. The lack of sex isn't helping. When I mentioned this he blamed the tiredness and the stress about work.

"And more" I whisper and he looks at me with a smile on his face.

"Definitely more MaKhumalo" he smiles and bite his

lower lip. Maybe whatever was the problem it's now gone.

"About Sdumo...."

"No. We are not talking about Sdumo. The less you know the better" he cuts me off.

"But Nqubeko....."

"No but. Leave all that to me. I don't want you thinking about Sdumo. I shouldn't have told you anything in the first place"

"But you did" I press on. He is overprotective I'm aware of that but I need him to stop treating me like a child.

"And that's all you are getting. Just focus on this baby and shut out all the negative things Thembeke. You don't need the stress and worry" he squeezes my hand and I nod. We are going to revisit this topic between the sheets.

** **

Nqubeko

I make it to my appointment just in time after driving Thembeke back home after her check up. The pregnancy is fine. She is also doing very well. I should be a happy man but I'm not. There is a voice inside me that won't stop asking questions so I've made this appointment in New Germany just to avoid bumping to someone I know and having to make up stories about seeing a shrink. Men like me don't need their heads read. I'm not here for head reading. I'm here for answers I need.

"You must be Mr Nkosi" says the front lady when I approach her desk.

"Yes. I think i'm right on time" I smile at her. i couldn't use my real name.

"Yes he is ready for you" he points the door and I nod a thank before going through the door.

Dr Gearing looks half white and half Indian. He is short and slim. I can tell he surprised to see me and the fact that I look like a giant compared to him isn't

helping.

"Mr Nkosi"

"Dr Gearing" I smile a bit and he smiles back. I hope he thinks i'm a gentle giant.

"Please sit" he points the chair

I sit down as he also sits opposite me.

"Thank you Mr Gearing. I'll just get straight to the point" I start and he stops picking up a pen and looks at me.

"I'm listening Mr Nkosi" He says kindly.

"Okay. I married this young woman. She was 18 at the time. It was an arranged thing so she wasn't given much choice" I can see him taking this all in as he looks at me and then look away for a bit.

"I was older then her. Really old. The gap is 20 years" I watch his face to see if the shock will register but he shows nothing. The man is a professional after all. I continue

"The first few years were bad. We hardly talked. There was no communication between us. We both

did what was expected and lived like that for years" the Doctor nods so I continue.

"I'm not proud of this but I cheated on her. She had no idea until my side chick confronted her and it broke her heart and she miscarried the same evening. It was real bad. Our marriage ended shortly after"

"That must have been hard on you both" says the doctor clearly wanting to get the word in.

"It was real hard for me. I couldn't let her go so I fought hard to get her back. And I did. We are expecting a baby" I smile just as the Doctor smiles.

"That's good. So what...." He starts

"Wrong?" I finish for him and he nods. "someone mentioned a Stockholm Syndrome and said she was suffering from the condition"

"Stockholm Syndrome?" He frowns.

"Yes. Trust me I've been to Google. I read up on it and thought about this"

"So you think it's true?" He asks.

"I don't know. That's why I'm here needing answers"

Dr Gearing gets up and walks to a book shelf. I watch him as he scans the books and then pick one before walking back to me.

"Mr Nkosi. If your wife is suffering from Stockholm Syndrome don't you think I should be talking to her?" He sits down and pages the book.

"So you think it's possible?"

"I'm just saying what you said. I can't say if she is or not. I haven't met her Mr Nkosi" I can tell he is thinking this is stupid.

"She is already attending therapy"

"For Stockholm Syndrome?" He looks up in surprise.

"No. For other problems I can't mention" I reply feeling a little annoyed.

"I see. So let me make sure I understand you Mr Nkosi" I nod and wait for him to continue "You think your wife is suffering from Stockholm Syndrome?"

"Yes" I say sharply.

"Why?"

I sit back and look at the doctor.

"Something happened to my wife when she was young. She has nightmares about it sometimes. Her parents died while she was still young. She was raised by her grandmother. When she died she was left with her uncles in her mother's side of the family. They weren't really kind and they were already looking for ways to profit off her. When I asked to marry her they were already planning to marry her off to someone older with more than one wife and a house full of kids. I knew her father and I couldn't let it happen so I married her instead. Wanting to give her a better life" I can see the Doctor is judging me for marrying her but i'm not going to tell him about making a promise to her father.

"Only you didn't give her a better life?" He asks

"I did. I sent her to school. When she was struggling to make friends I personally made it happen. I got her a job. I did everything a husband has to do but I

starved her emotionally. I wasn't aware of it at the time but looking back now I see she was starved. I should have been there for her. Help her adjust to being married"

"Not many would recognize their fault Mr Nkosi" agrees Gearing.

"I do recognise my faults. I made so many of them"

"But she took you back....."

"Exactly. She took me back Doc. Yes she wasn't sitting on the couch crying for me but still she came back just like that" I snap my fingers so he sees my point.

"And you wish she didn't?"

"Of course not. I'm happy she is back but I can't help wondering if she is back because she loves me or she is back because she feels trapped somehow"

"I'm not following Mr Nkosi"

"I once asked Thembeke is she ever thought about leaving me after we got married. Do you know what she said?"

"What did she say?"

"She said I became her home. She stayed married to me because I became her home. It wasn't the first time she said something similar to that. When she left she said she was going to pay me back my lobola because her uncles were saying she can't leave me without them having to return the lobola. I told her I didn't want it back. Instead I offered her a house because she said she now didn't have a home. When a woman gets married she leaves her home and belongs to the husband. So leaving me meant she no longer had a home. I searched for her father's family and found them for her. When we spoke about the divorce she said 'Thank you for letting me go' so you tell me Doc"

Gearing takes a deep breath and take his glasses off before sitting back on the chair.

"I see"

"And now we are back together. The sex is great. I'm seeing a different side from her. She is emotional, she cries a lot, she is extremely sensitive,

she is jumpy and she loves me. So i'm wondering. Is she in love with me because I'm a man for her or it's Stockholm Syndrome because she feels it's the only choice she has"

Chapter 62

Nqubeko

I leave Gearing's office not satisfied with his answers. He is suggesting therapy for us both because he can't diagnose Thembeke without seeing her. Talk about not being helpful at all but he does highlight that since she is dealing with other emotional issues I could be reading too much into it and that obviously being pregnant will also have some effect on the emotions side. As Gearing kept talking I could tell he wanted me to bring her over but I can't. Not without disturbing the peace and her journey with her own doctor. I might have to approach Thembeke's Doctor after all. Have her confirm if that's true. But for now I rush back to the

office for my meeting with Mluleki and Tiko.

I find them waiting. Mluleki hates being late while Tiko is busy flirting with my employees.

"Gents" I greet and Mluleki gives me the eyes "I'm late. I know" I tell him before he says anything about it.

"Yeah right" he speaks anyway and they follow me to my office.

I wait until Tiko closes the door and Mluleki is leaning against the desk.

"And?" I ask Tiko and he pulls out an envelope from his inner pockets. Mluleki takes it first and look at the photos before handing them to me.

"So he bought a taxi?" I ask staring at Sdumo's photo as he stood smiling next to a taxi.

"Yep and they say he is the only local taxi owner so it was easy for him to get in" says Tiko.

"I see. Do you still have a man in Mhlungwane?" I ask Mluleki. Sdumo and his family found a place in New Town. It's a local community in Nquthu and

Mhlungwane is the area across the Ij ojosi river. Someone who lives in Mhlungwane would know someone who is buying taxis in New Town. Sdumo can't blend in. Thugs always stand out.

"No. I can get there myself. It takes fiver hours to drive there" he replies and Tiko looks at him. I look at him and hopes he doesn't say anything about Mluleki's beef with Sdumo. He doesn't.

"Not you. I don't trust you not to kill him. I need someone not involved"

"I do have a connection in Nondweni. He can get there and deliver the message without being seeing" says Tiko.

"Good. I need him to be there tonight" Tiko nods and take out his phone.

"Remember. No one gets hurt" adds Mluleki.

"No problem" says Tiko as he starts typing on his phone. I open the drawer and grab the envelope before tossing it to Tiko.

"For expenses" I say as he looks inside. He nods

and I nod in return to say we are done.

"I'll be in touch" he says as he walks to the door.

"No. I'll be in touch. Thembeke owes me nut so I'll be very busy" I can't help but grin at the thought.

Tiko frowns but nod and then leave. I turn to Mluleki and find him watching me.

"Nut? What is that? A craving of some sort?"

"No. Coconut. The last time she only did coco tonight I might let her do the whole word"

Depending on the mood. Surely I can hold off until she reaches her intended point.

"So you've stopped obsessing about Stockholm rubbish?" Mluleki doesn't even want to entertain the possibility.

"Went to Gearing and he wants to see us both. Now I have to talk to Thembeke's Doctor. Suggest this and have her look into it" his face says he is disapproving so I add quickly "it's just a suggestion. Nudging her to a direction"

"You should have signed up for yourself Nqubeko.

At this rate you will need to talk about something.
This can't go on"

"I don't need my head read Mluleki. But I can't help it. I need to know if there is no chance of that at all" a thought of Thembeke not being in love with me gives me this chilling feeling inside me.

"And if there is then what?" He asks his eyes fixed on me.

"I don't know. But I know that letting her go is not an option"

"More reasons why you should drop this" he stands straight before walking to stand near the window.

"Okay. So Phili slapped your hand away last night. It would explain the negativity" I expect a come back or a grin but his face remains the same. I move to stand next to him so he can speak. A moment passes before he leans against the glass and bury his hands in his pockets.

"She didn't slap it away. I just couldn't do it" he plays with the coins in his pockets.

"Why not?" I know she has been going out with him and them having dinner in his place meant it was on in my books.

"She was fine. We had a meal, share some wine, laughed at some Jokes and kissed on the couch. The problem started when we moved from the lounge to the bedroom. The bubbly mood went away in a blink. Her kisses were nervous, she wouldn't stop hugging herself and then she became rather stiff. Almost frozen in my arms. It was bad" he explains.

"But Phili is a mother of two kids. One of them is a teenager. She can't be afraid of sex"

"I don't think she is afraid of sex. Rather what comes after the sex" he replies and looks at me. I stare back. I don't get it.

"Nqubeko, Phili is a single mother. For years she has been raising her kids and her brother in a way. So do you really think she hasn't been rejected after the sex?"

I do think about this. A beautiful young woman

raising a family she might have tried to get some love in but only met selfish men who can't handle not being the only priority.

"It's possible"

"Exactly. Plus she repeated eight times that she doesn't want to have unprotected sex. It was totally irrelevant but she said it and in the end I figured, she is afraid of rejection and having to deal with the outcome alone"

"So what are you going to do?" I ask because Mluleki always have solutions. He doesn't even get nervous like me and ruin things.

"Show her that I intend to stick around even after the sex" there is a smile on his face.

"Treat her good" if Mluleki breaks Phili's heart I'll suffer for it too.

"I know. You told me what they mean to you. I won't break her heart" he gives me the look that somehow makes me believe him. He might be cold and heartless when needed but I trust he will do right by that woman.

"Good. Anyway I do need to go home and prepare for Thembeke. I promised her a cooked meal" I check the time.

"I do hope you have plan b for the food. The poor woman doesn't need food poisoning" he teases and laughs.

"If you must know. I can cook. Ha ha" I turn back to my desk and start taking the files I need home.

"So Thembeke does the coconut trick?"

"Yes" I turn and face him "Would you stop imagining it"

"I don't, you are" He laughs and continue "While she did the coconut. Let me guess, she asked you questions"

I try not to think about it so I don't walk around with a hard on.

"Yeah we talked about Sdumo" I reply as my mind goes back to that day. He doesn't say anything so I turn around and continue packing until I realize why he is asking.

"Mlu"

"Yes Nqubeko, The coconut trick was there to get you to talk about your plans for Sdumo. Thembeke has found your weak point. It's right there between your legs" he cracks up. I find myself laughing too because I didn't see that one at all.

"Dammit"

"Word of advice. When she fucks you tonight, don't stop kissing her. It's the only way to keep your mouth shut"

** **

Thembeke.

"Okay I'm done now" I turn off the stove and leave the kitchen. I've cooked dinner while Phili was busy helping the little people with homework and listening to stories about adventures of schooling. I decided to cook so Phili doesn't stress about it

when I'm gone. I'm getting laid tonight and I hope Nqubeko has enough energy because I want it repeatedly.

"I'm done too" says Phili as she follows me to the bedroom. The kids can now fight over the remote alone.

I walk in and she follows before closing the door. She wants to talk and I'm ready for details. I've been ready since this morning but she has been quiet so I decided to wait a bit.

"So what are you wearing tonight?" She asks as she throws herself on the bed. I grin and search for my package in the closet.

"This" I walk back to the bed and empty the shopping bag on the bed. It's a navy/blue lingerie.

"Damn girl" she picks up the bra and looks at it. Thanks to the filling up boobs because now I don't need a push up bra to support the cleavage.

"Do you think he will like it?" Her eyes light up.

"He will be stupid not to. This is sexy and you are

going to look really sexy in it"

"Thanks Cuz. So what happened with Mlu?" I ask straight out because she is not being voluntary and I can't wait any longer.

The smile on her face is gone.

"I don't think i'm cut out for sex Tee" she says after a moment.

"You have a working vagina and a g-spot. How can you not be cut out for sex?" The words come out fast and she stares at me before laughs. Thanks God she is not offended.

"There is nothing wrong with it. Well I hope there isn't but I can't help think maybe I shouldn't do it" she is no longer laughing.

I decide to sit down next to her and forget about seducing Nqubeko for a moment. This girl needs me to listen even if my sexual experience is not exactly wide.

"Why?"

"What if I get pregnant and Mluleki leaves. I'll be a

mother of three" she shrugs.

"Not if you use condoms" I suggest while brushing the evidence of unprotected sex.

"I know but last night I just couldn't help it. Plus I really like Mluleki. He makes me laugh and has great manners. He does things the no men has ever done for me. What if the sex chases him away"

"Chase him away how?" I don't understand. Most men love sex. I don't see anyone being chased away by sex. Unless if it was extremely bad.

"Too big, too wet, too cold. Back home i've heard so many women say these things. That you need to fix it up before the new guy. I never did and no one stayed"

"Fix what?"

She stares at me in disbelief.

"Fix down there" she points my legs.

"Why would it need fixing?" A gruesome photo of the birth flashes on my mind and I try not to feel sick.

"You really don't spend time on Facebook or being around talking women. Tee, when it's been a while since you had some the vagina can be disappointing"

"Disappointing how?" I haven't stayed away from sex for a long time. Life hasn't given me that and I am not complaining because lately I am loving all the sex I get. In fact i'm willing to ask Nqubeko if we can try bondage.

"They say it becomes too wet and feels like it's too big on the male"

"But the wetness is there to make it easier. Dryness means bruising Phili" I know this because this one time I started being dry and Nqubeko had to stop because he didn't want to hurt me.

She stares at me like she is confused.

"That's why they sell lubricants. To make it easier"

"Being wet is not the problem Thembeke. It's being too wet that's a turn off" she lowers her voice. We do have tender ears after all.

"Why? You can wipe and continue if its too much"

"That's what turns men off. Everyone on Facebook says so" I wish Phili wouldn't believe everything she reads on Facebook.

"Who is everyone and what do they have to do with your vagina and sex life?"

"Men on Facebook Tee. Men talk on Facebook!!"

I can't help but stare at her. She stares back and laugh when I don't stop staring at her.

"Facebook has so many people Phili. all of them behind the screen whether on the phone or laptop. You cannot let a complete stranger dictate your sexual life. Some of those men are kids acting like men. Some of them don't even know what the vagina looks like. They have no say in your sex life"

"It's not a say. They are....." I stop her before she tries to defend this.

"Strangers with their own preferences. Even though I don't picture any woman wanting a dry sex and not risk any bruising but still if there is then it's their

preference. Do you want dry sex?"

"Of course not"

"Good. Then forget people telling you about being dry during sex. Sex is wet and it should be enjoyed wet"

"And if it's too wet? Won't it turn Mluleki off?" I chew my inner cheek and think about this.

"If Mluleki hates the wetness during sex then he should go to those who want it like that. It's not your vagina's fault if he is weird" now I do wish I can call Pretty up and ask her for some advice but I don't want to risk making Phili uncomfortable.

"And then the risk if the condom bursts?"

"It won't burst. If used correctly and I know for sure that you and Mluleki are old enough to use one correctly" I tease and duck when she tried to hit me with the bra.

"One last thing. Do you think it's possible for a man like Mluleki to be with a woman like me with two kids for a long time?" This is a hard question and

being asked on a wrong person. I can't speak on his behalf.

"Phili. I think you should ask him straight out on that one. Just ask him before you guys go any further" I advise and she nods.

"He smells so good. Every time before he kisses me he ask if he can. When he wants me to pass him something he says please first. And he makes me wear his jacket even if I have my own jersey" she smiles and I smile too.

"So you do like him?"

"Yeah I do. He is nice to be with"

"So what happened last night? Did you suddenly fake a headache?"

She sits up and hug her knees.

"We kissed. Got really heavy on the couch. He asked that we move to the bedroom. I said okay and we went. Then i started thinking about all these things. My head was all over i didn't realize that he was no longer kissing me or trying to take my

clothes off. He stopped and i told myself to focus. We tried again and when i was finally naked, well almost because i still had the bra on, he just stopped. Took his shirt off and put it on me before telling me to get to bed. I did that while he went outside to smoke. When he returned he stripped and got in behind me. He kissed me goodnight on the neck. This morning i left early saying i needed to get the kids ready for school. My phone is off since then" i stare at her in shock.

"Off?"

"I'm afraid to turn it on"

I don't reply instead i get up and take the phone from the dresser and turn it on.

"I doubt he called" she lays her head down on the pillow.

The screen comes to life and i wait as it starts processing and the network connects.

There is only one message saying she was a voicemail message. I hand the phone back to her.

"You have a voicemail message" i state the obvious. She nods and start pressing the phone until the lady starts giving her options to take her to the message. I don't know why she is using loud speaker but i won't act like i don't want to hear so i listen.

"MaMzilikazi I'm starting to think you are ignoring me on purpose. Please let's talk. I love you and if clock reaches 5 pm and your phone is still off i'll come to the house"

We both jump when the buzzer goes off.

"It's 5pm" she says as she gets off the bed. I hurry to the window and even though its not exactly direct to the window but still i can see a silver gray car at the gate.

The phone also starts ringing. I decide to let her deal with the phone while going to get the gate. The kids know that they should never answer the gate.

"Yes"

"MaKhumalo. Is Phili there? I'm here for her" says Mluleki

"Okay" I press the remote just as Phili walks into the lounge. She goes to the door and opens it. I also follow but unlike her, I stand while she walks over to the coming car. It stops and Mluleki gets out. Today he is dressed in a grey round neck tshirt and black jeans and black jacket. Unlike Nqubeko, Mluleki is not too tall and large. He is fit though and average in height. With Phili being small its a complete different sight in their point of view.

I can't hear them but he says something and she looks down on her feet. She is barefooted. I wonder what did the shoes ever done to her. Mluleki looks over to me and smiles. Like a cat being caught licking the milk I smile and wave. He waves back before looking at her again. They speak and then he put his arm around her waist and pull her closer sharply. When she looks up he bends over and kiss her lips. The childish me wants to clap and cheer but the responsible woman silently goes back to the house and smiles when she sees the kids watching TV with no idea whats happening outside.

I'm happy for Phili. We all deserve this.

"I'm taking a bath guys" i let them know before disappearing in the passage. I have a big task ahead. Get several orgasms and learn more about Nqubeko's plan for revenge and also figure out just how dark he really is. If i'm loving a thug then i need to know just how deep he is so I don't wake up in shock one day when someone shows me the real Nqubeko.

Chapter 63

Nqubeko

I finish everything just as Thembeke arrives. The weather has gone from warm to cold and cloudy. I take the apron off as her car drives in and rush to the door. I step outside and notice that it's raining just a little. The air is cold but she steps out wearing a trench coat. The wind blows the hair and give her a sexy look with that dark lipstick on her lips. I turn back and grab an umbrella behind the door. She smiles when she sees me approach with an open

umbrella. I take the bag from her hand and kiss her cheek. She smells like something sweet and warm.

"You look gorgeous" I whisper as we start walking side by side to the house.

"Thanks you look handsome too" there is a smile on her face.

I kick the door wide open and allow her to enter first. She does so and I close the umbrella before walking in. She stands and look around. I forgot to turn the lights off so the candles can be the only light we have. I set up on the floor using thick cushion and pillows for comfort.

"It smells good" she smiles and her hands plays around the belt of the coat.

"I hope it tastes good too" i can cook but it's not exactly the kind of thing i can say I can do it with eyes closed.

"I'm sure it does" she replies and continue to smile. I can't get over how sexy she looks. She seems taller too. The shoes give her the height.

We both go quiet for a moment before i clear my throat. I need to put the bag in the bedroom. She moves and stands aside when i walk past. I return to her still looking around.

"A drink? Non alcoholic" i point the bottle on the table.

"Yes please" she replies.

I turn and pick up the glass. She watches as i pour the wine. Filling her glass and only pouring myself half. I'll have a real drink later.

I hand her the glass. When she takes it my hand goes to get coat and pull the belt. The coat opens up revealing her red and black lingerie. She looks so damn sexy, immediately stand for attention.

"Thembeke" I lower my voice.

"Nqubeko" she replies and i pull her close before kissing her lips. She kisses me back. Without breaking the kiss I take the glass from her hand and pull away to place them on the table. She stares at me and suddenly she looks a bit nervous. It reminds me of the night we got married.

"I think dinner can wait" I whisper.

"Great idea" she giggle and I kiss her lips right there.

The kiss is hot and her hands starts to fumble with me shirt while I try to take off her coat. She pulls away in frustration when she can't unbutton my shirt fast enough. I take her hand and lead her to the bedroom.

** **

Thembeke.

Okay, this is not what i had in mind when i wore the lingerie and worked out a plan to seduce Nqubeko. Not that i even got a chance to seduce him. Nope he took over and did things to me. Things I can't help but get this warm feeling on my face when i think about them. At some point I was on my knees and he was pounding me. Then he had me on my side and then on my back with my legs on his

shoulders. He didn't even let me be on top. When we finished I was so tired I fell asleep while he was still kissing my swollen lips.

But now i'm awake and i'm starving. I'm alone so i sit up and take Nqubeko's shirt on the floor and slip it on.

"Hey" he smiles when I walk into the lounge.

"Why didn't you wake me?" I kiss his lips and he tastes like watermelon.

"You were sleeping so peacefully plus I got a chance to warm up the food. Come sit so we can eat"

"I need the bathroom first" I walk to the bathroom to pee and rinse my mouth before going back. The food smells really good.

He comes back with the plates and I sit comfortable on the cushions.

"Are you feeling alright?" He asks after giving me the plate.

"I'm starving" I start eating right away. He watches

me and I don't care. I'm feeding his baby too.

"Do you need more?" He ask after a moment of just me with the plate.

"J ust a bit" I sip the juice while he gets up and disappear in the kitchen.

He comes back after a moment and hands me the plate. I eat slower now and he also starts eating.

"You know I love you" He says out of the blue. I stop my fork midway and look at him.

"I know and I love you too" I reply and expect a smile but he looks serious and it makes me put down the fork altogether.

"Do you?" He asks his eyes not moving from my eyes.

"Yes. Why are you asking?" He look down and for a moment I start fearing he is about to dump me on some 'I love you but there is someone else' speech.

"Because I love you and I can't help fearing that you are with me because I took you from your home when you were just 18 years old" I stare at him in

shock.

"I read up on Stockholm Syndrome. I'm not saying you suffering from it but..."

"You think I don't love you" My voice sounds emotional and I don't want to start crying.

"I just need something to put me at ease" he replies impatiently.

"Stockholm syndrome is when a victim falls for their....."

"I didn't exactly do things right when we got married. And I was a lousy husband for years Thembeke. Somehow you stayed and....."

"Because I love you. Dammit Nqubeko. What do I have to do to show that I love you?" I yell and slam the table.

"Please calm down" he sounds alarmed.

"I can't calm down. How could you even question this Nqubeko? After everything we've gone through"

"I can't help it. I feel guilty Thembeke. I feel like I contributed in everything you are going through and

now you are stuck with me....."

"Please stop" I push the plate away because there is no way I can continue eating now.

"I'm sorry"

"Take me home" I pull myself up.

"Please don't leave" he stands up too and when his hand reaches for me I slap it away.

"Don't touch me!!" I scream and he moves back.

"MaKhumalo...."

"Don't MaKhumalo me. You just called me crazy for loving you" I look around hoping to see my coat but it's clear that I left it in the bedroom.

"I did not say you are crazy"

"Doesn't matter what you said. You are ungrateful Nqubeko. I give us a second chance to you decide to ruin it" I'm loud and he keeps cringing with each word I say.

"So was I wrong to tell you this?" He question stops me on my tracks. My head says I'm being dramatic

but my ego is refusing to acknowledge this.

I take a step forward and force myself to walk to the bedroom. I check the closet for my coat and find it.

"Please don't leave. We won't talk about this. Ever again" he begs when he walks in.

"How come you can't get over Sdumo's accusations? We both know that Sdumo was trying to get to you" he seems shocked for a bit but quickly recovers while murmuring Dabula under his breath.

"I know but just for sake of everything that's happening and everything that's has happened I just couldn't get over it" he points the bed and I walk over as we both sit down.

"I don't have Stockholm Nqubeko. Give me Brian Temba and you are history dude" I tease and he laughs just a bit before he puts his head around my shoulder.

"Who is Brian Temba?"

"Someone I'll definitely leave you for" he starts tickling me and I try not to laugh but he knows that

being tickled takes my breath away when I laugh.

"Stop, stop" I beg while trying to push him away. He laughs and stops.

"So no more leaving?" He asks.

"And no more talks about weird things Nqubeko. I'm already attending therapy. That's enough for me"

"I won't bring it up again" he raise both hands.

"fair enough. Can we go back to the food. I need something sweet" I stand up and he follows. We walk hand and hand back to the lounge.

"I should get us some desserts" he picks up the plates and I don't stop him. I need something sweet to pick up my mood now.

Someone buzzes at the gate and I don't even bother. This is Nqubeko's house so he has to deal with his friends.

He comes back to answer. Someone is asking him to open the gate.

"What the hell" he murmur while unlocking the door.

"What's going on?" I hold his shirt tight around me. Even with the growing tummy his shirt is still big enough to be a dress on me.

"I don't know" He stands at the door and I poke my head around his arm to see the person walking towards the house. It looks like a boy but it's rather late for a kid to be outside worse on a cold day like this one.

We wait silently as the person approaches until he is standing in the direct light. I stare at him and look back at Nqubeko. He looks exactly like Nqubeko only he is a teenager.

"Hi. My name is Qaphelo. I'm your son" says the boy looking at Nqubeko.

Chapter 64

Nqubeko.

I stare at the boy as he stares back at me. Thembeke is the one who breaks the spell by

clearing her throat and then looking at me. What do I say now?

"Come on in. Its freezing out here" says Thembeke when she realizes that I've gone mute.

"Thank you" says the boy not moving forward.

I feel Thembeke's hand on my arm before she turns back to the house. I also move and the boy follows.

"Let me go get dressed" she says as she hurries to the bedroom.

"I'm sorry to just arrive without calling first" says the boy sitting on the couch.

"Who is your mother?" it sounds like a cruel question but anyone finding a stranger in his house claiming to be their child questions like these clear the air.

"Nothile Xaba" he replies and pulls out his phone.

"This is her" he shows me the photo.

"Nothile" I say it quietly while remembering seeing her eNkonjeni. She ran off without even wanting to acknowledge me.

"You guys dated some years ago. You left and she raised us alone" says the boy his voice sounding confrontational.

"Us?" I give him back his phone and ignore the tone.

"Me and my sister. We are twins" he shows me another photo. A chubby girl in glasses. She looks like Nothile.

"Does your mother know you are here? How did you even find me?"

"I didn't know you were hiding" he snaps.

Thembeke walks back in and she looks really good in my trackpants. She start blowing off the candles.

"I wasn't hiding but I think I need to talk to your mother first" I reply kindly.

"She is probably in that place. Call the hospital and ask to talk to Dr Xaba. She will come running" now I sense anger in him. Thembeke looks at me and then back at him.

"Give me her number" I go back to the bedroom to get my phone. I need to call Tiko but I can't just yet.

I need to sort this out first.

The boy calls out the number and I make the call. It rings for a long time before a tired voice answers.

"Yes"

"It's Nqubeko" I hope she doesn't know many Nqubekos.

"Mbonambi?" Now she sounds alert.

"Yes it's me. Qaphelo is here"

"What? Here where? Give him the phone!!" She yells.

I pass the phone to the boy and the moment he greets she starts yelling. I hear some words but others are hard to catch.

"Mum chill. I got here safe" he replies calmly.

Nothile continues to yell. Thembeke goes to the kitchen and I follow.

"I'm sorry" I whisper and wrap my arms around her. She holds me back and says nothing. We stand like that until the boy clears his throat behind us.

"Sorry. She wants to talk to you" he hands me the

phone.

"Nothile"

"I'm sorry about this Nqubeko. I'll come get him tomorrow morning"

"So that's why you ran off that day" my head was still full of confusion that day. I should have recognized her.

"I'll come get Lindokuhle tomorrow morning. I'm sorry about all this" the line goes dead after that. I stare at my phone.

"Lindokuhle?" I look at the boy.

"That's my other name. She insists on calling me that. I like Qaphelo" I catch Thembeke smiling at him.

"What's your sister's name?" I ask and Thembeke looks confused so I add "They are twins"

"Her name is Amanda" he replies.

"Do you need something to eat?" asks Thembeke opening the cupboard. He looks at her and nods.

"But I'm lactose intolerance" he adds

"Meaning?" I look at Thembeke.

"Milk doesn't treat him well" explains Thembeke already dishing up the food.

"There is no milk there" I reply.

We all stand silently as Thembeke warms up the food in the microwave. How do you deal with this? Find yourself a father of two teenagers.

She hands him the plate and pour juice as well. He thanks her politely and goes back to the lounge.

She takes the dessert and take my hand as we go back to the lounge too. I turn the TV on and the boy eats without even looking at the TV.

"This is good. If I have to eat pizza or a burger it will be way too soon" he says with a mouthful.

"Why?" I ask

"Because that's all we eat. My mother doesn't have time for cooking. Aunt Mbali is a bad cook but she is good on everything else so we have to eat takeaways more often" he explains.

"That's hectic. Can you cook?" Asks Thembeke.

He looks at her like she is crazy "even my mother doesn't cook so why should I?"

"Because you are the one wanting food" she replies.

"Well i'm her child and she doesn't have time to cook" he shrugs.

"Your dad cooked this. If he can cook like this i'm sure you can too" she smiles at me.

"You can cook?" He looks at me.

"Yes I can" I reply.

"But you have her" he points at Thembeke.

"So? She is not a cook" I look at him. He looks like he wants to argue but stops. We fall back to silence until Thembeke yawns.

The boy gets up and take the plate to the kitchen. I use this moment to kiss Thembeke and lick the chocolate on her lips. She giggles and pull away just as the boy walks back in.

"Come let me show you where you are sleeping" I

get up and point the passage before he follows.

I open the bedroom door and walk in. He stands and look around before going to the window.

I open the closet and take out the blankets. I show him the bathroom and show him the towels. He smiles and says goodnight. I smile back and leave him alone.

** **

Thembeke

The moment I close the bedroom door Nqubeko has his arms around me and kisses my lips.

"Nqubeko" I try to stop this but he doesn't slow down. His hand finds it's way inside the pants.

"Can we talk after this? Please" he whisper and claim my lips again. It takes him few minutes to get me undressed and on the bed. I lie on my back and

wait for penetration but it doesn't come. After a second he rolls off me.

"Sorry"

I nod and look at him. I'm not sure how I feel about the kids but i'm trying not to be dramatic.

"Nothile and I used to fuck. She didn't want a relationship and I never pushed. I was just happy to have someone who didn't want any thing more. But as you get familiar with a pers on you start to feel them grow on you. She did that too. When I suggested a real relationship she was okay with it but after a while everything changed. We grew apart too quickly. Then we ended shortly after. She never told me she was pregnant"

"So you did that a lot in your single days? Have fuck buddies all over" that comes out bitter than I meant for it.

"But I always used protection. I thought I was avoiding this"

"Well at some point it didn't work. You have a copy in the bedroom" again I sound harsh. It's probably

the shock of finding out he has kiss. Teenage kids.

"She should have told me. When she started ignoring me I used to drive to her place. Wait outside and call nonstop but she wouldn't come out" Now this part hurts. I use to think that he was doing it for me. Coming after me because he loves me so much but now I find he did it will all the women he has been with.

"Yeah well she is back now. With two kids" I say bitterly before rolling over to my side of the bed and pull the pillow under my head.

"15 years later Thembeke. Who becomes a father 15 years later" he follows and put his arm around me.

"You are. I think i'm sleepy now. So goodnight" I turn the light off on my side. He doesn't say anything at first but after few seconds he kisses my neck. His hand goes further down and start brushing my thigh. I lay still and force myself to continue breathing calmly. The kiss doesn't stop. I can feel his tongue on my neck and his hand going even further down.

"Let me know if you want me to stop" he whispers as his tongue touches the back of my ear.

"So you are loyal to all women you dated?" I ask turning my head so he can kiss my lips.

"Would you prefer if I'm a heartless player that's strings everyone along?" his hand pushes my legs apart before his knee is between us.

"You did cheat with Nobuhle"

He pauses for a second and I want to kick myself for it. I said I forgive him so I shouldn't be bringing it up every time we have an argument.

"And I lost you for it. It was a lesson for me" his lips find my nipple and he sweeps his tongue over it.

"And you have me back"

He stops kissing my nipple and looks at me. I open my legs wider and wrap them around his waist. We stare at each other for a moment before he pushes inside me. I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him close. I feel his hand on my weave just before he starts thrusting hard and fast. I come

immediately with my body locked around him.

"I have you back MaKhumalo. For ever this time" he hold me tight and starts moving again and finishes shortly.

"You owe me some proper love making Nqubeko. I'd like a good morning glory" I say when he pulls out.

"When did you become so brave?" He laughs and kiss my nipples.

"You made me brave. Besides, you said nothing between us should be embarrassing" he told me so when I was still a shy virgin who closed her eyes when he took his clothes off.

"Yes my love. Nothing in this bedroom will ever be"

"That's why I think i'd like bondage"

He stops playing with my breasts and look at me.

"what?"

"You know. The cuffs and blindfolds. They say it can....."I try to explain

"I'm not tying you up for sex. Forget it" He gets off me and i'm left feeling cool. Its the sweat on my

body.

"Why not? It doesn't hurt"

"Aybo Thembeka. How would you know that it doesn't hurt?" He snaps and I find myself fearing that he might start yelling at me.

"It says so on the Internet. It spices up the bedroom action"

"Spices up? Are you hearing yourself?? I just fucked you less than five minutes ago. What kind of spicing up do you need?" He yells and tears immediately fill my eyes.

"There is no need for you to yell" I turn and face the other way just as they start falling on the pillow.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell"

I don't reply. If I start talking now I'll end up sobbing loud and there is a kid in this house.

"Thembeka" he comes closer and tries to turn me over.

"Don't. Goodnight" I whisper before closing my eyes.

"Okay fine. I'll do it. Just a bit of playing around.
Now stop crying. Please baby" he begs.

I wipe the tears and slowly turn my head to face him.
He stares at me and says nothing.

"If it doesn't work out we can stop" I suggest and
hope to get some reaction but he continues to stare
at me.

"Nqubeko"

"I hear you. You know that I love you right" he says
quietly.

"I love you too" I smile and take his hand to mine.

He leans over and kiss my lips. Slowly this time and
I feel his hands moving gentle on my upper body.
This pregnancy is turning me into a sex crazed
woman but it looks like Nqubeko doesn't mind. We
kiss for a while before there is a knock.

"Eh, Nqub.... Dad. Mum wants to talk to you" says
the voice at the door. I glance at the watch on the
wall and it's almost 11 pm. Who calls at 11pm.

Nqubeko doesn't move on top of me "Is there

something wrong?" He asks.

"Her shift just ended at the hospital. She is home now" explains the boy.

"Then tell her I'm busy. I'll call her tomorrow morning" says Nqubeko coming back to kiss my lips.

I can hear the boy speaking on the phone. After a moment he says okay. "she says okay" he says out loud and then we hear the door open and close.

Who calls at 11 pm to talk about the kids she his for 15 years.

"I owe you some proper love making. Are you up for it?" He lick his lips and I smile.

"Yes I'm craving an orgasm or two" I whisper.

"Then orgasm coming up" he kisses my lips again. I push all the problems away. I'll deal with them tomorrow.

Chapter 65

Nqubeko.

I leave the bedroom quietly and close the door behind me. It's almost 8 in the morning and Thembeke is still snoring. I want her to sleep a little longer after the night we had. At some point it started to feel like I couldn't keep up with her hunger for sex but after going at it like rabbits she finally slept and I stayed up thinking about the big elephant in the room. Nothile owes me some answers. Who hides two people for years? I had teenage kids and I never knew about them.

"Morning. I made a cereal. I hope you don't mind" says Lindokuhle sitting on the couch with a mountain of cereal on the bowl and the milk dripping on the rim. I stare at the now wet coffee table.

"Morning. It's fine. Just wipe the table please" I try to keep my voice calm.

He stares at it and for a moment he looks like he wants to use his sleeve to do it.

"A dish cloth or paper towel will do. In the kitchen" I

let him know and wait until he gets up. His phone vibrates and he look at it before looking at me.

"Mum and Amanda are here" he stops walking and turn back the door before opening it.

"Wipe the table first" I demand and he glance towards me as his face flashes with annoyance but when he finds me staring back at him he walks off to the kitchen.

I walk outside and press the remote before watching the car drives in. She parks behind Thembeke's car and the passenger door opens first but no one comes out. I stand and wait. Lindokuhle joins me and stares at the car too. After some time she young lady steps out and Nothile also steps out. I stare at the girl. She is wearing glasses and her pimpled face has this look of disgust as she looks around. I also look around my yard. It's clean. I sweep the drive way from time to time. I have no dead leaves on my grass and the little trees got a trimming exactly two days ago. I paid a guy to do that though.

"Nqubeko" says Nothile as she walks towards the house.

I nod and step aside to let them in. Lindokuhle also follows before I do the same. They sit on the couch and I'm left standing at the doorway not sure how to deal with this.

"Mbonambi" Thembeke's voice fills the house before she appears in the passage wearing my shirt and slippers. She stops and I can see the shock on her face. She didn't expect a full lounge.

"Sorry. Morning" she smiles and greets.

"Hi" says Nothile looking at her up and down.

Thembeke holds the shirt below her tummy and then go back to the bedroom.

"Excuse me" I say and follow her to the bedroom.

** **

Thembeke

The door opens just as the embarrassment tears fill my eyes. I totally forgot about this woman coming today.

"Hey, hey, we said no more tears" says Nqubeko wrapping his arms around me.

"Sorry. It's just humiliating" I wipe them on his shirt.

"It's not humiliating. Its sexy and I love it" he whispers in my ear and I know he is just trying to make me feel better.

"They are early" I pull away and wipe the tears.

"Yeah they are early. You must be hungry. What would you like for breakfast?" He asks not letting me move from his arms.

"Eggs. Scramble eggs"

"Good. Get dressed and I'll go make the food for you" He kisses my lips and then smiles. I smile back and watch him leave the room.

My mood doesn't improve even after the shower and wearing Nqubeko's shorts isn't helping at all.

After what feels like hours I finally leave the bedroom and find the kids in the lounge. The girl looks up from her phone and I think for a moment she rolled her eyes at me but I can't be sure because she is wearing glasses. She is fat and also looks like Nqubeko.

"Hi. I'm Thembeka" I introduce myself.

"Okay" she reply without look up.

I raise my eyebrows and nod to Lindokuhle who nods back because he has his earphones in his ears. I leave them and join the parents in the kitchen. Well, a parent because Nqubeko is alone.

"Where is she?" I ask looking around even though the kitchen can't hide anyone at all.

"She is making a call. Here, sit" he puts the plate in front of me. The smell of fried eggs hit my nose and a drop of saliva escape my lips and Nqubeko laughs.

"I'm starving" I pull the chair and sit. He stands on the other side and watch me eat.

I eat like a starved person and Nqubeko pours the juice before pushing it towards me when I'm about to finish.

"Thanks" I take the juice and stop when we hear approaching footsteps. It's the lady and she is surprised to find me. I must say she is gorgeous. She is tall and slim. Her skin is clear and everything is right size even her eyebrows are perfect. I can't help but feel like a zero against her but I try my best not to show it.

"Hi" She smiles but it looks faked. Her face doesn't break into a smile, only her showing teeth.

"Hi" I reply and continue to clean the plate by wiping it with a piece of bread and then drop it on my mouth. The kitchen is silent and I look at her. She looks disgusted.

"You do know that you shouldn't eat fat during pregnancy. If you want to remain healthy and not gain weight like a slob" she adds.

"I'll ask my doctor" I reply and smile at her.

"That's totally uncalled for. I was just trying to help"

she looks at Nqubeko and I look at him too. He doesn't say anything at all.

"Don't worry about it. I'm totally covered" I stand up and put the plate on the sink.

"Why didn't you tell me about the kids" Asks Nqubeko. I turn around and look at her waiting for an answer.

"Can we talk in private?" She looks at him. I look at him to and for his sake I hope he doesn't agree.

"She is part of my life so we can talk in front of her" he replies and a bitch inside me is cheering.

"I found out you cheated on me with Lerato and Buhle" she says this with such pride in her tone. I can't help thinking she is saying it for my sake. To show me that Nqubeko is not a Knight in a Shining armour but a cheating guy that has been cheating for ever.

"What?" Asks Nqubeko not looking at me. He didn't tell me about him cheating last night. He said it was all her nothing from him but I decide to let that one pass for now.

"She told me Nqubeko. She told me about everything you were doing with her. Then you had some nerve to come to my place begging me to talk to you while you were fucking that whore" she yells. She is still angry.

"Lerato was a lesbian. I know for sure because she was fucking Fiona who lived next to my flat" says Nqubeko looking at her like she was nuts.

"And Buhle?" She asks.

Nqubeko's face falls and he looks at me for a moment. Him and Buhle were in a long relationship if 15 years ago she was already a side chick.

"And for that you decide I shouldn't know that I have kids?" He asks.

"I was angry. I didn't know about the pregnancy until I was almost four months pregnant. I had irregular cycle so I didn't check. Then when I came to tell you, Buhle was there. You had your tongue deep into her mouth. I left without talking to you. Then you left Meadowlands. I couldn't find you anywhere" she shrugs and Nqubeko goes quiet.

Footsteps approach before the girl's face appears. She looks at her mother before announcing she is starving. I stare at Nqubeko. How come he didn't offer her breakfast.

"She said she didn't want anything when I asked" he says as if he is reading my mind.

"I don't eat curbs" she replies without looking at him.

"Are you allergic?" I ask and they both look at me like I just grew horns.

"Go check in the car" says the mother handing her the car keys. She looks at me before she walks out.

"Why doesn't she eat curbs?" I ask because I don't get it.

"Because she is trying to lose weight" she replies and rolls her eyes before turning to Nqubeko "I didn't go out of my way to purposely hide the kids. I was young and hurt. When I finally realized that you needed to know you were already gone. I was forced to live with my choice" she shrugs.

"So you live in uLundi now?" He asks.

"Yes. I took a position in Nkonjeni and they needed a change of environment so we moved" she steps closer and pull the chair.

"I didn't know you wanted to be a doctor?" He says and she smiles.

"Well we did spend time having sex and not talking seriously. When you started to cheat I realized that I wanted to be more than just some township girl dating a guy with a shiny car. There is more to life then dating a rich guy" I notice her eyes are looking at me.

"I guess so. You did well. You should be proud of yourself" he says and she beams.

"I am. That's why I'm already teaching Amanda that she should fight to be independent. I wouldn't want her to date rich people for money" her tone is starting to rub me off the wrong way. I am unemployed and right now I'm unemployable since I'm pregnant but I'm not a gold digger.

"That's good. Now you just need to teach her to be comfortable on her own body before she starts

thinking she is a fat pig" I add and immediately realize that Amanda is walking in and what I just said sounds real cruel.

"What?" The woman gets off the chair and looks at me. I look at Nqubeko and he looks disappointed and then he looks at a frozen Amanda at the door.

"I'm sorry that came out wrong. I didn't mean it like that. I just think you shouldn't let your daughter start stressing about diets at 15. I mean she is still growing and her body is filling in before taking a shape" I try to explain but I can see that Amanda is tearing and her mother looks like she wants to smack me.

"Just shut up!!" She goes to comfort her daughter.

"I'm sorry Amanda" I add and Nqubeko gives me a nod.

"What are you sorry for? You just called her a fat pig. How dare you?" the boy hurries over probably being startled by the yelling.

"What's going on?" He asks looking at his crying sister.

"Your dumb stepmother just called a fat pig" she says

"Nothile" Nqubeko's voice cuts in and make her jump a bit before she looks at him "Thembeke apologized. It came out wrong. No need for name calling" he sounds serious for a moment I am completely turn on by the command on the tone.

"You are unbelievable. Your teenage daughter who is already struggling with self esteem is heartbroken and you are siding with her" she points at me like i'm some garbage.

"Maybe she is struggling because she has a bitchy mother that allows her to start dieting at 15. I bet she doesn't eat ice cream or chocolate because you will tell her about her weight. I don't know you but you sure sound like a miserable cow. Just let the girl eat what she wants. If she grows up to be fat so be it. Even fat people are beautiful and they can have it all and not depend on rich men for money. Now I need you to move your car so I can go to my own house. I might be chowing his money but I have my own things too" I add before leaving the

kitchen. This day started badly.

Chapter 66

Nqubeko

"Look I'm sorry. I'm behaving like a bitter person. Please forgive me" says Nothile stopping Thembeke from leaving. I expect her to say okay and want to stay but she doesn't.

"I have to go back home. I have a family" she adds after she also apologises to both Nothile and Mandisa. We all watch her leave the kitchen and I find myself wondering if this is how our lives will be like from now on.

"I better go move the car then" says Nothile walking out. I follow her and check on Thembeke who is clearly leaving with my pants and I am not complaining.

"Are you okay?" I ask when I find her in the bedroom.

"I'm fine. Sorry about the drama" she smiles and

hugs me. I hug her back and kiss her lips for a bit.

"I love you. I'll call you as soon as you arrive" I should drive her but I can't avoid the situation in the lounge.

"Okay" she doesn't sound bitter and I hope I'm not seeing things. I don't want find myself having to solve problems all over the place.

"Let me walk you to the car" I take her hand and we walk out. Nothile is back and she says goodbye to Thembeke who also returns a polite goodbye and walks out.

We walk quietly until we reach her car and I open the door for her. She turns and kiss me before getting in. I lean over and brush her stomach and kiss her forehead.

"I'll call you. I love you" I add and close the door.

She waves and start the car. I watch until she drives out and then wait as the gate close behind her. I take a deep breath and walk back to the house.

"Is it possible for us to talk in private? We can go for

coffee" says Nothile when I walk in. I look at the kids and they both have their faces on their phones.

"And we leave them alone?" I ask not sure if that's a good idea. I'm not sure about what's right and what's wrong at this point.

"They are 15 Nqubeko. They will be fine"

"Let me change" I hurry to the bedroom and change into something comfortable.

** **

We pick a quiet restaurant in the mall and ask for a seat in the corner. Nothile asks for green tea while I ask for coffee and a sandwich.

"I see you still drink coffee. Something's never change" she laughs.

"And you now drink green tea. I guess you changed" I point out.

"I guess so" she goes quiet and I look around the

place.

The waiter comes with my coffee and her tea. We both look at him when he walks away.

"So what's going on with Lindo?" I go first because she isn't volunteering with the information.

"What makes you think something is going on?" She does look up which means I am right. Something is going on.

"He arrived in my house late at night" nothing says 'problem' like that.

She takes a deep breath and look up. The cover is gone and now I see a troubled person across me.

"He doesn't listen to anything I say. He got suspended at school. I am paying thousands to keep him in that school Ngubeko but he goes and steals the teacher's car and takes it for a spin" she blinks rapidly to clear the tears in her eyes.

"Was it the first time?" I sit back when the waiter comes back with my sandwich. I nod a thank you when he walks away.

"No. I had to take him out of boarding school after a girl was caught in his room after hours. The headmaster wouldn't let him continue because they were tired of his behavior. It's a mess Nqubeko" this time the tears fall on her eyes.

"Amanda is not like that?" I ask while handing her a handkerchief.

"Amanda is a normal teenager. Mood swings and peer pressure. I was expecting all that so I can deal with it but Lindo is a different story" she wipes her eyes and look at me.

"Do you think maybe Lindo needs some sort of a ceremony? Imbeleko?" Its the only thing I can think of right now.

"Or a father figure" she replies.

"You mean his father. He needs me as his father" I say it straight. The boy came to find me for a reason.

"I know I should have told you Nqubeko. I know I am to blame for this and I do hope you will forgive me some day"

I can't but smile because this is the Nothile I know. Even back then she didn't have a problem with apologizing when needed.

"Its going to take a while for us to adjust. I mean its not everyday you wake up a father to teenagers. So I do hope that you will give me enough time to work things out. Thembeke and I"

"Thembeke seems nice. We got off on the wrong foot but I think she is nice" she smiles and I can feel myself relax a bit. Things will work much better with them getting along.

"She is very kind. Extremely sensitive but very kind" I don't add that I'd like her to watch her tongue around her.

"She is different from Nobuhle or anyone else I know" there is a smile on her face.

"Yep she is. Speaking of Thembeke. I need to make call" I stand up and walk out. She is probably wondering what's keeping me after promising to call.

** ** *

Thembeka.

Phili is all giggly on her phone and I assume it's Mluleki so I don't drill her for details instead I make something to eat and go lie down in the bedroom with the plate next to me. The phone rings just as I was starting to think about Nqubeko promising to call.

"Hey" I answer.

"My love" he sounds like he is standing near the ocean.

"Are you home?" I ask before my mind starts wondering and making not so nice conclusions.

"No. Nothile and I went out for coffee to speak away from the kids"

"Okay. Is the talking going well?" I wonder what else are they talking about.

"We are not killing each other" he laughs.

"Has she confessed having feelings for you?" I ask straight out so Nqubeko knows that I am on the look out already.

"What? Come on MaKhumalo" he sounds shocked but he could be pretending to be shocked.

"I guess she hasn't. Just so we are all on the clear Nqubeko. If you cheat on me we are never fixing things again"

"Where is this coming from?" He sounds calm or disappointed I can't tell but his voice sounds flat.

"I'm just letting you know so there is no confusion. You and her better not even think about it" I warn before putting a spoon in my mouth.

"I'll come see you as soon as I am done here"

"Sure" I reply my mouth full of food and end the call.

"Who is her?" Asks Phili standing at the door.

I sit up and put the phone down. She walks over and sit on the bed. "okay. Talk" she says when I don't speak.

I start from the beginning for her and she listens quietly. I like talking to Phili because she listens and she doesn't take over the conversation by telling me about her own things. Phumelele used to do that a lot.

"So Nqubeko has grown kids?" She asks

"Yep. Their mother is a doctor and she already told me that I should watch what I eat. The nerve of that woman" I click my tongue and stuff more food into my mouth.

"Why did you leave?" she asks.

"I was annoyed. I didn't want to give her anymore opportunity to piss me off"

"But you are still pissed off. So you leaving didn't solve anything at all"

"But Nqubeko can't see me. I can curse all I want behind his back. And those kids. The girl has this nose up attitude while the boy is a spoilt brat. He is 15 but complaining about eating takeouts. He can't even cook Phili!!"

"Why are you yelling?" She laughs. I stare at her and laugh too.

"I'm just feeling angry and jealous. She is all tall and proper. Has a figure for days Phili. Me, I'm pregnant. My boobs will be saggy and leak, I might never gain my normal stomach back. Her kids are all grown while this baby is months away"

"You are feeling like a woman and its okay. It's natural to be a little jealous when it comes to there things girl. Relax and eat your food. Nqubeko loves you and if you are feeling down just talk to him about it. Or tell me or your therapist but don't let it stay in your mind because you will end up resenting your life" I wish it was that easy. How do I stop seeing her when she is standing tall. Maybe if she has one eye or a bursted lip or bushy eyebrows I would feel a bit better but she is perfect.

"Let's forget me. Tell me about Mluleki. Last night you were all kissy kissy" her face break into a smile before she giggle.

"we were all kissy kissy and i want to be kissy kissy

again today. More like stay over" she hides her face behind her hands.

"You are going to get laid. Damn girl" I get off the bed because now I have to obsess about finding something sexy for her to wear.

"I think it might happen. He said dinner. A formal place somewhere"

"We have to go shopping. Come on" i grab her arm as we both leave the bedroom.

"I do have a perfect dress" she tries to resist.

"You need a new dress for this one girl. Grab your phone" i hurry to the kitchen and put the food in the fridge.

"I need shoes too" she goes back to the bedroom. I grab my car keys and check my face in the mirror next to the door. I don't look like i woke up and left even though I really did.

"Hurry up" i call out and open the door.

"I'm done" she appears applying lipstick.

"We have to use Nqubeko's card. It will make me

feel better" i tell her as we walk out.

"Come on. Thats....." She starts to argue but stop. Pretty's car just stopped at the gate. It's been a while since we spoke and i was hoping our friendship can just fizzle out naturally.

I open the gate for her and she drives in. She stops behind my car but doesn't get out. I close the door while Phili approaches the car.

"Phili" I also follow to see what's keeping Pretty in the car.

She knocks in the window because Pretty's head is resting on the window.

"Pretty" we both bang the window. She can't be a sleep. She just drove in.

She moves and unlocks the car. I open the door and a strong smell of alcohol greets us.

"She is drunk?" Asks Phili opening the door wide.

We stare at each other as Pretty snores against the seat. She is driving drunk.

"Pretty" I try to wake her up but its not helping. She

is still snoring.

"Thembeka" says Phili pulling my arm. I look at her frightened face and her eyes are fixed behind me. I turn around and two men are walking inside the gate.

"Don't move ladies" one of them pulls out the gun.

"We don't want any trouble. I just want my stuff" another says as he approaches Pretty's car.

"Search the car" the first man instructs the other. We stand still as the man gets in the car and starts searching it.

"Anything?" He asks after a moment.

"There is nothing. She is drunk. I hope she didn't take my staff" replies the one in the car.

"Then we take her. It will help Pretty sober up quickly" says the man grabbing my arms.

"Please don't...." I try to speak but the man puts the gun on Phili's head.

"We don't want to hurt you. So don't let me hurt you. She stole from me. When she returns my staff I'll let

you go. But if you resist then i might kill her and we both don't want that. Please" says the man looking at me.

I stare at my cousin and nod. I don't want these men killing her.

"Pretty knows where to find me" he says and pushes me forward.

We walk to the car and the man opens the door before I get in. I look back and I can see Phili still standing in the driveway staring at the car. The tears starts streaming down my face as i wonder if i'll see her again.

Chapter 67

Phili.

Strong Language and Violence

My head goes blank for a second. I watch the car

drive off before I hear Dabula's voice behind me. He is demanding to know what's going on. I am pointing at nothing unable to say what's wrong.

"Phili" he grabs my shoulders and give me a little shake.

"They took her. Those men took her" I yell and then finally my voice break out and I start crying out loud.

"Who is this?" He points at the sleeping Pretty who seems to be drooling with her mouth open in a disgusting manner.

"They want something she took and they took Thembeke for that" I remember Nqubeko. I have to tell him.

Dabula is already on the phone making a call. He is telling Nqubeko that Thembeke has been taken by some unknown men.

"Did you see anything you can identify clearly. Anything?" He is asking me while holding the phone with the other hand.

I try to remember but I can't. It's like I imagined the

whole thing but I didn't because she is gone.

"I think she is in shock. Pretty is here passed out" says Dabula when he sees me struggle to say anything.

"Okay. I will" he says and take my hand to his "He is coming over. You need to drink some water and sit down. Let's go inside"

"He has dark hair. He spoke in a different tone. Almost like some fancy English" I try to get the memory back but I am failing.

"It's okay. Take a deep breath" says Dabula squeezing my hand again. We might never see her again. What if we don't? I can't lose her. Not after everything we've been through. Not before she has her baby.

"Phili. Keep breathing" he forces me to sit down. Pushing my shoulders down until my knees accept and I sit down on the concrete. Dabula continues to coach my breathing.

** **

Nqubeko and Mluleki arrive at the same time. I'm sitting on the grass while Dabula is standing near Pretty's car while she continues to snore.

"What happened?" Asks Mluleki crouching in front of me. I wipe the tears and try to speak but the words don't make sense when mixed with the crying.

"What did she drink?" Asks Nqubeko pulling Pretty's limp body out of the car.

I'm not sure if Dabula is replying or they are waiting for me to speak.

"It's okay. Try to calm down" says Mluleki pulling me up.

Nqubeko carries Pretty inside the house and drops her on the couch. Mluleki gets me some water and forces me to drink.

"Phili. I know you are scared but i do need to you to tell me something. Please" says Nqubeko sitting on

the coffee table in front of me. I wipe the tears first and try to explain. The way those men came in the yard. I can't describe their faces but I remember their words. Pretty knows something that belongs to them and they took Thembeke.

"Did they say what it is?" Asks Mlu

"No. He searched her car though"

"So she took whatever it is that they want and they took Thembeke so Pretty can bring it back" says Nqubeko looking at Pretty.

I nod and look at her as well. I've seen drunk people before. They don't sleep like they are drugged.

"Can you get me a bucket. A cleaning bucket" says Mlu to Dabula who does say anything but goes to the bathroom to get the bucket. He comes back with it and hands it to Mlu. I watch him walk to the kitchen and then i hear the tap running. He comes back after a while and without any warning he throws the water in Pretty's face. Some ice cubes land on me. She jumps up as if a click has been turned on.

"What..." She starts to speak but Nqubeko delivers a hard slap on her cheek.

"Where is my wife?" He demands and Pretty's eyes fill with tears instantly.

"Don't worry about the couch. It will dry" says Mlu behind me. Not that i even care about the couch.

"Speak Pretty. Who the fuck are those people? Are you doing drugs?" Nqubeko continues to demand to the now crying and shivering pretty.

"I'm sorry I can explain" she tries to get up but Nqubeko pushes her down.

"Who are they. Where are they taking my wife?!!"

"His name is Clement Mabala" she replies and Mlu removes his hands on my shoulder just as Nqubeko turns his head towards him. They know who this man is.

"Mabala. The Clement Mabala? Why would Clement come here to take Thembeke?" Asks Nqubeko moving away from Pretty.

"Who is Clement Mabala?" Asks Dabula taking the

words out of my mouth.

"Some nerd" replies Nqubeko before he turns to Pretty "What could you possibly take from Clement?"

She doesn't reply instead she looks down and starts biting her nails.

"Pretty" yells Mlu making me jump because its a voice i've never heard him use before.

"I can talk to him. Get him to bring Thembeke back" she offers and I expect one of them to give her the phone to make the call but they don't.

"What did you take Pretty and why did they target Thembeke?" demands Nqubeko.

She doesn't reply again and I can see the frustration on Nqubeko's face.

"I'm asking you for the last time. What did you take from him?" Says Nqubeko. I'm not sure if Pretty is stupid or she is still high from whatever drug she is using because this is the time to speak. If it was me i would be singing.

There is a moment of silence and then Nqubeko take one step before he is back in front of her and his hand pulls out the belt from his pants.

"I can....." she tries to speak but it turns into a scream when the belt lands on her legs. Nqubeko delivers the beating fast it's hard to count how many before he stops and Pretty continues to scream.

"What did you take?" He demands

She still doesn't talk and Nqubeko continues. When she tries to cover her legs with her arms he hits the arms and i think her back gets a hit or two because she sits up quickly and Nqubeko continues to lay the lashes all over her legs and thighs.

"50k and morphine" she says in between the scream.

"J esus Christ" says Mlu just as Nqubeko stops and stares at her in shock.

"R50 000? Morphine?" Asks Nqubeko looking at her. She nods her body shaking and her nose running.

I hear a click and jump up. The last time i heard that sound my arm got injured. Mluleki is pointing a gun at Pretty.

"Where is it?" He demands

"I was desperate. i... i" she tries to speaking and stops as there is a hole and a little smoke on the couch just few inches away from her face. I stare in shock realizing that Mluleki just shot the couch. If Pretty had moved he would have shot her head.

"Next time i won't miss. Start talking" demands his voice sounding cold and cruel.

"I was desperate. I owe Owen Burner a lot of money. So i stole from Clement and went to pay Owen" she explains while sobbing.

"Owen Burner is a drug dealer. Are you doing drugs?" Asks Nqubeko

"It's a one time thing"

Both Mluleki and Nqubeko laugh.

"One time thing from Owen? Yeah right. One timers don't go straight to the dealer. You are a druggie?"

Asks Nqubeko looking at her with disgust.

"I didn't mean for it to happen. I was just trying to...."

"Doesn't matter. So you stole from Clement. Why did they come here then?" Asks Mluleki

"I didn't mean to lead them here. I didn't know they were following me" she explains and her explanation is awarded by several hits from Nqubeko's belt. She covers her face taking it from her arms and thighs.

"You exposed my pregnant girlfriend to your rubbish. You led them here on purpose. You exposed this family to your filth" he delivers more and Petty's scream is now hoarse.

At last it stops and Nqubeko takes his phone and starts making a call.

"I'll pay you 50K. Bring back my girlfriend unharmed" he demands.

He listens for a while and then look at Pretty.

"Okay fine. I'll make it 100K. You can buy whatever you need and keep some change to tie you over.

Just give me back that woman" I can see the shock in Dabula's face and Pretty has also stopped sobbing. She is now looking at Nqubeko.

"Unharméd man. If she tells me you did anything to her we are going to have a serious problem in our hands. You have 15 minutes" he ends the call and drop the phone on the coffee table.

"And?" Asks Mluleki.

"Did you know that J abu has cancer?" He looks at Mluleki

"No. I thought she was just thin" he shrugs.

"Clement says she is" he turns to Pretty "You knew and you still stole all that money and that morphine from him. On top of that, you knew there was no way he wouldn't come after you so you lead them here to my family. You risked their lives for coke habit Pretty. How could you?"

"I'm sorry. I was just....." She tries to speak.

"You knew they will take Thembeke to get me to cough up the cash. You used a desperate man for

your own high. How could you be so selfish?"

"And to think you encouraged the friendship between her and Thembeke" says Mluleki.

"I thought she was a good person. I was so wrong. You are the kind I don't want anywhere near anyone I know and care about. Nx" he click his tongue in disgust and leaves the lounge.

"Are you okay?" Asks Mluleki putting his hands around me. For the first time since I've known him I don't feel the warmth instead I feel cold. This is not the kind of life I thought the city would offer.

Chapter 68

Thembeke

I don't know where I am but it's a house. A large and beautiful house with tall trees around. They ordered me to lay down on the seat so I don't see where we are going and I complied. When we arrived they ordered me inside before I could even try to figure

out where I am. The other guy left leaving me with the other guy who asked me if I wanted something to drink. I asked for water but didn't drink it just in case it's poisoned. When I asked why I was there the man told me Pretty stole from him and he needs his things back. He didn't tell me what she stole. I ask about my cousin and he told me to relax they won't harm any of us. I have no idea how is that supposed to work out. How do you relax when taken at gun point.

"You must be hungry. Here" says the first man walking in with a brown paper bag.

"I hope it's not too greasy. She is pregnant and she can't be risking cholesterol" says the second guy his voice coming out from the speaker on the table.

"It's nothing hectic. I added some salad" he replies as he sits down and tear the paper bag to reveal a takeaway.

The smell fills the room. I look at the takeaway and it doesn't look like a curry. It looks like boiled beef and papa. I thought he said there is salad.

"Did you bring me some?" Asks the voice on the speaker again.

"In the kitchen" he replies while biting raw chillies like he is eating carrots. I watch him chew and swallow. I'm waiting for steam to come out of his ears and mouth.

"Eat. It's getting cold and your stomach is complaining" he points the paper bag.

I look at it and then back at him.

"Why did you take me?"

"Pretty stole and we desperately need that morphine. Why are you friends with her anyway? Surely a woman like you can have other friends. Better friends not users" his hand brushes his nose when he mention users.

"I don't think she knows. That's Mbonambi's girlfriend" says the other guy walking in.

"Mbonambi?" He looks at me like he is waiting for me to explain.

"Him" he shows him on the phone. They both look

at me.

"That bitch" curses the eating guy as he puts down his meal and stands up.

"She knew what she was doing" agrees the second guy.

They both look at me and then the other sits down while the other goes to stand near the window.

"Eat. I don't want you to go back hungry. Your man will kill me" says the man near the window.

I want to argue but I stop myself. So far these man haven't hit me or said anything blood chilling so I have to work with them to ensure they don't snap. My hand shakes as I take the takeaway out and open it. Its a cooked meal and it smells good.

I take the plastic spoon and put the takeaway on my lap.

A phone starts ringing and the man looks at it before he walks out. I am left with the eating guy and I can't help wondering why am I eating a different meal.

"I bought this in the rank. Taxi rank. Inhloko" he says and show the takeaway to me.

"I haven't eaten inhloko lately. Can I have some?" I ask my eyes not moving from the meat. Growing up they used to give it to boys and us girls would get nothing. But that doesn't mean we didn't get to taste it.

"Here" he takes several pieces and puts them on my takeaway before sitting back down.

"Thanks" I start eating right away. I wonder how fat is this baby going to be if I am eating like this.

We eat silently until I am done and my body starts craving the bed. I keep yawning and rubbing my eyes.

"So you eat and sleep. You know that sleeping a lot during pregnancy makes the baby sleep during labor" he says in a friendly tone and I laugh imagining the baby busy pushing and then deciding to nap in between.

"I can't help it" I hope by that time I'll be better than now.

A strange sound starts beeping and the man gets up. I also jump up because something is going on.

"I need help" says the voice on the speaker.

The man hurries out and I am left standing not sure if I should follow or sit still. Sitting still sounds like a good idea so I sit down again.

"Thembeka" a voice calls after a moment and I rush to the door. When I open it it reveals a large family room with a passage that leads to other doors.

I stand there stunned a bit. The room is bright and well furnished even the portraits on the wall they give the room a welcoming effect.

"In here" calls the voice again and I follow where it came from. All doors are closed in the passage except for one door and I walk straight to it. I can see the man inside. I walk further in. It's a bedroom. A very large bedroom with large windows.

"Please help me with this" says the man. I stop looking around and approach the bed. There is someone on the bed. It's a woman and she seems throwing up on the bucket he is holding.

"Please hand me that towel in that drawer" he points the chest of drawers. I hurry over and take two towels.

He lowers the bucket and use the towel near the woman's face. She coughs and it sounds like there is something ripping and her breathing is loud.

"She might throw up again. Can you please hold the towel like this. I'll quickly rinse the bucket in the bathroom" he asks and I nod before taking his place. He takes the bucket and leave the bedroom leaving me with her. Her eyes are closed but after the coughing fit she opens them and look at me. I stare back wondering what could be making her this sick.

"Can I have some water?" She whispers. I follow her eyes and see where the water is. I stand up and pour the water into a glass. She smiles and tries to raise herself up to drink. I sit next to her head and help her up before holding the glass to her lips. She drinks gentle until she pushes the glass away from her lips.

"Thank you" she smiles when I lower her back to the

pillow.

I go back to my position with the towel but she doesn't seem to be nauseas now.

The man comes back and I stand up to let him sit but her hand touches my fingers.

"Stay a bit. I haven't seen a pretty face in days now. No offense my love" she says to the man and he smiles at her.

"And I thought I was pretty" he bends over and kiss her dark and thin lips. She smiles at him and then look at me.

"You are prettier than him" her hands feel dry and cool. They are very thin and long.

"Thank you" I can't say she looks good too. She isn't ugly but she is very sick so I don't say anything about her at all.

"Themba is back. I hope he got it" says the man before he leaves the room.

We stay in silence for few minutes while her fingers are busy tracing my own fingers on the bed.

"It's cancer" she says and continues before I could focus on what she is saying "Last stage. There is nothing else left. I'm just waiting for time. The final moment"

I really don't know what to say so I stare at her my face failing to hide the shock. She smiles and raise her hand as she points something in the window. My eyes follow where she is pointing and I can see pins on the curtains.

"Growing up I used to design clothes for my dolls. Use these pins to hold the fabric. Sometimes I would cut the curtains if I wanted that fabric. My mother would yell but my father would tell her to let me be. He would offer her new curtains and I would get new material for my designs" she smiles and I figure it's probably her happiest memory.

"I still have the clothes. The designs. My husband doesn't even know what do with them. He is into science and fashion I foreign to him"

I'm still not sure what to say about all this. I've never had a doll let alone making clothes for one. I didn't

even have parents so everything she is saying is just foreign to me too.

"You can have them. The pins and the designs" she says after a short silence. I stare at her in shock. She doesn't even know me. Her husband took me at gun point.

"Me? Why me?"

"Because everything happens for a reason Thembeke. Open the last drawer for me please" she requests. I stand up and go to the drawer. It's full of books. Thick books and diaries.

"Take the navy diaries. All of them" she says her voice sounding stronger than before.

I take all four of them and close the drawer. When I sit back down on the bed i notice that her nose is running so I take the towel and wipe it.

"Thanks" she smiles and he hands brush against my hand.

"So these are your designs?" I ask looking at the diaries.

"Yes. When the cancer began I used to continue, thinking i am stronger than cancer. But cancer won so I stopped. You can continue. Play around and see if you don't fall in love with it" she smiles and i smile back. I do have time so what harm can this do.

"I do it" i say while smiling.

"I got it. Its not much though" says a voice before footsteps approach.

Both man walk in and we stare at them. They stare back as if they are surprised to see us.

"Everything okay?" He asks looking at her.

"We are talking dolls" she smiles and the man smiles back.

"Her husband is here" says the other man.

"Maybe she can visit again soon" says the man looking at me.

"Yeah. I'll come see you again" i tell her while smiling. She obviously doesn't know that i was kidnapped.

"Take the pins too" she smiles

I stand up and go take the pins on the curtains. They are about 24 pins. I take all of them and her husband pins them on the handkerchief before putting them on the diaries.

I go back to her and hug her before kissing her cheek as she squeezes my hand.

"I'll see you soon" I whisper to her and she nods not opening her eyes.

"Let me carry these for you" offers the man taking the diaries. I hand them over and follow him out. At the door I turn back and look at them. He is sitting on the spot and she is looking at him. I walk out quietly and follow the man. Outside I'm surprised to find Nqubeko leaning against the car. I hurry to him and wrap my arms around him. He holds me tight and only then I start crying. I'm feeling sad for her.

Chapter 69

Thembeke

We drive silently until we get home. I'm surprised to find Phili with Mluleki sitting on the couch while Dabula is kicking the ball with the kids outside. Phili jumps up and hugs me when we walk in. I can feel her shaking as I wrap my own arms around her.

"They didn't hurt you?" She asks while looking at me as if she is searching for bruises.

"No they didn't" I hold the diaries tight in my hands.

"That's good. I was so scared" she wipes the tears in her eyes. I look at Mluleki and he smiles back before him and Nqubeko decide to leave the room. We both watch them leave before we both exhale at the same time.

"What's this?" She looks at my hands.

"Diaries. I think I need a bath and a nap" I'm not ready to talk about it yet.

She doesn't press so I head to the bedroom and put the dairies in my drawer before going to the bathroom.

The water is hot so I just stand there while it starts

from my head and down to my toes. I can't help but cry. I keep seeing her. She is so thin and she looks like she is always in pain.

A sharp knock snap me out of the thoughts. I turn the shower off and grab a towel. It's Nqubeko. He stares at me before he wraps his arms around me. When he does this it always makes me feel so small. Like a child being comforted by a parent. I hold his shirt and continue to cry until he encourages me to walk to bed. I sit while he kneels in front of me.

"She is so sick. But she still smiles even though it does look like it hurts but she still does it" I tell him between the sobs.

"Cancer is hard my love. I'm sorry you got exposed to that" he tries to wipe the tears in my eyes but it's no use. Once I start I don't stop.

"How could Pretty do such a thing? I thought she was a good person. How could she steal her medication?"

"Pretty is not a good person. She is a drug user and users are selfish MaKhumalo" his hands are on my

knees now.

"Where is she?" her car is not even in the drive way.

"I don't know. I told her to make sure I never see her again" his hands squeeze my knees before he looks up to my face "How do I make you feel better?"

"Make love to me" I request and lower my head to kiss his lips. He hesitates for a second but kisses me back.

"Dabula and the kids" he whispers against my lips.

"Lock the door and I'll be quiet" I suggest.

"Or we can go to my house. Have some dinner and make love" he doesn't move which makes me think he doesn't want to.

"And your kids?"

I can tell he totally forgot about them.

"We can go to a hotel then" he suggests while standing up.

"It's okay. I'll just sleep" I remove the pillow and pull the cover back.

"Sorry my love. I have to show your brother some respect. And the kids too. Would take a chance if it's late at night or something" he really does look uncomfortable and I don't get it. We once had sex in the car on the side of the road and it was all him. Now we are inside the house but he is all weird.

"It's fine" I crawl into bed without even bothering to wear something.

"Are you not hungry?"

"No. They gave me food. I just need to sleep for a bit" I pull the blanket over my head "I'll call you later" I add.

He doesn't reply instead I hear the door open and close. I never thought Nqubeko would ever walk away from sex. I close my eyes and try to imagine a perfect world. A world where there is no pain and people like Pretty don't exist and illnesses like Cancer don't exist. I build and rebuild until I drift to sleep.

** **

Nqubeko.

I find Mluleki and Phili in the kitchen. She is cooking while he is just standing there watching her.

"Is Thembeke sleeping?" Asks Mluleki

"Yah. It smells good" I compliment her so she can smile. I like a smiling Phili. Whenever she is not smiling I imagine her crying and its something I don't like at all. I feel like she has gone through a lot in life and she deserve nothing but happiness.

"I hope it will taste good too" she replies quietly and I look at Mluleki. He shakes his head a bit. I guess they haven't talked.

"I'm sure it does. I'll be back for a plate" I try to cheer up hoping to get a laugh but what I get doesn't sound like a laugh. I turn to Mluleki and nod before walking out.

I check the back and find Dabula still playing with the kids. The boys run to me and I brace myself for

impact.

"I scored" they both say at the same time.

"Good. Next time we are all playing. You against us"
I point at Dabula. They both look at us and laugh.

"We will give you guys a beating. We are faster" one says as they fist bump. Dabula laughs and kicks the ball to Celiwe. Unlike the boys, Celiwe is quiet and shy. Plus she is growing into her teens but everyone is happy to see her still play with the boys.

"Everything okay?" I ask Dabula as we keep a safe distance from the game.

"Yeah everything is fine" he replies.

"I'm going home for a bit. I'll come check on Thembeke later. She is sleeping. I need you to forget about Pretty. What she did was irresponsible but I've sorted it out. Thembeke is emotional but I'm hoping she will be a bit better after a nap. So you don't need to worry about anything" I assure him.

"Okay. So we won't be attacked by some unknown men?"

"No. Plus Mluleki wants to tighten up the security. It makes him feel needed so don't take it as if we are trying to undermine you or anything" he might be a child but he is still the man of this house.

"He is not staying over, right?"

"No he is not"

"Good. I respect the guy and all but I can't just sleep knowing he is....." I stop him before he says it.

"I totally understand. Phili is cooking and Mluleki is not spending a night" I assure him.

He nods and look at the kids.

"They know nothing and we have to keep it that way. Fragile minds need to be protected"

"Yeah they do. Which is why I have to ask for something" he says and turn his attention to me.

"What is it?"

"I'd like to have a gun. A licensed gun"

I'm not shocked. In his position I would also ask the same thing.

"No problem. We will talk about it when I get back"

"Thanks Bhuti"

I nod and say bye to the kids.

** **

The first thing I notice when I get home is dirt. The lounge is empty but the coffee table is covered by crumbs. There is a wet stain on the floor and dirty footsteps leading to the kitchen and back. I check the kitchen and find it worse. It also smells like burning cooking oil. Egg shells crushed on the floor. Potatoe peels on the floor and ice cubes melting on the table.

I walk to the back and find the door open and music coming from the side of the house. Lindo is swimming while the radio is playing on the pool chair. He sees me and stops.

"Come out please" I grab a towel and throw it to him when he gets out of the pool.

"When did you get back? Is mum awake?" He wipes his upper body.

"Your mother is here?"

"Yes. Sleeping in the bedroom. They are both sleeping" he turns the radio off.

"I thought she left" I left in such a hurry when I received a call about Thembeke. They completely skipped my mind. No one can blame me though. No one becomes an instant father and get it all perfect that fast.

"She is leaving later" he replies and looks at me.

"What happened to the kitchen?"

"Oh the mess? When does the cleaner arrives? I tried to pick up after myself but it was a big fail" he shrugs.

"There is no cleaner. Come clean the mess" I turn and walk back to the house. He follows and the smell of cooking oils hits harder when you we walk in.

"Leave the door open and clean this mess"

He looks like he wants to complain but changes his mind. I watch him as he disappear into the lounge.

I go to the bedroom and change my t-shirt before going to knock in the guest bedroom. The door opens and Nothile appears wearing my gown.

"Sorry I couldn't find anything fitting" she is clearly waking from sleep.

"Why would you find anything fitting in my house?"

She seems taken back by my tone.

"Is Thembeke okay?"

"She is fine. Why didn't you teach the kids to clean up after themselves?"

"Because I was busy trying to earn a living!!"

The door opens wider and Amanda walks out. I'm starting to think she was born with this expression on her face.

"Did you see the mess Lindo made in the kitchen? It looks like a storm blew in"

"So you don't have a housekeeper?" Asks Amanda

pushing her glasses with her middle finger.

"Even if I do have a helper it doesn't mean you can just mess up the kitchen and leave it for someone else. This house is always spotless for a reason"

She looks at me and then shrugs before she walks away.

"So you think you can do a better job?" She folds her arms to her chest.

"Yes. We don't want spoiled kids Nothile"

"That's just rude and unnecessary" she sounds annoyed but it's no match to my own annoyance.

"Then start teaching them to keep a clean house" my phone vibrates and it's Tiko so I walk away from her.

"Talk to me" I say while checking to make sure no one is following me.

"We found Sdumo. The guy is going there tonight" says Tiko.

"Good. I got destructed for a bit but it's going to work out just fine. I'm sending you an address and a

photo. I need you to keep an eye on her. She owes me big time"

"Sure thing" says Tiko.

"Sharp" I end the call and send Pretty's photo along with her address. I hope she didn't think she won't be paying me back.

I finish up and go back inside. To my surprise I find Amanda and Lindo busy cleaning the kitchen. I stand there and watch.

** **

Phili

We are in Mluleki's house. He waited for me to finish cooking and then asked if we can come to his place even though we can't go out for dinner. The events of the day ruined all plans so I dished up on a Tupperware container and brought food with us so he doesn't have to make calls ordering dinner.

I can never get used to this house. The first surprise was the fact that it has no dividing walls inside.

When I asked he said it was an open plan. I decided I like the open plan but it has no privacy. You are in the kitchen and you can see and talk to the person in the lounge. The most fascinating part is the stairs. Yes this house has stairs leading you to the top floor. They look like a spring that comes from the ground and lead you up. When you step on the stairs they glow in gold colour. When I asked if they were strong enough to support a fat person he laughed and said they were strong enough to support the whole house. I didn't ask any further details.

Today it's different though. We are both quiet as I dish up the food and put the leftovers in the fridge. He takes the plates and I carry the juice to the dining table. He pulls a chair for me and then takes his own seat.

"Are you okay? I know I'm asking for a third time since we left the house" he asks putting down his fork.

"I'm fine" i'm lying. Deep down I want to ask questions. I have tons of questions to ask.

"I can tell when you are not being truthful" he doesn't take his eyes off me.

"How?" I take the glass and pretend to sip the juice.

"You blink repeatedly and when you lie jokily you do this sexy breathless laugh that makes me hard instantly but right now I can tell you are not okay"

I am so caught out I don't even have the strength to argue.

"I'm shocked. In this place people sell their friends for a quick fix. I mean who steals what is meant to keep someone off the pain for a while? I just can't get my head around the whole thing. Then I had a gun placed on my head. It wasn't the first and I'm wondering how long before someone doesn't just point it but pulls the trigger" my body seems to shiver as my mind build the reality out of what I just said.

"I have three kids Mluleki. I can't be in those situations"

"And you won't be. What Pretty did was irresponsible and she is never hanging around you ever again"

"And you almost shot her head right in Thembeke's lounge" My voice sounds higher and I can see him tilting his head back a bit while raising his eyebrows and his lips pressed together.

"What? You almost killed her" I add just to he doesn't think I'm being hysterical for no reason.

"But I didn't. If I aimed for Pretty's head I wouldn't have missed and I wouldn't do it in Thembeke's house"

"That's not the point" my hands hit the table making the fork jump up a bit on the plate.

"So you are angry. You just needed a way to express it" he smiles.

"I'm glad you think it's funny" I snap.

"It's not but I like it when you are vocal. It makes me happy. Sometimes it's nice to be yelled at. The sexy kind of yelling though" he winks.

"I am serious Mluleki. This is not the kind of life I want. I had different idea about the city"

"Okay fine. I'm sorry you got exposed to all that. That's just the sad truth about the city my love. It's a jungle" he takes my hands to his.

"And how do we know that we are safe? The kids?" I get this disturbing image in my head where Celiwe is laying on the ground bleeding.

"I'll never let anything happen to you and your family Phili. You have to trust that. No one even suspected that Pretty is a druggie. But now we all know better. Plus i'll have a new security system installed. Just to make sure that it's completely safe"

I nod and look at the food I no longer have an appetite for.

"Please eat. I don't want you passing out"

"Why would I pass out?" I pick up the fork and stab a potato.

He looks at me and smile while biting his lips. I

watch as his eyebrows go up and then down. Sometimes I can't get over how handsome Mluleki is. He is taller than me and larger too but he is not fat just large. When he smiles it's a lazy smile that seems to start from his eyes and down to his lips. When he walks he walks straight but tends to tilt his head back a bit when he is looking down at me.

"Because I'm going to have you screaming my name when we are done here. Now eat up"

** **

We finish eating and I wash the dishes while Mluleki wipes the table and sweeps the floor. Tonight is the night and I am so nervous now that we are done eating and I'm done with the dishes.

I hang the swap on the sink and take a deep breath before turning to face him. He smiles and takes my hand as we walk towards the stairs.

"Are we leaving the lights on?"

"There is a switch in the end of the stairs" he goes up and I follow. When we reach the top he presses the button and the whole downstairs is dark leaving the glowing stairs.

We walk to the bedroom and close the door behind us.

"I'm nervous" I let him know.

"I can feel. It's totally okay" he smiles and stands in front of me.

"I have some nasty stretch marks"

He laughs and pulls me closer.

"I do too. Now stop shaking" he laughs and kisses my lips. The kiss starts gentle but gets deeper quickly. The clothes come off fast before I'm being lowered to bed.

"Protection please" I manage to remind him.

He rolls off me and walks to the bedroom. He returns quickly and throws a little box next to me. I look away when he takes his clothes off. He laughs and grabs my legs before the panties come off. I'm

naked and I can see my own cellulite and stretch marks. He doesn't flinch instead he kisses my thighs before opening them wide. I feel so exposed but he doesn't take long before kissing my stomach.

"I'll be slowly next time" he whispers and then comes up to my face. I kiss him back feeling him settle between my legs.

"Please don't forget the condom" I remind him.

He doesn't reply but he reaches for the little box and opens it. He hands me the condom and raises himself up.

"You are going to touch me" he laughs and grabs a pillow. Without any warning he pulls me up and puts the pillow under my bottom.

My shaking hands tear the wrap and take out the rubber. He brings himself closer and my eyes go wide. He is rather thick. The last guy I slept with was not this thick.

His hand covers mine when I slip it on and then he lowers himself to my lips while he settles back between my legs.

"Are you feeling okay?" He pauses at the entrance.

"I'm....." He pushes in before I could even finish.

"Does it hurt?"

I open my eyes to his eyes staring at me close.

"No it doesn't hurt" he smiles and kiss my lips. The thrusts are slow at first but they seem to be on point. I notice that he doesn't go in and out instead he seems to go deep and up. His other hand is on my neck while the other is pushing my left knee up. When the thrusts pick up the pace I hold him tight my fingers squeezing his butt cheek pulling him close. I can't help but grind my lower as his hand leaves my knee and holds my waistline as the orgasm washes over me. I open them even wider as he reaches his own orgasm.

"I'll go slower next time" he whispers in my ear and I reply with a kiss on his lips.

Chapter 70

Phili

I wake up alone. The memories of the night before come flooding my mind. My ears heat up as the smile spreads in my face. It was amazing. Mluleki really knows how to do this and he made me do things I never thought I would ever do. I look around the room and spot his shirt on the chair. I get up, slip the shirt on and quickly make the bed before rinsing my mouth in the bathroom so I don't greet him with my morning breath. I exit the bathroom and look myself in the mirror. I never thought I'd ever find myself wearing a man's shirt and walking around his house like I am doing. Where I come from this doesn't happen. Where I come from you leave a man's home before dawn and you don't even get to wear his clothes.

"You look sexy" his voice makes me jump a bit because I wasn't expecting it.

I turn to face him and he is wearing pants and an apron. He looks neat and I like it.

"You also look good. I even like the apron" I tease

and walk closer where he is standing.

"I was making breakfast for you. I didn't want to risk it" he wraps his arms around me and lift me up.

"Taking advantage of my weight?" I can't even pretend to sulk because I'm laughing.

"That and more" he lowers just until my his lips can kiss my lips.

His lips part my lips and starts massaging my tongue. He tastes like mint and smoke.

A moan escapes my lips and he tighten his grip on my ass giving my butt cheek a squeeze while I try not to scratch his back with my nails.

"I don't want you to think i'm using you for sex" he whispers after pulling away and looks at me.

"I won't" I reply while looking everywhere but the pair of eyes looking back at me.

"Then breakfast can wait" he carries me to bed and lowers me down.

"Protection" I remind him and he smiles and bite his upper lip.

"I remember" he pulls it out on his pocket.

"You walk around with condoms in your pocket?" I pretend to be shocked.

"Because I wanted to fuck you in the kitchen so I didn't want to come running here to get one" he replies and go back to my lips.

** **

Hunger made me nap after sex and I wake up to find Mluleki sitting next to me with a laptop on his lap.

"Your stomach is wondering why is it being punished. It's been complaining" he laughs before lowering his head to kiss my lips.

"I didn't know that sex can work such an appetite" I reply when he pulls away.

"You are addictive and I am not complaining" he gives me the kind of look that seem to wake the hair on my skin.

"You won't break my heart?" The question comes out even though it was meant to be an inside thought.

"What?" He frowns and I realize he didn't hear me.

"Nothing. Sorry" I try to get around him so I can be off the bed but he stops me.

"Talk. You said something. What is it?"

I think about lying. As much as I believe in clear boundaries but I know that no one wants a nagging girlfriend.

"Please don't lie" he adds before I even open my mouth.

"I said please don't break my heart" I come clean and he exhales and nods.

"Your food is in the microwave. I'll be down in a minute" he replies in a quiet tone.

I decide to wear his shirt again and leave the bedroom hoping this doesn't ruin everything. That's the hard part about being with someone. Wanting the truth and expectations but not wanting to offend

at the same time.

I quietly walk down the steps admiring the glow. It's fascinating and I didn't get toys growing up so I am allowed. When I reach the floor I decide to go back up and try to see if they still glow if I were to sit on them.

"They glow even if you press a finger on them. Its the sensors" says Mluleki making me jump because I didn't hear him coming.

"Sorry" I mumble while walking back down. This is humiliating.

"It's fine. They do look like toys but they are not" he follows me down. We both stop walking when a light flickers on the wall.

"Someone is coming" he says before he goes to the door. I stand there and not follow. I've learnt that in this place people can be dangerous.

I hear a car driving in and Mluleki curses a bit before he walks out. Now I am curious so I go take a peak in the window. It's a sport car. A very bright sport car. The kind that I see blonde rich women

drive in movies not in real life. The door opens and I expect a blonde woman but a beautiful black woman steps out and she smiles at him.

I watch them speak and wish I can hear more but I can't. Mluleki points the house and the woman stops looking so happy. Her face looks annoyed as she moves forward but Mluleki tried to block her.

They talk some more while she is trying to move away from him but he keeps blocking her. I might be from the rural but I am not stupid. The conclusion is clear. She is Mluleki's girlfriend and he is trying to stop her from coming in the house.

I take a deep breath and walk outside. The moment I do she stops fighting him and stares at me. Mluleki also turns and looks at me.

"You are such a bastard" she yells and try to hit him. He block the hits but she doesn't stop "With some stupid whore" she screams.

"I hope you are not calling me a whore" I walk closer. I've never been the kind that takes insults from strangers.

"Go back inside Phili" hisses Mluleki waving me away.

"I am calling you a whore. You are a dirty whore. How much is he paying you?" She continues to yell and finally manage to get out of Mluleki's grip.

"Vee. I'm warning you" says Mluleki but she ignores him and rush to me. I am read for her to start hitting me. She is tall but tallness has never stopped me from dealing with people even at school they knew that I didn't back down. One of my teachers said it was a delayed reaction but I didn't wait for her to explain what she meant.

She stands right in front of me and looks down. "You think you are special because you stay the night and wear his clothes? You are not. You are...." She doesn't finish because Mluleki has grabbed her by the waist and he is half carrying and half dragging her back to her car.

"They've come and gone. He uses them and then throws them out. You will be gone too" she continues to scream as Mluleki shoves her inside

the car.

I expect her to get out but she starts the car and show him the finger before she drives off. Another car meets hers before she can drive out.

"Dammit" curses Mluleki "Can you please go back inside" he looks at me but i'll be foolish if I do that so I don't move.

The second car moves back and allow the first car to pass before the car drives in. This one is a BMW and the woman that steps out is not tall and slim. She is a bit round and her height is just a bit higher than mine.

"I came to get my things" she doesn't even greet.

"You know where they are" he replies and then looks at me.

She gives me a disgusted look before she walks right past me. The thing is, if she doesn't say anything to me I can't just go off at her. She walks ahead and we follow her.

** **

The house remains quiet as she goes upstairs and returns after few minutes dragging a suitcase with her.

"Your key" she hands him the key and then turn to look at me "The last one was charging him R5000 per night. I hope you charge extra while you are still worth his time. He always go for the next available whore" she sounds so cool like she isn't insulting me.

"I'm not a prostitute" I reply without looking at Mluleki.

"Of cause. Silly me. You are the lady of the night" she laughs and walks out.

We both stand still as the car starts outside and drives off.

"I should get my things as well" I announce and then head upstairs. I can have food at home.

"So you won't ask me questions?" He follows.

"There is no need. I think they explained enough for me" I reply and continue upstairs. He doesn't follow and that gives me enough time to change quickly and then go back downstairs ready to leave.

I find him sitting on the stairs.

"We have to talk. Please seat" he points next to him.

"There is nothing to talk about. You are a womanizer and you sleep with prostitutes" I don't need a big dictionary for that.

"And I use protection all the time. I didn't cheat on you"

"And that is supposed to make me feel better?" I stare at him as he looks up his face not smiling at all.

"No but I don't see why it should break your heart. Beside that they both said something mean and for that I apologize but everything else just forget about it"

"So you don't see anything wrong with all this?" I'm aware that my voice is a bit higher now but I can't

help it.

"I should?"

"You are sleeping with women who sell sex for a living. You pay them for it. One of them has clothes in your house!!"

"Her name is Cleo and she doesn't sell sex for a living. We were living together at some point. I cheated and she dumped me. So I started sleeping with Vee for payment. She was just being bitter about the payment thing"

"So you don't see any wrong with all this?" He gives me this blank look.

"I don't. I apologized for the language they used. I know it's not ideal for them to arrive here like this but beyond that I don't see anything wrong"

"Wow. Just take me home" I demand feeling my nose start sweating.

"Phili let's not act like kids. We are both adults. Surely you don't think I didn't have a sex life before you"

"Of course not"

"Then stop don't make this more than what it is. I cancelled Vee and Cleo is an ex. You have kids which means you know what it means to have an ex. Now quit acting and have breakfast"

I open my mouth to reply but the words don't come out.

** **

Thembeke

I drop the kids at school and then drive straight to Nqubeko's house. I want to go see Jabu but I really don't know where they live and I know that Nqubeko knows the directions.

I'm surprised to find the kids still there. Amanda is wearing pyjamas and eating a cereal in the couch while Lindo is frying something in the kitchen. Their mother's car is still outside which means she

stayed over. I head straight to Nqubeko's bedroom and walk in without knocking. Part of me is kind of expecting to find them in the act but another part doesn't want to. The problem is that Nqubeko has cheated on me before so I am allowed not to trust him just a bit.

"Thembeke" says Nqubeko clearly surprised to see me. Nothile is sitting on the ottoman while she is drinking something in the coffee mug. Nqubeko is still in bed with coffee next to him.

"Morning" says Nothile smiling at me.

"Morning" I turn to Nqubeko who is staring at me like there is something left unsaid "we have a doctors appointment later today. But for now I need to see J abu"

"J abu? My love it's 8 o'clock in the morning. Don't you think J abu might still be sleeping" he says while eyeing me like i'm unstable or something.

"J abu is the cancer lady you mentioned last night?" Asks Nothile looking at Nqubeko. He nods and she continues "She probably is still sleeping and I doubt

she would appreciate being visited this early"

"And you know this because you know everything about everyone?" I look at her and she acts all shocked.

"Thembeke" says Nqubeko.

"Don't Thembeke me" I snap at Nqubeko and turn to her "What the fuck are you doing in my bedroom anyway?"

"Your bedroom?" She uses this 'don't be ridiculous' tone while looking at Nqubeko.

"Yes. My bedroom. You are an outsider and you are using the kids that you hid for years to worm your way into his life and he is dumb enough to let you" I yell at her.

She looks at Nqubeko as if she is expecting him to say something but he doesn't say anything.

"How dare you?" She realizes baby daddy is not backing her up.

"How dare I what? Question your intentions? How come you didn't book yourself into the guesthouse

or hotel and stop throwing yourself in his face"

"Nqubeko" she yells at him.

"Don't look at me. She is fighting for what's hers" he smiles and it makes Nothile even more angry.

"Yes and I want what's mine to focus on me now. Please leave I want to talk to my man in peace" I point the door and she looks at Nqubeko in disbelief.

"You are unbelievable. Nx" she gets up and leave when Nqubeko doesn't take her side. I can hear her yelling at the kids after she slams the door behind her.

"Stupid bitch" I say before getting next to Nqubeko. He smiles and put his hands around me.

"So I am yours" he laughs and kiss my nose.

"Yes and I want her to stay away from you but I need you to take me to see J abu. I could have driven myself but I don't know the directions. I woke up last night and I have loads of idea about her designs. I can't wait to share" I want to make her happy and I can even imagine the smile on her face

as she hears my ideas.

"That's great. You are glowing. I love it" he gives me this goofy smile and I can feel myself just melting.

"So drive me there already. It's early but I can't wait" I poke his chest.

"Okay. Give me a moment to wash my face at least" he bands down and kiss my stomach before getting off the bed.

"I need something to eat. I'll go check the kitchen" I get off the bed too.

"Thank you MaKhumalo" he says before I walk out.

"For what?" I look at him wondering what he is talking about.

"For trusting me. I love you"

I look at him and nod because I am feeling a little guilty. I did have bad thoughts but he doesn't have to know.

"Hurry please" I smile and walk away.

In the kitchen I find Amanda washing the dishes while her brother wipes the counter.

"Can I make you some coffee?" She asks while looking at me her nose still turned up. It must be her permanent face.

"No coffee for us. Just tea. I'll make a cheese sandwich" I smile back at her. The last time it wasn't so good.

"She has her own hands. I told you to get dressed" yells their mother walking in.

"But we are staying mum" says Lindo.

"Don't test me. We are leaving" she screams and I roll my eyes about it. She said they needed a father suddenly she is taking them because Nqubeko is not available. What a bitch.

"It's Friday. We are staying a weekend" says Amanda looking at her mother.

"Let the kids stay" I add.

"Stay out of it. Your child is there" she points my stomach.

"You are being dramatic for no reason. Just let Nqubeko spend time with his kids" I continue.

"These are my kids. You don't get to tell me what I should and shouldn't do" she looks at me like she might slap me.

"Nothile" says Nqubeko behind her "They are staying the weekend. We are going out tonight" he sounds so calm about it and I expect Nothile to object or something but she doesn't.

"Are we going now?" I can even skip the tea and I'll eat my sandwich in the car. Nqubeko turns and look at me before he takes my hands to his.

"Baby. Jabu was admitted last night. She is in ICU. I called her husband and he told me so. We have to wait a bit before they can allow us to see her since we are not family" I stare at him wondering if he is lying or not. He doesn't look like it.

"Which hospital? Maybe we can send her some flowers" just to show that we are there for her.

"Good idea. Let me call" He takes his phone and it starts ringing in his hand. He looks at me before he

answers.

"Yes"

I can't hear what the person is saying but Nqubeko looks up his eyes closed.

"Thanks for letting me know" he adds after a moment his voice sounding weird like he might start crying.

"What is it?" I ask feeling my heart slam painfully against my ribcage.

He stares at me and smile a bit before kissing my forehead.

"It's nothing baby" he clears his throat "Have that rooibos tea. I'll send the flowers and wish her well" he fakes a smile. I can tell he is lying but I don't get why.

Chapter 71

Nqubeko

I want to wring Pretty's neck. Thembeke was fine and doing so well before she ruined our peace. Now Jabu is gone and it will destroy her when she finds out. I think about lying saying they moved and didn't leave an address but that might break her heart worse than the truth but I can't tell her the truth. Whatever Jabu did it gave her a bounce in her steps and I like it. How could I possibly ruin it now?

"Nqubeko" Nothile's voice snaps me out of it.

"What?" I snap back feeling annoyed that she is still here.

"So this is what this means? Us parenting means she gets to walk all over me while you just stare at her like a lunatic?"

I shrug dramatically before looking at her.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Tell her to show me some respect" she shriek and it pisses me off even more.

"Respect is earned Nothile. You know that"

She huffs and I brace myself for some real bitching.

"You are unbelievable. So you are allowing your gold digging girlfriend to walk all over me because respect is earned? What is there to respect?"

"That's exactly my point. You see her as a gold digger but you want to throw a fit when she addresses you the way she sees fit. Ah ah Nothile. You are old enough to know the basic rule of life. Respect her and she will respect you right back. It's really that simple"

"What happened to you Nqubeko? What happened to the man that I used to know?" she gives me this look, like I've grown horns or a third eye in the forehead.

"You dumped him and hid the kids from him"

She looks away on that and I use this chance to end the conversation.

"Stop disrespecting Thembeke and she will respect you right back. The kids are mine too so let them stay and I'll make sure they are home on Sunday evening ready for school on Monday. That's if we want to co-parent peacefully. Have a safe trip going

back" if she doesn't take a hint I will be forced to say things I will regret after this.

She stares at me and then nod before she leaves the house dining room.

I wait until the door is closed before going back to sending flowers to Clement even though I know very well that he doesn't care. If I were to lose Thembeke I wouldn't care about flowers.

I send a text to Mluleki letting him know that J abu has passed on. He calls back immediately.

"That's hectic. How is Thembeke?" He asks without even greeting.

"Morning to you too. I haven't told her" I lower my voice checking to see there is no one listening in.

"You have to tell her Ngubeko"

"I know and I will. I hate that bitch" I click my tongue

"If she didn't expose Thembeke to Clement's situation I wouldn't be here right now"

"But you are and now do the right thing. Is Phili there?"

"No. Thembeke is with me. She arrived early wanting to visit J abu but I managed to delay her for a bit. So you and Phili had a fight?" that's the only reason why he would ask me.

"I think so. She requested an uber when she left. Said she didn't want to be dramatic about me driving her back"

"Okay. Sounds like a serious fight. What happened?" Mluleki is not exactly the worlds best lover but I thought him and Phili would be way better than his past relationships.

"Cleo and Vee arrived. Vee made a scene. Cleo, not so much. But Phili started acting up as well. I kind of snapped and told her to quit the drama since she has kids so obviously she has ex's too"

"Damn. So she called an uber and left?"

"I told her to eat first because she was yet to have breakfast. She ate and then left" I can hear him inhale and exhale. Mluleki is yet to be introduced in the art of dating someone who doesn't mind losing you.

"Go after her and apologize" I advise. The sooner he does it the better.

"I will but that's not just it. I was expecting more. More yelling and more arguing. That sort of thing you know"

"I know but you know what they say. You should fear the quietness"

I hear a door open and close.

"That's exactly what i'm fearing. I'll call you back. Tell Thembeka the truth about J abu" the line is dead after. I take a deep breath and go back to them.

I'm a bit surprised to find them talking and laughing. Thembeka is teaching Amanda something that involves grated carrots and grated potatoes. Lindo is there taking a video. I stand there and watch. Maybe they will get along well if she Nothile isn't in the picture.

*** **

Phili.

I thank the driver and hand him cash when he drops me at the gate. I'm thanking him for not doing anything bad to me. As much as we still request these rides but you pray whenever you arrive in your destination. This driver was kind and he kept telling me jokes saying he is apologising for not having a radio. I laughed at them feeling even more grateful that he wasn't telling me distasteful jokes in the name of trying to make me laugh.

Dabula is the one who opens the gate and he waits until i'm in front of the door before going back inside. We are both still shaken by what happened.

"Are you alone?" He nods and goes back to sitting on the couch. I can tell he is stressed about something.

"What happened?" I sit down opposite him and switch my phone off.

"I got a call from Xoli. She is threatening take me to court for Bobo's custody" I stare at him in disbelief.

Bobo came to live with us when he was a new born baby. Her family said Dabula needed to take responsibility and I became his mother because Dabula had no idea how to mother a new born baby.

"Let her" I reply feeling my anger approach a new high.

"Phili. We both know that the court will agree with her. They always take their side" he sounds like he is going to start crying.

"Not this time. Dabula. We are in Durban. We've been here for months already. That alone proves she doesn't care about him. Let her go to court and we will expose her"

"How could she do this to me?" He looks at me as if he expect me to have an answer.

"Because she is selfish. Selfish people do things like this Dabula. We need to stop being kind and fight back. Let that bitch go ahead" I feel like banging something but I can't. I don't want to risk breaking Thembeke's things.

"Are you okay?" He gives me the weird look.

"I'm just annoyed that she now suddenly wants Bobo. How dare she!!" I get up and head to the bedroom. I slam the door and throw the phone on the bed.

I sit down on the bed and try not to bite my nails. I do that when I'm angry and at times it leaves my nails ruined and needing weeks to recover.

"Phili" Dabula knocks.

I get up and open the door.

"Mluleki is here and he wants to talk to you" I think he can tell that I am not okay because he keeps looking in the passage.

"Tell him I don't want to" I step back and close the door before locking it. I can hear him walk away as I walk back to bed and lay down. Time ticks by and there is no other knock. Clearly he got the message and left.

*** **

A knock wake me from the nap. It takes me a moment to remember that I locked the door and I can hear voices in the lounge which means Nqubeko and Thembeke are here.

I drag myself to the door and unlock it. It's Thembeke and she is gives me the questioning look.

"I was avoiding Mluleki. What time is it?" I go back to bed. Since moving here I've gotten used to sleeping during the day. Back home I didn't sleep during the day.

"It's after one. Dabula went to get the kids from school" she goes to the bathroom and come back after few minutes. "What's wrong with Dabula?"

"His baby mama wants Bobo and she is threatening to take him to court. You know that courts always take the mother's side so he is worried"

"Bobo has a mother?" I can't tell if she is being sarcastic or serious.

"Yes"

"But we've never met her. Does he even know her?"

Aybo"

"Dabula is worried. I told him to tell her to go ahead and we will see her in court"

"Yeah we will. How dare she suddenly demands the child. She should have asked Dabula nicely and get visits not what she is thinking. That's why he looks so depressed. Nqubeko thought it was the man thing" she goes back to the bathroom and I hear the tap running.

"Have you seen Mluleki?" I hate myself for asking but I can't help it.

"He was here when we arrived but he left soon after. Are you guys having a fight?" She walks back into the room.

I tell her everything that happened and I am happy she is annoyed just like i am because it means i'm not being dramatic.

"I hope you yelled at him or something"

"I didn't. I ate and left"

"Why? You should have yelled at him or something.

You are not punishing for his past but for talking to you like that. How dare he?" she is loud.

"Like i was supposed to be calm about all that" where i come from buying sex isn't something men pride themselves for.

"Mluleki is turning into a disappointment" she lowers her voice "Tell me the sex was good though" I can't help but giggle.

"It was amazing. I didn't even know that you can have different orgasms at once"

"How?" She comes back to sit.

"It happened. One on the clit and another deep inside there. Girl i'm telling you it was that good"

We both look at each other and burst into giggles. Her laugh is short lived though.

"What?" i ask looking at her.

"J abu got even worse last night. She is in the ICU" she looks so heart broken. We were laughing just two seconds ago.

"Who is J abu?"

"Clement's wife"

"The lady with cancer? But i thought she passed away. I heard Mluleki on the phone with someone named Thuba" I try to recall the conversation the best I can and Mluleki did say she passed away in the early hours or something.

"No. She is in the ICU. Nqubeko ordered some flowers for her and he called her husband about an hour ago"

"No. I remember very well. Her name is J abu Mabala. She died in the early hours" She must be confused a bit.

"But Nqubeko....." She looks at me as tears fill her eyes.

Only then I realize what Nqubeko did. He heard and lied saying she is in the ICU.

"Nqubeko lied about the ICU" I confirm it for her. As much as I get why Nqubeko would lie but Thembeke is not a child and he can't keep treating

her like one.

Chapter 72

Thembeka.

Strong language

I'm angry but mostly i'm just heartbroken. J abu is gone. J ist like that. I never even got a chance to say goodbye. she was very sick I get it but how could life be so cruel. Why snatch her away after such a brief introduction.

"Thembeka" Phili's voice snap me back to the present.

"She didn't even say goodbye" I look at her

"I'm sorry Cuz. She was very sick. Let's think of her as in no longer in pain"

She is right but I can't help it. Tears start streaming down my cheeks and I don't stop them. I'm

heartbroken so I should be allowed to cry.

"Thembeke"

It's Nqubeko. He looks alarmed.

"What's wrong?" He asks while looking at me as if he is expecting to see blood or an open wound.

"I told her about J abu" says Phili.

He let's go of my hand and looks at Phili as if he wants to smack her.

"Phili knows you shouldn't lie to a person" I inject before he goes off at her.

"I was going to tell you baby. I was just....."

"J ust take me there" I cut him off before he tries to justify his actions.

"Okay fine. Wear something warm" I can translate for him. It means wear something longer and not show cleavage.

I don't protest. I check wardrobe for a presentable dress and tie a doek on my head.

"Let's go" I grab a bag and check if I have tissues

inside because I know I am going to be a crying mess.

**

"So you are going to give me silence treatment?" He asks after driving a short distance.

I give him a "You think" look and go back to looking outside the window.

"But I did it to protect you. I don't like seeing this Thembeke. I hate it when you cry"

"So you rather treat me like a child and hide things from me?" I yell at him.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time" he shrugs.

"Don't talk to me Nqubeko" I look away again and blink the tears away.

We continue silently until I start recognising the neighbourhood. It's where rich people live. Tall walls and tall trees and the street is dead quiet. We

turn left and spot a huge moving truck. I guess Clement's neighbours are moving or new neighbours are arriving. As the car draw closer Nqubeko and I see the same thing. The truck is in Clement's home. Is he moving?

The car stops behind the truck and I get out first. There are people. Three guys wearing uniform are carrying chairs to the truck. There is a woman behind them. She is shouting instructions.

I walk closer ignoring Nqubeko's protest behind me. The woman stops and looks at me up and down.

"Who are you?" She ask her voice is loud. Maybe she has one of those voices.

"J abu's friend" I reply. Another lady walks out carrying an unzipped suitcase with clothes spilling out.

She doesn't say anything but give me a stare for a bit and then Nqubeko comes to stand near me.

I spot Clement in the other side of the house. He is wearing shots and a vest.

"Are you also a friend?" Asks the woman looking at Nqubeko.

"Yes ma'am" he replies but I'm no longer focusing on them. Clement is on the phone and he is barefooted. A glass breaks making me jump and he remove the phone on his ear for a moment before putting it back. Something is wrong so I go to him.

"Clement"

He looks at me and tears start falling from his eyes. He ends the call.

"What's going on? Are you moving?" I step closer and fight back my own tears.

"They arrived with a truck. To take her things. Our things"

"Who? Who are those people?"

"Her family. They are J abu's family" he crouches down and bury his face on his hands.

Nqubeko joins us. The look on his face tells me he knows.

"I thought J abu doesn't have parents. They died

when she was still a teenager" says Nqubeko putting his hands on Clement.

He can't speak. He continues to sob.

**

I leave Nqubeko and Clement alone and get inside the house. The kitchen is a mess. There is a man raiding the fridge. He looks startled when he notices me looking at him.

"Hi" I greet and step over the broken plate.

"Are you a foreigner too? Some of you don't even look like foreigners any more" he looks at me up and down.

"What?" Something snaps somewhere in the house and a woman starts yelling about it. Now that I am inside I can tell that there are over five women in this house. All of them are shouting orders at the moving men.

"Oh. I thought you are his sister. You must be

Jabu's friend then" he goes back to the fridge.

"Why are you guys destroying the house?"

"You mean my sister's house? She died this morning. We can't let this kwerekwere take her things" he looks so disgusted.

"What?"

"Clement is a kwerekwere. We are here to take her things before he brings his starving family to live in her house and eat her food" he takes another piece of the chicken and stuff his mouth while the gravy stains his shirt and leak in the corner of his mouth.

"This is my house. Everything in here I bough with my own money. Jabu has n't worked in years because of the cancer and your family dumped her in that hospital when she was too sick" says Clement behind me. His voice sounds broken.

"Whatever kwerekwere. J ust pack you bags and go back home" says the man

"Have you called the police? They cannot take your things" I look at Clement.

"Call them and see if they will give a damn. Do you even have papers to be here in this country? Go back to Nigeria where you came from"

"Zimbabwe. I'm from Zimbabwe and I grew up in this country" says Clement as if he is hoping this man will start reasoning with him.

"Nqubeko give me the phone. I'm calling the police" I hold out my hand and he hands the phone to me without any hesitation.

I make the call quickly and argue with the police to hurry. He doesn't sound interested until I tell him where I am. Sometimes living in the grand suburb helps. He promises to be here in a blink when I end the call.

"The police are coming" I say loud enough for more than one person to hear.

"What?" Says a woman appearing in the passage.

"Yes. You broke into his house and you are stealing his things. I called the police" I give her the cheeky attitude.

"They are my sisters things. The Nigerian didn't cross the boarder with furniture" she yells.

"The sister you dumped at the hospital and forgot about when she became too sick? The sister that hasn't worked in years because she was battling cancer?, that sister?"

She steps closer and Nqubeko steps in front of me. I poke my head around him and look at her.

"You are opportunists. You were just waiting for her to die and claim things you know nothing about" I can speak freely with a human shield.

"How dare you side with a kwerekwere?" She shriek.

"At least he is a hard working kwerekwere and you are stealing from him. You should be ashamed of yourself for trying to rob a grieving man" I am just as loud.

The rest of her family joins in and they all start yelling insults directed to Clement. They are saying he is a drug dealer and corrupting the youth. One says if it wasn't for them in this country we wouldn't have unemployment problem. I let them continue to

scream and hold Clements hand while Nqubeko continues to be my shield. You see while they yell insults nothing else breaks and the moving men are standing there watching so its a perfect plan as we wait for the police to arrive.

**

The arrive after a while and find us engage in insults. It's four policemen and one of them doesn't even fake interest.

The noise dies down immediately as the police walk in.

"They broke into his house and they are taking his things saying they belong to their dead sister who happens to be his wife" I go first before the noise starts again.

"Mr..." The police looks at Clement.

"Mabala. I'm Clement Mabala" replies Clement.

"He is a foreigner" one lady chips in.

"I've been in this country since I was 10 years old. I'm here legally. J abu and I were married. She had cancer and i've been taking care of her for years now. She passed this morning" explains Clement.

"And you guys are?" one policeman looks at the ladies.

"We are her family" the lady replies.

"Do you have any papers allowing you to be here? Papers saying these are her things?"

No one answers but they mumble a bit.

"Any papers at all?" He asks again his voice a bit louder this time.

"We don't need papers to take her things. She is dead already. We are her family" the man replies.

"These are my things. This is my house. J abu doesn't have any money. Your family left her in that hospital to die. I took her and paid for treatment. She hasn't worked in years. She couldn't work because she never fully recovered. Everything in this house is mine" says Clement his voice shaking.

The noise starts again. The policeman raise both hands.

"Ladies you have no right to take anything in this house without any legal papers. I'm afraid you have to leave. Put everything back and leave. Once you have some proof or something. I will personally come with you to take what belongs to you. For now please take your truck and leave" he turns to men "Please off load the truck and leave. If you take anything without his permission it means you are stealing and we will be forced to arrest you" he touches his cuffs.

"Unbelievable. You are protecting akwerekwere" one says quietly.

The policeman returns a hard look and they all start moving. The movers go back to get the things while the policemen start engaging in their own conversations. Clement, Nqubeko and I stand around to watch as they bring things back.

At last the house is a mess but the family is gone leaving us alone. Nqubeko thank the police and walk them out while i look around the mess.

"Thank you Thembeke" says Clement quietly.

"It's fine. Ignore them. They are just mad that they can't take your things. Their insults don't matter"

He smiles a bit before he hugs me. I hold him tight as he starts crying on my shoulder. I don't pull away until he calms down and wipe his eyes.

"Sorry" he looks embarrassed.

"You lost a wife. Cry all you want. It's okay to be sad"

"I just can't accept it yet. It's like someone will come and say it's a joke"

"I can imagine" I take a deep breath and hug him again.

We both pull away when we hear Nqubeko walks in.

"I think we should try to clean up a bit" I start taking my jacket off.

"Or call the cleaners. I'll pay" he offers.

"Okay. I'll cook though. You do need food" I look at Clement and he doesn't argue. Nqubeko looks bothered though but I ignore him. He can't hire a chef too or order take aways for the guy.

"Let me make the call" he says and Clement walks around the counter and opens the fridge.

"I'll help you with the chopping" he smiles and I nod and nod to Nqubeko who is looking at me like he wants to say something.

Chapter 73

Strong Language

Nqubeko.

She trembles in my arms and I quickly cover her lips to keep the sound in. Lindo and Amanda are still here and I don't want to be that parent but I

couldn't let Thembeke sleep without reminding her how this feels like. She continues to tremble and occasionally shuddering as her moans turn into gasps. I can't let her go just yet. Not when i'm still feeling this hard and buried deep inside her. If she wasn't pregnant already this would have been it.

We are separated when I get soft and she doesn't protest the lost of contact. She simple just put her arms around me and hold tight. My grip also remain on her hip and my other hand around her neck.

The silence last for a while before she turns her head to kiss my cheek and then move to my lips.

"Are you good?" I whisper.

"I'm fine" she laughs a bit and go back to putting her head on my shoulder. I reach between us and touch her stomach. It's growing slowly but the doctor told us everything is fine and we shouldn't be surprised if she gets really big as the pregnancy grows. For now it's just a sexy bump that fits her petite body.

"Let's get you back to bed" I lower my arm from her neck and grab her ass before pulling us both up as I

carry her to bed. She giggles when I lower her down.

"Thanks Mbonambi"

I stop and stare at her before lowering myself to her lips "I love you" I add after the kiss. She smiles and yawn.

"I love you too"

"Get some sleep" I pull the cover over her.

"Please bring me some oranges when you come to bed" another yawn follows.

"And peanut butter sandwiches. I won't forget"

"And an egg" she whispers.

"Okay. I'll bring it" I laugh and pick up our clothes on the floor. I grab my shorts and slip them on and turn to look at her. She is asleep. Sometimes I do wish I could fall asleep so easily as well but it doesn't happen. Tonight i'll be lucky if I even get some at all.

I close the door gentle behind and go to the kitchen. I wash my hands first before making a sandwich for Thembeke.

"Please stop crying"

I stop moving around and listen carefully.

"I said i'll do it and I will" It's Lindo's voice.

I tiptoe to his door and press my ear.

"Of cause I know. Dammit Pinky. I told you" he hisses and I hear footsteps moving around. I tiptoe back to the passage before the door opens. I pretend to be surprised to see him up and he looks really surprise to see me.

"Dad"

"What are you doing up?" He ends the call.

"I just needed some water" I think he is lying.

"Okay" I turn back to the kitchen expecting him to follow but he doesn't. Something is going on and i'm not sure if I should demand the truth or wait for him to tell me about it. I focus on the sandwich for a bit. My phone pings and it could only be Tiko texting this time.

"Pretty ran" reads the message.

I call him back.

"To where?" I ask the moment he answers.

"To Eastern Cape" he replies

"Find her. There is no way i'm funding Pretty's coke habit. Find her and bring her back" she owes me big.

"Sure thing"

"Thanks Tiko. Keep me updated"

We end the call and I decide to call Sandile while at it. He answers quickly.

"It's late Nqubeko" he complains.

"Whatever. Anything about Sngobile?" I ignore the protest on his tone.

"Not yet. She is fine. I'm going to Vryhied tomorrow and i'll probably call you late"

"Good. I'll wait for your call" I don't even say goodbye as I hang up.

** **

I place the sandwich next to Thembeke's side of the bed and walk out again. Mluleki is still up and probably chatting to Phili on WhatsApp.

"Ay Nqubeko" he complains.

"When you are done call me then" I end the call and pour myself a drink before sitting on the couch. I should be in my private space but i'm waiting to Lindo to approach me or turn off the light in his bedroom. So far he is not doing any of that so I sit and wait.

Mluleki calls back after few minutes and I need some privacy for this call.

"Are you done?" I ask while unlocking the door and stepping outside.

"Sort of. So i hear Thembeke went crazy earlier today" he laughs.

"Totally crazy but i'm proud of her. She was amazing"

"So what's the problem?" He sounds like he is

having a drink.

"I take Phili is still pissed off judging by your drinking" i tease and expect a laugh but it doesn't come.

"I'm starting to think it's not worth it" he replies.

"Woah. One argument and you want to quit?"

"That's why i prefer paid girls. They know what it means. No drama" i hear a glass being slammed on the table.

"You do know that the drama is your motivation to do better because she wants you. If she didn't care she wouldn't be pissed off. Don't give up now" I try to encourage. He can't be buying sex forever and you can't pay for companionship.

"Whatever. Lets solve your problems. What's eating you?"

I close my eyes and the images of Thembeke cooking with Clement forces me to open my eyes.

"I need so information on Clement"

"Why?"

"Just to be sure of the kind of person Thembeke is helping. I know she won't stop checking on him so I want to be prepared" I don't add that Clement made her laugh and she was all calm and relaxed while they were cooking and laughing. Jabu is dead and Clement is heartbroken I don't want him being attached to Thembeke.

"Because you think she will cheat?" I can tell he thinks I'm being ridiculous.

"I didn't say that. I just want to know the kind of man he is"

"Nqubeko you have to stop this man"

"He is younger than me. He feels helpless. Thembeke is drawn to his situation" I'm getting frustrated now.

"So what? She won't cheat on you" he snaps.

"You don't know that"

"I think you need therapy more than she does. Don't let Thembeke hear you say you don't trust her. It will break her heart. Clement is fine. Harmless and I

doubt he is thinking about another woman right now. He has bigger problems "

"I guess so. That family is rotten. I doubt they will even allow him to bury her" I think about my own family. We are not even with my brothers but I know they wouldn't come to my house to harass Thembeke if i die.

"He shouldn't even care about it. He loved her enough while she was alive. That's all that matters "

"Call Phili and do whatever it takes to make it okay" I advice.

"You also stop having these dark thoughts. Thembeke loves you. Next time i'm sending you a bill. If i'm becoming your shrink I deserve some payment" he laughs and hang up. I laugh too and go back inside. I don't feel better but it's not worse either. I am just scared that I will lose Thembeke to a four eyed Zimbabwean boy.

I walk back inside and find Lindo standing in the middle of the lounge.

"Lindo"

"My girlfriend is pregnant" his eyes are all out.

Chapter 74

Strong Language

Nqubeko.

I stare at him wondering what he is talking about.

Lindo is 15. He can't be having sex already.

"She doesn't want to have an abortion" he continues.

I continue to stare. He looks frightened.

"I've been trying to talk to her dad. We are both 15.

We can't have a baby but she won't listen. She keep telling me she is scared to do it"

"Go to bed Lindo. We will talk tomorrow" that's all I manage to say. He hesitate a bit but he does move.

I wait until the door is closed before locking the door and removing the key so he doesn't run away while we sleep.

Thembeke is still snoring when I join her in bed. I can't sleep. Lindo is not only having sex at 15 but he is going to be a father.

"Nqubeko" says Thembeke her hand touching my chest.

"Sorry I didn't mean to wake you" I whisper. I guess i've been tossing and turning nonstop.

"It's fine. I need to pee anyway"

I reach for the light and turn it on. She gets up and head to the bathroom.

When she comes back she sits down and start eating the orange as if it's not the middle of the night.

"What's eating you?"

I sit up and try not to stare at her naked breasts.

"What makes you think something is eating me?" I act all cool about it.

"I know you Nqubeko. You have this forbidding look on your face. I saw it when we were with Clement and you made love to me like it's for the last time.

So out with it" she smiles and I reach for a piece of the orange.

"It's nothing my love. We had a long day" I can't tell her about Lindo yet. Not when I haven't heard the whole thing myself.

"If you say so"

We both continue sharing the orange but I don't eat the sandwich. I can't risk a heartburn.

When she is done she gets back to bed and I hold her until we both fall asleep.

** **

I wake up alone the next day. The curtain is open and the sun is already coming in the window which means it's way past morning. I sit up and spot Thembeke's phone on the charger. She is still here and that makes me feel a bit better but I know her. She could be dressing up to go check on Clement already.

"Thembeke" I call out while making the bed. I get no reply which means she is in the kitchen. I finish up and brush my teeth before going to the kitchen. I find Thembeke busy showing Lindo how to make pancakes. Personally I hate them but I think they like them.

"Morning guys" I greet and kiss her cheek.

"Morning dad" says Amanda with a pleasant smile on her face which I must say looks nice on her for a change but the annoyed look is still there. Whoever she takes after ruined her looks.

"What are you guys making?" I can see its the pancakes but I don't know what else to say.

"We are teaching him how to make pancakes. I woke up craving something made with flour" says Thembeke.

"That's nice. I'll have coffee then" I get the mug on the cupboard and make my own coffee.

Lindo finishes the pancakes and serve the ladies before I ask him to speak outside. We both follow each other to the back.

"Who is she? Where is she? Have you told your mother?" I ask the questions quickly while he keeps looking around as if he thinks it's an ambush.

"We go to school together" that's all he says.

"Her parents? Where are they?"

"She lives with her grandmother. Her parents are in Cape Town. They work there"

"How far is she?"

Now he looks really frighten. I think it's my voice but I can't help it. He is 15 years old.

"Almost 3 months "

I stare at him in disbelief. I thought we were talking about someone who is only few weeks.

"3 months?"

He nods and I stop myself from smacking him.

"Does your mother know?" I shout.

"She doesn't know"

"Call her and tell her" I demand.

"But dad...."

The look on my face stops him from speaking. He pulls his phone out and start making the call. I demand he puts the call on speaker.

Nothile's phone rings for a while before she answers.

"Mum. I made a mistake"

"Lindo. What happened?" She sounds alarmed. I give him a hard look.

"Pinky is pregnant and she doesn't want to have an abortion" he starts crying.

"What?!!"

"I'm sorry Mah. I didn't mean to mess up like this"

"Dammit Lindo. How many times have I warned you about that girl?" She screams.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know it was going to come out like this"

"So you don't know that sex means someone can get pregnant?" I ask.

"Nqubeko"- Nothile.

"She is almost 3 months pregnant" I add so she can get over the shock quickly.

"Aybo Lindo" she yells.

"I didn't mean to mess up" he continues to sob.

"That's the thing Lindo. You never mean it. You keep screwing up and being sorry. When is it going to stop?" I think she is starting to cry as well.

"It's time he cleans up his own mess"

Lindo looks at me with stained cheeks.

"Yes. It's time to fix your own mess" I repeat.

"I can talk to Pinky's grandmother. We can find a solution that won't backfire" says Nothile.

"What solution?"

"I'll talk to her and offer to cover the cost of the termination" suggests Nothile.

"So you are going to force her to have an abortion?" I thought at 3 months it means it can get a little complicated.

"Not force. Convince. Pinky is 15 years old Nqubeko. What does she know about raising a kid?" She asks.

"So you think why not traumatize her by forcing her to have an abortion when she is almost 3 months pregnant?" I ask.

"What do you suggest we do then?" She snaps.

"Why not let her make a choice" I suggest.

"And what? Pay child support? He is 15 Nqubeko"

"And at 15 he thought why not have unprotected sex. He should have thought about his age before he thought he was man enough to have sex"

"So we should let him pay for a mistake for the rest of his life?" She starts shouting.

"No need to shout at me. Your son messed up not me"

"Then shut up and let me fix it" the line goes dead after. I take the phone and call again. For a moment it seems like she won't answer but she does.

"Look. I don't think it's fair that we want to put Lindo first on this. If she wants to keep the baby then she

shouldn't be forced to terminate Nothile. Her feelings matter too"

"What child could be raised by 15 year olds Nqubeko. Don't be foolish. This will do nothing but destroy their future. I said i'll fix it and I will. Send me her number Lindo" she ends the call after that.

"Life is about taking responsibility of the mess you create Lindo. At 15 you had no business having sex" I stand up and leave him there to think about it.

** **

Thembeke

Nqubeko protested when I asked to be taken to Clement's house but now him and Clement's friend are busy arguing about soccer. I won't lie, I like it like this. We are helping someone in need and Nqubeko is not acting all weird about it.

"I can't thank you enough" says Clement coming to

stand next to me as we both stare at the garden through the window.

"It's fine" I smile at him. Clement is handsome. He is dark skinned. Very dark skinned but it suits him just fine. It makes him stand out just fine and I can tell that he is probably charming too even though he wears thick glasses. As people we judge people who wear glasses and enjoy science. We call them nerds but Clement is a handsome nerd with a bright smile.

"Can I confess something" I turn to face him.

"Sure. What's up?" He smiles but it doesn't reach his eyes.

"You are the first Zimbabwean I know. I mean to actually talk to" he doesn't laugh at first and I wonder if I've offended him.

"Why?"

"Because I grew up around xenophobic people. We were raised to think very less of other Africans" I just tell him the truth. Back home people didn't want to be associated with other Africans unless they were buying whatever they were selling. Beyond

that, any interaction was questioned.

"That's bad" he doesn't show any annoyance.

"Yeah but now that i'm older I think they were just misinformed"

"But i'm the first guy you've ever talked to" he smiles again.

"And I like it which means I would have liked it even back then. So many missed opportunities" I shrug.

"Meaning?"

"This one time I was in campus. We were lining up for student card photos. This guy sits next to me and he clearly wants to talk but I didn't talk to him"

"Why?"

"Because he was from Nigeria and I was more thinking about him being a foreign. I should have kept the conversation going. Gone beyond just hi"

"I guess so but sometimes it takes us a while to get out of what we grow up being told. To see the real world"

"And I failed" I reply.

"Failed?" He raise his eyebrows and I can't help thinking his beard and eyebrows are too dark like he dyes them.

"Yes. I should have befriended the guy. I should have talked to the selling guys that came to our home selling vegetable racks and washing basins. I should have opened my mind to the getting to know other people"

"You are getting worked up over nothing. The guy should have tried harder as well. It's a you put some effort for both side situation Thembeke. Yes you can befriend someone from another country but they have to want it too"

"I guess so but still. I wasn't very welcoming"

"Oh please. No one is that welcoming when it comes to these long lines we deal with on daily basis. Anyone can be closed off when tired" he laughs.

"But still"

"No still. Tell you what? I'm going to introduce you to some of my friends. They are from other countries in Africa. There is one from Ghana and he has been asking to chill so i'll take you with when we go" he offers.

"Great. I can't wait" his phone starts ringing and I turn back to the window when he answers it.

"What?" He asks after a moment. I can't help turn to look at him.

"Okay fine" he ends the call. The pleasant smile on his face vanishes and it's replaced by pain.

"What is it?" I ask unable to help myself.

"I can't attend J abu's funeral. They are burying her tomorrow"

"Tomorrow? Isn't that too soon?" She just died yesterday.

"They don't want me there at all" tears fill his eyes.

"But she was your wife. Surely you have rights too"

"Even if I do have rights it's not worth it. She is not coming back" he starts sobbing and Hold his hand

while letting out my own tears. It's not fair at all.

Chapter 75

Phili

The weekend is almost over. We had a really good day today. Thembeke and I took the kids out for lunch. She invited Amanda and Lindo but Lindo declined saying he had homework. He lied but we all acted like it was all cool. Amanda is very different. She has no personality but she is kind. I saw it when she was showing Celiwe some apps on her smartphone. She didn't act all better than my daughter instead she was happy to explain things. To bad her mother raised her to be closed off and uninterested. When the day out ended Thembeke and Amanda went to drop her back into her father's house and I'm back at home trying not to talk to Mluleki on whats app.

"Phili" says Dabula walking in.

"Hey" I quickly put the phone down. At least I'll stop fighting myself to talk to him.

"Nqubeko's office guy just called and they want me in tomorrow" He sits down and start rubbing his knees.

"And you will be fine" I'm happy for him. I know how it was affecting to be staying home all day after being a breadwinner for so long.

"You think?"

"I know so. Remember, everyone has a first day at work moment. Those people there also faced this moment"

"I guess you are right" he smiles

"So has she called again?" He knows who I am talking about.

"No and I hope she doesn't. She didn't even ask to speak to him"

"Because she doesn't care. She is such a bitch. If she calls give the phone to me and i'll tell her exactly what I think of her" I'm getting all fired up

already.

"And I will. I also called Ntuthuko. Just to hear how are things there. He said Sdumo came around last week. They are suspecting he is up to something"

"Something like what?" There is nothing much left there.

"I don't know. Knowing Sdumo. He could be selling the place you know" we both laugh.

"I hope he doesn't find anyone desperate enough to be robbed" I laugh and my phone rings. We both look at it before Dabula gives me a look that says "Are you not going to answer" it's Mluleki and I'm debating whether to answer or not.

"At some point you will need to take a chance Sisi" he gets up and leave.

I stare at the phone until it stops ringing but it doesn't stay quiet for long because it rings again and it's still him.

I take a deep breath and pick up.

"Philiswa"

"Yes"

"Dinner tonight. I'll send an driver. We have to talk"
he pauses before adding "Please"

"I can't I have plans" I lie. I have no plans. We
already went out today and I know the kids will want
an early night.

"I know you don't. The car will be there at 7. We
have to talk. Please"

"Okay fine but i'm not staying the night" If he thinks
he can just smooth me over with some dumb talk
then he is in for a real surprise.

"No problem. See you at 7" he ends the call.

I put the phone down and go the kitchen for a glass
of wine. Wine tastes weird but it helps when you
have things in your head and I have so many things
in my head right now.

** **

"You are drinking wine. So what's up" asks Thembeke the moment she walks in. The kids disappear into the bedroom with the toys Nqubeko bought for them. I wait until I hear the door close before taking another sip.

"Dinner tonight at 7. He is sending the car" I take another sip and each time I do my tastes buds go into a temporary shock.

"So why are you getting drunk?" She sits down and throw the car keys on the table.

"Because i'm feeling nervous about everything" I take another sip.

"Stop drinking. The last thing you want is to get there already drunk" she grabs the glass in my hand and spill some on the floor.

"Maybe when i'm drunk i'll react better"

"You won't. You obviously like the guy. J ust go talk to him girl. Have some food while doing it. J ust lay out the rules early so he knows what shit you won't tolerate" she takes a sip.

"Don't make the baby pick up the tab" I warn before she takes a second sip.

"The baby hates the wine" she laughs.

"Good. Give me back my glass"

She hands it back.

"I like him. I mean he is great but I just don't want to get hurt. To deal with the rejection after all this"

She looks at me as if she knows what I mean but I know she doesn't. Thembeke knows pain but not the kind that I've faced.

"That's why you need to be sober and tell him all that. Just let him know what you draw a line to. I told Nqubeko if he cheats on me i'm out for good. If he cheats then I'll know it's time to exit" I wish I could be sure like her.

"But I don't even know what I'm faced with Thembeke. Mluleki already told me he is not a saint. He could be worse than a cheater"

"Yeah I know but for now we are just speculating. Until you go to dinner and hear him out we can't

know" she raises her eyebrows.

"I guess so"

We both jump when someone buzzes at the gate. After the whole drama with Pretty, we are both still shaken a bit.

Thembeke gets up to answer while I take the glass to the kitchen. When she opens the door I rush to see who it is.

We both stand outside as this lady drives in wearing a bright smile.

When she gets out takes out a large bag and a dress.

"Miss Philiswa Khumalo" she reads on her clipboard.

"That's me" I reply.

"Hi ladies. I'm Mavis. Shall we go inside?"

"No. Not before you tell us why you are here" I speak first and looks at Thembeke before nodding.

"I was sent by Mr Mluleki. The dress and shoes for you" she raises her bag a bit.

"For dinner tonight" says Thembeke all cheerful.

We show the lady in and I check my phone. Mluleki did send a text about the delivery. I just didn't see it.

** **

It's a transformation. This Mavin lady knows how to transform a person from ordinary to something out of a magazine. I'm wearing a long black dress with glittery stuff on the sleeves. It has this long slit on the thigh and it hugs my ass and stomach like I don't have love handles. She made me wear tights to give my ass a bit of a lift and then made me wear these long heeled shoes Thembeke said they are called red bottoms. I think it's because they have red sole. I feel taller and breathless because I'm worried about falling.

The lady looks pleased with her work. She waits until the car arrives to get me and the man gives me a flower before opening the door for me. Nqubeko is also here but he doesn't look okay at all. I feel better

though because with him around I know they are safe.

The driver is quiet as we head over to Mluleki's house. My heart feels like it's going to beat its way out of my chest and I think the driver can hear it too. The trip seems shorter and before I could even calm down we are already there.

"Have a good night miss" says the driver after opening the door.

"Thanks" I try to smile but I'm too nervous for it to come right.

He closes the car just as Mluleki walks out. I can't help but to stare. He is wearing a dark blue suit and a white shirt with the last two buttons undone.

"Thanks man" he says to the driver.

"Sharp" the driver sounds less formal now and I watch as he drives out. Mluleki presses the gate remote before he steps closer to me. I take the perfume in first. He smells really nice. He smells like a man and I like it.

"You look gorgeous" he looks down at me. Even with the shoes he is still tall and a tonight he seems larger too.

"Thanks. Mavis did an amazing job"

"You were already there. Shall we?" He offers his arm. I hook mine onto his and smile. Drinking earlier helped, just a bit.

We walk slowly towards the corner of the house. I think he knows that I fear falling because he doesn't rush me at all. When we finally make it I can't help but gasp. The whole area is lit by small candles inside glasses. They are in different colours. Some are blue some are gold.

"Wow this is beautiful"

"I hired a person to do this" he laughs.

I look far ahead and there is a table. There are candles in the table too but the beautiful blue light comes from the pool lights. A man exit the house carrying a tray and he places it on the table before turning to greet me.

"Thanks man. I'll take it from here" he says to the man as we finally reach the table.

The man nods and disappears back to the house. Mluleki pulls the chair for me and I sit down. He pours the wine in these long wine glasses and hands me one before sitting down with his.

"I owe you an apology MaKhumalo. Before we start this evening. I want to ask for forgiveness for my behavior the last time. I should have done things better. You deserved better from me. So please forgive me" he takes out a little box on his jacket and hands it over to me.

"So this means we won't have uninvited guests who will insult me? I ask without opening the box.

"Yes. That chapter is closed"

"Good because I won't stand for that"

"I know and you don't need to. I'm going to be straight from now on my love. I promise" he doesn't even blink. But he is a man. Men can have a breakdown in front of you and still be lying. It's something they do so well.

"In that case I do forgive you" I take the box and open it. It's a necklace. A diamond necklace with my initials on it. "Wow. This is gorgeous"

"I'm glad you like it" he smiles and reach for my hand "are we okay now?"

"I think we are. J ust don't do it again. I know I can be a little demanding and harsh but I hate being lied to and I hate being treated like a child. So no more dismissal al tone"

"I swear. Never again" he smiles before he gets up and leans over to kiss my lips. I kiss him back and the phone interrupts us. It's his phone not mine.

"Sorry" He pulls it out and frown before answering. I sip the wine and listen to my tastes buds as they complain about the foreign taste they are subjected to today.

Mluleki's call doesn't last long but he looks disturbed when the puts the phone back.

"Everything okay?" I ask hoping it's not worst news.

"That was my stepsister. Her daughter committed

suicide. They found her in a bathtub"

"That's horrible" I can't even imagine Celiwe in that position. I would die too.

"She was such a bright child. Living with her grandmother. I don't get it. Pinky was 15. What could drive a 15 year old to suicide?" He looks at me like he thinks I might have an answer.

"You will be shocked to find out what kids deal with nowadays" I might have my own problems but I try by all means to always remind Celiwe that there is no problem she can't share with me.

"I guess so. Out of all the kids they have. Pinky was the only one I liked and trust me I don't like my family at all"

"Why?" Many people don't get along with family but to admit it out loud is not normal for many.

"My step mother was a cruel person Phili. She raised them to be vile like her so as soon as I could get out I got out for good"

"Get out?"

"Be able to take care of myself. I left them when I was 12. Lived in the streets for 3 years. Ran off to Johannesburg when I was 15. By 16 I could drive, shoot a gun and at 17 I was part of a group that robbed a large supermarket in Tembisa. Life changed after. But that's the story for another day"

I stare at him my mouth open.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to shock you" he smiles.

"So you've done things. Bad things before?" I try to sound less judgemental right now.

"Yes. I've robbed a church at gun point" he says it like he will say he is joking.

"A church?"

"Yes. Not just a small neighborhood church Philiswa. A large church with over 200 members. Made it out with watches, phones and cash. But I don't do that anymore. When I finally got out I swore to never do it again" he explains.

I nod and think about this. Back home people used to say it's the beautiful people who does there

unbelievable things and continue to smile. When you look at Mluleki you wouldn't think of him as a criminal and robbing a church.

Chapter 76

Adult Content

Phili.

We move to the house when the air is starts to cool down and Mluleki pours another glass of wine for me as we sit in the lounge with music playing low in the background. He is no longer drinking wine instead he is drinking something gold in the glass.

"So you are a charming man with a dark side" I ask to keep the conversation going. I'm feeling very calm and I think it's the wine.

He laughs and take my to his.

"Charming?"

"You are very charming Mlu. You look like a mystery. A sexy kind of mystery" I giggle.

"Too much wine I see" he takes the glass from my hands. I protest and hold the glass tight in my hands.

"I'm fine. Let me enjoy this"

"Not when you are drunk. Besides I still have to fuck you and you won't enjoy if you are drunk" he raises his eyebrows.

"You shouldn't say fuck" It sounds embarrassing when he says it like that.

"Fuck baby girl. I'm going to fuck you hard and to show just how hard I'll take you against the wall and finish in bed. So let's take away this" he takes the glass and I'm still processing thoughts of being fucked against the wall.

When he walks across the room to pour me a glass of water I can't help but stare at him. Compared to Mlu I'm small and I curse my grandmother for giving us this tiny frame.

"Here drink this" he holds the water in front of me. I take the glass and place it on the table.

"Thanks"

"I almost forgot" he turns and run upstairs taking two at the time. I sit still wondering what next. We had a lovely dinner, expensive wine and he bought me jewelry. What else is left there.

When he comes back he usi carrying a shopping back not a plastic bag but the ones made out of hard paper and smells like roses.

"I bought you these" he hands the shopping bag to me.

I stand up and start taking the colourful papers out before pulling out what I don't understand at first until I hold it with both hands. It's a g-string. A red g-string with strings and a very small area to cover a very small part of the vagina.

"There is more" he encourages.

I take out more fabric and it's different pieces. Matching pieces from bras to panties and very sexy

short with a matching vest.

"Thank you so much. I'll definitely wear this" I pick the shorts.

"When you are sleeping. When you are with me I like the pink ones. In fact how about you head upstairs and put them on" the way he says it I can feel myself getting wet without being touched. It's the alcohol. It makes one lose their common sense and makes them horny.

"But....." I try to argue but he stops me.

"Just go baby. I'll be up in a minute" he winks and push the panties towards me.

"Not before washing them first. I wash undies before wearing them" I'm lying. I don't. I only wash jeans because I heard that some girls don't wear undies and then they try on jeans in the fitting room so I wash them first.

"Okay fine. Just go upstairs and take that dress off because I might rip it if I do it myself.

I take a sip of water and grab my clutch before

heading upstairs with my grip on the rail so tight I'm afraid to fall and break my leg and neck.

** **

The bedroom smells like a garden and I can't help but let out a laugh. I have to take the dress off and I'm wearing lace panties that Mavis and Thembeke said they will improve my mood. I didn't get how because sometimes I do stay without wearing and I still feel fine.

I take the dress off and carefully put it over the chair before taking the shoes off. Now I'm back to my original height and it makes me laugh. Yes I'm drunk and horny.

A low whistle makes me jump. It's him and he is leaning against the door frame.

"Put the shoes on for me"

I don't protest. I slip them on and stand there in lace panties and red bottoms.

"You look so fine" he starts unbuttoning his shirt his eyes keep looking at me up and down "I appreciate beauty. Natural beauty" he takes the shirt off and he is left with a white vest that hugs his body.

"You are also handsome" I reply not sure what exactly do I do now.

"But you are more important. I love these" he walks closer and touch the panties.

"I love them too"

"As I appreciate the beauty I also love lingerie. I love seeing you walking around my house in something sexy and expensive" I'm about to answer but he claims my lips with such hunger.

The kiss is deep and intense I can feel his fingers leaving a print on my flesh and it makes me shudder.

My hands fumble with the belt a bit but I finally manage to take it off before he lowers his pants down without breaking the kiss.

When my body leaves the floor I gasp and pull away.

"It's okay. You won't fall" he whispers. I wish I felt that calm but I don't.

"The bed please" I ask before he takes my lips to his again.

There is no answer but after a moment I land on the bed with him above me immediately. The kiss is broken again and smiles when his finger traces the elastic on my panties. When he pulls them aside and touches me I let out a surprise moan. I'm already wet and ready. I really blame the wine.

"Condom please" I remind him.

He nods and reach under the pillow and pull one out. I look away when he puts it on and then his hand pushes my knees down to different directions. I feel so exposed but he doesn't give me time to think about it when he pulls the panties aside and push himself in.

"Knees down" he grunts when I move my legs.

I do as told and feel him as he sinks down so deep a foreign feeling makes me shudder a bit.

"Eyes on me beautiful. Eyes on me" he whispers before resting his upper body on his firearms. He slowly pulls back without taking his eyes off mine. I move one leg but he shakes his head quickly.

"Don't. I need you to be open like this" he goes back in harder than before and I let out a moan while trying to bite my lips.

"Shiiii. No sound yet" he whispers and pulls out almost completely before he comes back again in an even harder thrust. My hands sink in his back in a desperate attempt to keep him buried inside me like this but he grabs the cover and pull himself up still buried inside me. I let out a sharp cry when he seems to touch a sensitive place inside me.

"That's it baby. This is how I want it" he pushes his knees up and forces my legs to open even more. His arm goes above my head while his other arm locks around my right arm and pins it on the bed.

"Mluleki" I don't know why I'm calling his name but it seems fitting. He doesn't reply instead he starts thrusting deep and up so hard and so fast all I

manage to do is to moan his name and accept the building sensation that's threatens to take my breath away. He doesn't stop even when my legs seem to have a mind of their own. The climax hits me so hard everything stops working for a moment but it doesn't stop. He continues until my moan turn into loud screams and I orgasm so hard I feel like I just peed all over him. Only then he stops and covers my lips forcing his own moans into my mouth as he reaches his own orgasm.

My body continues to tremble as I enjoy the after shocks.

"That's how i'll fuck you every time you get angry and ignore my text and messages" he whispers in my ear when i'm trying to catch my breath.

"Hhuh" my head is not all back yet.

"Yes. I told you to yell at me if you are mad but ignoring me is childish. It deserves some punishment" he slowly pulls out and some warm wetness follows.

"That was punishment?" I don't move. I don't think I

have the energy anyway.

"No. Just a glimpse of what real punishment will feel like. That and more" he ties the knot on the dirty rubber and drops it on the floor.

"I don't get it"

He looks at me and nod before he grabs the elastic of my panties and rips them in one go.

"Mlu!!!"

"Shiii. I'm showing you what I mean" he slaps my hand away from the panties before he tosses them on the floor. When I try to close my legs he pulls them apart and bury his face in my wet and swollen centre. The sensation is almost painful. My hands grab his head but he doesn't stop. The activity is mind blowing as he changes from the kissing, sucking and licking. I stop fighting him and pull my head back to allow him to own me for now.

The activity last until i'm begging for more but he doesn't instead he reaches up and pull another condom under the pillow. In a blink he is already gloved and back inside me. Unlike before this time

he starts pounding me right away. The thrusts are hard and fast. It won't take long for me to come.

"Next time we have an argument. We deal with it like adults. No leaving without saying goodbye" he says in my ear without even pausing the humping.

I nod unable to reply out loud.

"Loud Philiswa. Say it loud" he demands.

"No more childishness" I say it quickly.

"Never request uber without telling me first"

"Okay"

"And never ignore me. Any problem we talk it out.

No more what?"

"Silence treatment on the phone" I say and hold him tight because i'm coming now.

"Good girl. I love you" he thrust one last time and it feels like this orgasm will kill me straight. I hold him tight and my vision is a little blurry as I come so hard my legs shake.

I don't feel him pull out because i'm exhausted and

all I do is to stare at the man in my face before drifting to exhausted sleep.

Chapter 77

Phili

It's a new day and I feel sick. It's the hangover from the wine and exhaustion from the sex. Mluleki fucked me like he was settling the score last night and again this morning. I don't know where he get the energy from but he has it.

I drag myself to the bathroom and open the hot water tap before using his toothbrush cup to drink five glasses and then throw up in the toilet. When I finish I repeat the process making sure the water isn't too hot now. When i'm done I get into the shower. It doesn't make me feel better but the nasty feeling in my chest is gone. Wine is not fancy and the morning after is even worse.

"Phili" he knocks on the door and push it open

before I can answer or even grab a towel.

"Are you feeling sick?" He asks ignoring my naked body.

"A bit" I take the towel and wrap it around my body.

"You need some food and some liquid. Come on" He reaches over and take my hand to him. "Are you sore?"

At first I don't get it until there is a naughty smile on his lips.

"No. Just tired" I feel my cheeks burn and I avoid his face.

"Good. I would hate to injure you" he whispers as we both leave the bathroom.

I stop walking when I see a bag on the bed. Am I being kicked out? But I didn't bring a packed bag when I came over.

"I have to away for few days" he says when he notices me looking at the bag.

"Oh. Pinky?" I remember just bits of the night before.

"Yeah. I just don't get it. She was such a happy child Phili. I mean for her to do something like this just doesn't make sense" he shakes his head.

"I can only imagine how everyone is feeling. Losing a child isn't easy" I think about S'nqobile. When her daughter died she died too and I don't think we will ever get that S'nqobile back.

"It's not. I said I'll be there today so I have to drive to Mahlabathini right now"

"Have a safe trip. Let me get dressed quickly. I'll request a ride"

"No you won't. I'll drive you myself. I told you, no more requested rides" he frowns.

"Why? It's easy and safe" way better then taking a taxi.

"No woman of mine is taking an uber. Forget it" his voice is a little sharp and I wonder what's a big deal.

"You are acting like a man right now" I look away and roll my eyes.

"I do see that and I don't care what i'm acting like.

No uber and that's final. Here" he pulls something on his pocket and hand it to me. It's only when it's in my hands that I see it's money. Stack of money.

"It's money" I'm a little out of breath. The largest cash I've ever held in my hands is over R2000 not layers and layers of bank notes. It's even a bit heavy.

"Yes it's money. Do something. Have your hair done. Get a massage or take the kids to the movies and dinner" I stare at the money and look at him.

"It's a lots of money Mluleki"

"Are you sure? I was thinking about adding a grand or two" he laughs.

"Are you paying me for sex?"

His laughter dies down sharply.

"What?"

"You are giving me money. I mean you used to pay for sex. So what am I supposed to think?" I'm starting to feel out of breath.

"Philiswa. I've been giving women money for as long as I can remember. There is no way I can never

give you money now that you are my girlfriend. It's not payment for anything just some money to spoil yourself" he pulls me closer to him and push my forehead back using his forehead before kissing my nose "Tell me. Would you feel better if I give you a card instead?"

"A card?"

"Yes. A card. The thing that you swipe on the machine instead of paying cash"

"I know what's a card" I roll my eyes.

"Do you want that instead?"

"I have my own capitec card" Sure, it's not loaded with cash but it's a card. A working card.

"Connected to your cell number?"

I nod as he let's me go and pull out his phone on his back pocket. I put the money on the bed and take his lotion. My phone vibrates on the pedestal and I reach for it. It's a bank notification.

"I'll send you more tomorrow. In fact I think you should have a savings account. Save some cash on

the side. When I come back I'll take you to my financial advisor. I'm sure he can give us some ideas on what we can invest in"

"Thanks for the money. I'll remind you" I put the phone down and sit down before applying the lotion on my arms.

"Phili" he grabs the ottoman and sits in front of me. I continue to apply the lotion until he grabs my hands and pull them on each side.

"I'm listening"

"Are we going to have a problem with the money?"

"No. I'm just not used to this. Give me time to get used to it" I'm not lying. No one has ever given me so much money just because they want to. Where I come from people don't do this.

"Get used to it fast baby girl. I have money and I intend on spoiling you and your kids" he smiles and leans in for a kiss. I meet him half way and kiss for a moment.

"Thanks" I whisper.

"I meant it last night. I love you and there is no pressure Mzilikazi. When you are ready you will say it back" he kisses my lips again.

** **

Nqubeko

I finish making Thembeke's breakfast and make my own coffee before watching the news a bit. Dabula and the kids are already gone for the day.

Thembeke woke up early and got everyone ready before going back to bed for a bit. When I questioned it she gave me an evil eye and I decided to let it be. Pregnant women can be a little off so it's best to let them be.

My phone rings and it's Nothile. It's way too early for her to be calling me but I answer anyway.

"Nqubeko" she sounds out of breath.

"Yes"

"Pinky committed suicide last night" she says quickly.

"Who is Pinky?" My mind doesn't snap into place.

"Jesus Nqubeko. The pregnant girl" she snaps.

"What? Is she okay?" i get up and take the cup to the kitchen.

"She is dead Nqubeko" she is yelling.

"She killed herself?"

"Yes. She killed herself. Lindo and I are driving to Durban as we speak. Are you in your house?"

"No. I'm in Thembeke's house"

"Oh. Well we are coming. We have to do something about this Nqubeko"

"I thought you were going to fix it" i wash the cup and set it aside on the sink.

"And I tried. It's not my fault that she took her own life Nqubeko" she yells.

"You mean after you and Lindo were pressuring her to have an abortion" i wipe my hands on the cloth

while balancing the phone between my ear and shoulder.

"I was trying to be a parent Nqubeko. What was i supposed to do?"

"Then be a a parent and fix this one as well" I can hear her banging the driving wheel. It serves her right. She was acting like I was the enemy and she had solutions.

"So you are going to be like that?" It sounds like she wants to starts crying.

"What do you want me to be like? Nothile, at some point you have to learn that not everything can be controlled by you. Give Lindo the phone"

"Dad" says Lindo his voice trembling.

"When you are ready to admit your mistake and wants to take responsibility call me" I end the call after that and call Mluleki.

"Nqubeko" he sounds like he is running.

"Are you jogging"

There is more sound and then a moan.

"Damn you" I end the call and stare at it for a moment. Mluleki will never ever grow up.

I go to the bedroom to check on Thembeke. She is still sleeping. Surprisingly she has taken off her pyjama top and kicked the blankets off her. It's not that hot but she looks so peaceful.

Her phone starts flicking the light and I quickly grab it before it rings. It's Clement. She has his number saved.

"Not today buddy" i mumble before turning the volume down and put the phone down.

Thembeke continues to snore and I stand there just watching her. She looks so much better. The therapy seems to be helping or it's being surrounded by her cousins that makes her so calm. Sometimes I do look at her and look at myself and wonder why she stayed with me. I'm not exactly the greatest lover but Thembeke seems to love me even when I don't see anything loveable in me.

My phone starts vibrating and I quickly answer the call before it wakes her up.

"Mbonambi" it's Mluleki.

"You are such a bastard" we both laugh.

"You called" he replies in between the laughs.

"Are you done or you want to continue?"

"I'm done. I won't apologize for that. You called and I answered. So what's up?" I hear Phili in the background.

"My son's pregnant girlfriend committed suicide. I don't have all details right now but what I know is that he was pressuring her to terminate and she didn't want to. I'm thinking of dragging him to her family and make him tell the truth"

"And have her family wanting to kill him for it? If that girl is Amanda and some boy comes over to confess such. Would you let him walk out the door?" He asks.

"Probably no but what do I do now? Let him hide?"
Where is the lesson there.

"I think knowing that he indirectly helped the situation was a punishment enough. As a father you

can take him there to pay his last respect to his girlfriend and not mention everything else" he advises.

"And compensate the family?"

"No. Just offer to help with the burial as a parent too but don't offer them money as if you are paying for your guilt"

"Thanks man. Lindo is getting out of hands Mluleki. I really hope he learns a lessons from all this "

"He is 15 Nqubeko and let's not act like Nothile is a right person in general" I'm not surprised. Mluleki hates all women I've dated. He only like Thembeka.

"Don't go there. Parenting is not easy"

"For her it's probably worse. Anyway I have to go to Mahlabathini. Pinky also committed suicide. I have no idea what happened. God knows what's going on with these kids"

"Did you say Pinky?" I ask just to be sure.

"Yes Pinky" he repeats.

"Pinky is Lindokuhle's girlfriend Mluleki"

Chapter 78

Thembeke.

"I'm annoyed. Don't look at me like that" I tell Clement while shoving another potato in my mouth. His friends laugh and stop when I look at them.

"You are pregnant Thembeke. You couldn't attend the funeral. It's not like they decided to just leave you out" says Clement pushing his glasses in place.

"But Nothile could? She indirectly pushed her to suicide you know" I continue to yell.

"Here drink some juice" says the friend pouring orange juice on the glass.

"Thanks" I take the juice and sip but it's so sour I have no choice but to spit it back out "Jesus Christ. What the hell is this?"

"Lemon juice" says Clement handing me the glass of water instead and his friend taking the lemon juice.

"I thought it was orange juice" I drink more water. My baby must be wondering what just happened.

"Alex bring the orange juice please. She drink sweet juice" calls out Clement.

"Okay" replies the guy. If he is Alex that means this other guy is Ndlela. I was tempted to ask why they named him with a surname but then again I figured I shouldn't do anything to ruin this day.

"So Ndlela. Beside being a business man. What else do you do?" I ask trying to get the spotlight off me for a moment. I've been bitching about Pinky's funeral ever since I arrives and these guys let me be.

"I work at University. I'm a lecturer. Alex is the one in business" says Ndlela not looking offended.

"Sorry"

Clement laughs and hands me a paper towel. My hands are stained with fat. We are eating ox kidneys and dumplings. Alex made some potatoes on the side just in case I didn't want the dumplings.

"It's fine. It's an honest mistake" he laughs.

"Are you squeezing the oranges in there?" asks Clement to Alex who hasn't returned from the kitchen.

"Yes I was" Replies Alex his voice sounding so deep "Freshly squeezed juice for the lady" he smiles and puts the glass in front of me.

"Wow. Thanks" It looks so good. He even decorated the glass and put on a colorful straw. This man knows how to impress a person.

"It's cool. Sorry about the lemon" he sits down next to me and pick up his plate.

"It's fine" I take a sip and it tastes just as good.

My phone starts ringing. It's Nqubeko and I want to ignore him but he will worry and he might even start making a big deal out of this.

"Yes" I answer.

"MaKhumalo. Are you okay?" I don't hear people singing or a Pastor preaching. It's not even midday so they can't be done already.

"I'm fine. How are things there?"

"As they can be expected. Dabula says you are not home. Where are you?" He sounds like he is walking.

"I went to visit Clement" I brace myself for the yelling.

"After I asked you not to?" He sounds calm.

"I was bored Nqubeko. Dabula was playing outside with the kids. My therapist wasn't available for me to blow off some steam for being excluded from the funeral" I bring up the funeral because I really wanted to go. I wasn't going to dig or cook or do anything that might cause anything to me. What was sitting there listening to some singing, say goodbye to Pinky and then come home? But no. I had to stay and let that witch go with Nqubeko and their kids.

"Just go home and stop acting like a child" He replies sharply.

"Well i'm being treated like one so I might as well. See you when you get back" I end the call and go back to eating.

"Look" says Ndlela turning a piece of paper towards

me.

I can't believe it. It's me. A penciled picture of me with a phone on my ear.

"You can draw?" I take the paper on his hands.

"Yeah. i enjoy drawing beautiful people who do nice things for my friends. Clement told us what you did for him when that family wanted to take over his things" he says kindly and I look at Clement. He didn't deserve it and I couldn't stand back and just watch.

"Those rotten people. I hope i never see them again" i add.

"They tried to approach my lawyer wanting to know if they can have a claim on her things. I'm not sure if they will ever stop" says Clement. A moment of silence passes before Alex speaks.

"No more depressing talks people. Lets play some video games" he suggests.

** ** *

Phili

This has been the saddest day ever. Watching people cry for Pinky and wondering what would I do if it was me and Celiwe gone. Pinky's mother fainted in church and she has to be carried outside. I wanted to go help but I was forced to remember that i am Mluleki's girlfriend and I didn't want to give people something to judge me for. Nothile was already giving me the "you are low class" look for wearing a green dress instead of black. In fact I think she hated that I came too. She didn't need to say it out loud but her face said so. In the car it was Me, Her, Nqubeko and Lindo who didn't say one word the whole trip. Mluleki in the other end only gave me an acknowledging nod when our eyes met and then he continued being busy. Nqubeko also rolled his sleeves and helped with the grave digging. Now everyone is leaving and i'm waiting near the car already.

"Phili" a voice snaps me out of my thoughts. I look up and my eyes can't believe it. It's Vela. We went to school with. He looks the same just older and rich. He looks really good.

"Mvelo" I can't help but smile.

"I thought it was you. I saw you arrive. Wow. You look good" he smiles too. I notice the ring on his finger. He is married.

"You also look good"

"And where is Dabula? I saw J abulile two days ago. She said you guys moved" he leans against the car next to me.

"We live in Durban now. Dabula had to stay behind with the kids. But he is fine" him and Dabula used to chill together at school. I never understood their friendship but then again it wasn't mine to question.

"I live in Melmoth. You have to give me Dabula's number" he takes out his phone. I nod and take the phone.

"How is your mum?" I type Dabula's number and

hand the phone back to him.

"Very old but still healthy. I'll tell her i saw you. You know she loves you" we both laugh. His mother was very kind to us.

"She is a kind woman"

"She still is" He smiles and look at me like he wants to say something.

"What?"

"You look beautiful" he replies shyly.

"I know, right" someone answers.

We both turn around and It's Mluleki on the other side of the car.

"Sorry I couldn't help it" he continues while taking his jacket off "I figured it's probably cooler now" he hands it to me.

"Thanks. This is Vela. Dabula's friend" I introduce them to avoid the awkwardness.

"I know Vela. His wife is looking for him in the tent" says Mluleki. Vela doesn't say anything. He just

walks away.

"Okay that was weird" I say to myself.

"Are you okay? Sorry we didn't talk earlier" he takes my hand to his.

"It's okay. Are you and Nqubeko okay?" I haven't seen them talk.

"We will be fine. Don't worry about it"

"How dare you!!" there is some screaming that follows and then chairs falling.

People are screaming and I can hear Nothile's voice in them. She is insulting someone.

"We should go see what's going on" i suggest because Mluleki is just standing there.

"No. It has nothing to do with us" he doesn't move.

I spot Nqubeko rushing towards the car with Lindo behind him.

"What's going on?" i ask before they even get to us.

"Nothile and her big mouth" that's all he says. I look at Mluleki and he doesn't say anything at all.

"So we are going to leave her here?" Asks Lindo looking like he is ready to cry.

"The police are on their way. For her sake i hope they hurry" he replies and gets in the car. Lindo doesn't move but Mluleki opens the passanger door and I figure it's for me so I get in.

"I'll call you" he kisses my cheek.

"We will talk" says Nqubeko and Mluleki just nods.

"We can't leave without mah" says Lindo.

Nqubeko doesn't reply instead he starts the car and drive off leaving him there.

We drive silently at first and I keep expecting him to stop but he doesn't.

"Nqubeko. What happened?"

"Nothile insulted another woman in there. The woman got pissed. I told her to shut up. All she had to do was shut up and ignore them. When it's your kid at fault Phili, You keep your mouth shut and allow the wronged part to decide what to do. You don't go there and attack them" he is yelling and

banging the wheel so I decide to just nod and let him be. I have kids at home and i want to get there in on piece.

Chapter 79

Thembeke

I wake up in a strange place. At first I don't understand but when I hear laughter I remember. I took a nap in Clement's house and they are still playing video games. It feels like I've slept way longer than a normal afternoon nap.

"Hey guys" I greet when I join them in the lounge.

"Damn you know how to sleep" says Ndlela pausing the game.

"Pregnant women love sleeping. They can't help it" says Alex removing the pizza box on the couch.

"You guys should have woke me up. I'm starving. What time is it?" I open a box on the table and it's still warm so I help myself.

"I wish all girls were like you. See, no fuss" says Ndlela.

"It's after 11. Do you want juice with that?" Says Clement.

"Why would I fuss? It's just pizza" I reply with a mouthful "11? As in 11 pm?" I swallow.

"Yes 11 pm" says Clement pouring juice.

"Why didn't you guys wake me up?" I put down the pizza and take my phone. I have no messages or missed calls from Nqubeko. Maybe he is no back yet "I have to go" I take the juice and drink to down the pizza that's starting to feel like large stones on my throat.

"I'll drive you" offers Clement.

"Thanks" I put on my shoes and take another slice. I'll eat in the car.

"It was really nice to meet you. You are fun to chill with. Next time i'll even let you win" says Alex giving me a hug.

"Next time i'll be ready and i'll start practising as

soon as I get home" Nqubeko bought a PlayStation for the kids. I'll check if it's the same or not.

"Visit soon. Okay" says Ndlela also giving me a hug.

"I will. Thank you so much guys"

"No. Thank you for taking care of him" says Ndlela.

"Anytime. Bye guys" I walk to the door with Clement following.

** **

I ask Clement to take me to Nqubeko's house so he can find me there like an obedient girlfriend.

"Do you want me to come in with you?" He asks when I open the gate.

"Yes please"

He drives in and we both walk to the door. I unlock and turn on the outside light before turning the lounge light on.

"Thank you so much" I turn the light in the passage and the kitchen.

"No problem. It was a good day. Thanks Thembeke" we hug before he leaves. I stand outside and wait for him to drive out before closing the gate.

I lock the door and turn on the TV before going to the kitchen. There is no food in this house so I drink some juice and call Nqubeko. Maybe he can get something in the garage. The phone goes straight to voicemail which explains the lack of calls. He must have a low battery. I leave a short message and go to the bedroom.

My heart almost stops when I turn on the light and Nqubeko is lying on the bed staring at the ceiling.

"You almost gave me a heart attack. I thought you were not back yet" His car is not outside and his phone is off.

"I came back around 3" he replies without looking at me.

"Oh. Did you guys travel safe?" now this is awkward. I did not expect this at all.

"Yes we did. Where were you Thembeke?" He sits up.

"I was with Clement. I fell asleep and over slept" now that i'm saying it out loud I can hear how bad it sounds.

"Why are you here?"

"What?"

"This is my house and you arrive in the middle of the night. Why?" His voice doesn't sound calm at all.

"I didn't mean to stay there until late. We were playing video games. I got tired and I slept. It was meant to be a quick nap...."

"Get out" he cuts me off.

I stare at him not understanding what it means. Get out in the bedroom or leave his house.

"Nqubeko I....."

"I said get out. Leave my house Thembeke" he gets off the bed and I run to the door.

"I can explain"

"Explain what? That you have no respect for me? What pregnant woman that goes around visiting men she doesn't even know and be dumb enough to fall a sleep there. Is that what you want to explain?!!" I flinch with each word he says.

"It was Clement and his...."

"I said get out!!" He picks up something and i run off before he can throw it to me. I manage to make it outside before he tosses my handbag and shoes behind me. The phone is the last item to follow and it lands on the ground. I pick it up and the screen is creaked.

"Please leave my house" he shouts while opening the gate. I don't move. Where am i supposed to go this late? I didn't bring my car over and there is no way i can walk home.

"Thembeke. Don't make me drag you out this gate myself" he walks out and I quickly grab my things and run out.

He stops following and close the gate. I think about running back in before it closes shut but something

tells me not to test Nqubeko so I stop.

He goes back inside and close the door. A second later the lights are off. Tears fill my eyes when i see the bedroom light also go off after few minutes. I look around and there is no one. J ust streets lights and their shadows. I try to call him but his phone is still off. I try Dabula and his phone is also off. I try Phili and she answers after a while.

"Thembeka"

"Hey Cuz. Can you please wake Dabula up for me. I need him to come pick me up" I fake a normal voice so i don't freak her out.

"Pick you up where?" She is still sleepy I can hear it.

"In Nqubeko's house. We had a fight"

"But Nqubeko took your car"

"Took my car to where?"

"I don't know. He arrived and took keys and the car. Is the car not there?"

"It's not. Well maybe it's in the garage" it doesn't make any sense. Why would he take my car or is it

because he paid for it?

"Maybe it is. Should i ask Mluleki to come get you? He is the only pers on I know with a car" she suggests.

"Please do"

"Okay" she ends the call.

I move closer to the gate so anyone walking down the street can't spot me easily in the shadow.

Phili calls after few minutes and says Mluleki's phone is off. The call gets cut off in the middle of the conversation. My battery picked this time to run out. I try to turn the phone on but it only does for 10 seconds informing me that there is no battery life. Now it's a perfect time for me to panic. It after midnight now and I doubt anyone would open for me if i start banging their gate. The only gate left to bang is Nqubeko's gate so I take my shoes off and start hitting the gate. I use all my strength and it takes less than 5 minutes for the opposite neighbour to turn their is lights on. I continue until the man comes out and approach his own gate.

"Excuse me. We are trying to sleep" it's a white man. I hope he is not carrying a gun.

"I'm sorry. My phone is off and i'm trying to wake him up" I explain. The man looks annoyed but he waves me over. I walk across as he holds out his phone.

"Call him"

"Thanks " i dial Nqubeko's number and his phone is still off. I call Phili.

"Hello" she doesn't sound like she went back to sleep after my call.

"It's me. Can you request a ride for me please. Nqubeko locked me out and my phone is off. I'm using the neighbour's phone. I'm right outside the gate. Please"

"Okay"

"Thanks Cuz" i end the call and return the phone.

"What kind of person locks a pregnant woman out in the middle of the night?" Asks the man taking his phone.

"He is being selfish. Thank you so much. My cousin is getting me a ride" now I'm holding my breath that the man doesn't go back inside until the ride gets here.

The door opens again and a woman comes out. She is speaking Afrikaans and I have no idea what she is saying. The man replies to her in Afrikaans as well. Clearly they are talking about me.

Their conversation goes on until i hear the word police. I turn and look at them. The man notice this and look at me too.

"You are calling the police?"

"It's the middle of a night. I've never seen you before and that house doesn't look like there is anyone in it. How do we know you are not lying?" asks the woman switching back to English.

"I've called for a ride. Of cause you don't know me. I also don't know you. Look i'm not here causing trouble. I just need a car to take me back home"

"Stop yelling" says the man.

"I'm not yelling"

"Back home? i thought you live there" she points the house.

"I have my own home. I was here to see Nqubeko and he wants to be a bastard about it" I click my tongue and look down the road hoping to see an approaching car. I see blue lights instead.

"You called the police?"

"Yes. They will deal with you. It's a bad world" says the woman like she had no choice.

"Mcm" I run across the road and start hitting the gate yelling to Nqubeko to let me in before the police get here. The house remains dark. I guess i'm going to jail. J ust thinking about it makes me start sobbing.

Chapter 80

Short chapter

Nqubeko.

I wait until the watch strike 6 before taking a shower. I need a hot shower that will wake me up complete because it feels like i'm half awake and half asleep. The water is too hot and I let it burn my skin a bit. I need some pain to forget about everything for a moment. Lindo having a hand in Mluleki's niece's death. Nothile being involved too and being too proud to admit it. His family wanting to press charges and Mluleki being quiet in the middle of it all. He is my voice of reason and I think he could be theirs too so right now he is the middle part. Then to top all that I have to deal with Thembeke who refuses to be an adult just for a little while.

I turn of the water and step out. I don't even bother making sure i'm dry I simple get dressed and grab my phone. The first call is to Fakude. He answers immediately.

"She is still fine. Sleeping warmly in a cell with a sleeping bag and there is a half eaten hotdog next to her. The cell was clean" says Fakude sounding like he is reading a script.

"I'm on my way. Thanks man" I search for my car and house keys.

"Sure" the line goes dead after. I make another call to Mncedisi. He doesn't answer right away like Fakude but I wait patiently.

"Nqubeko" he answers at last.

"Did you find it?"

"Yes I did. There was nothing major and it's all fixed. I even changed the tyres like you asked" i owe this man some real money for checking Thembeke's car. Leaving it up to her is useless if she can drive with some squicky sound for days and not even notice them.

"I'll send your payment and send someone to pick up the car"

"No problem. Sharp" he ends the call. At least with the car in good condition it means no more worrying about those kids riding it every day to and from school.

I make a transfer quickly and spot my keys under

the table. The phone rings before i'm even out the door. It's Nothile. I guess they didn't lock her up.

"What?" i'm not feeling friendly today.

"I think Lindo ran away" she sounds like she is crying.

"He is with Mluleki. If you weren't busy being all bossy you would have noticed that he didn't sleep in" I end the call before she says something else.

The phone rings again and it's Phili now.

"Hi Nqubeko"

"Hi and I'm on my way to pick up Thembeke in the police station"

"She is in jail?"

"No. She just slept there. She is fine. Don't worry about it" the last thing I want is to scare her. This was a just a practical lesson for Thembeke not them.

"So the police really took her? But you said....."

"Don't worry Phili. We will talk when I get there. I

have to go"

"Okay" she hesitantly hangs up. I guess Mluleki hasn't spoken to her.

I lock the door and rush to my car. I don't want to be late and have to answer to Reed or Ntuli.

** **

The trip to the police station takes me over 20 minutes. I find two ladies in the front. Both of them stare at me and I remember Fakude saying they are bringing two people in. I guess it's them.

"Morning" I greet them and that makes them snap out of it. One looks embarrassed and the other pretends to be putting away some papers before she replies.

"I'm here to see Fakude" I say with a pleasant smile on my face.

"Mbonambi" says Fakude before he even appears.

"Brian. Where is Thembeke" I expect to see her behind him but he is alone.

"In there" he points behind him.

I walk to him and he shows me to door. I walk to door and leads me to another area with bars.

"Thembeke" I call out.

"Nqubeko" she replies and I hurry down the little passage and find her. The bars are unlocked but she is sitting on the sleeping bag hugging herself.

"MaKhumalo" I drop to my knees and throws herself to me before she starts sobbing. It was meant to be a practical experience. What I didn't see is her looking this frightened.

"I'm so sorry my love" I whisper repeatedly as she continues to sob in my arms her hands are practically digging into my skin.

"Is she okay" someone asks behind me.

I nod without saying anything. The truth is I feel like a dog right now. I just wanted to scare her. To show her that I don't like the recklessness.

"Let's go home" I whisper trying to pull her off me so I can get up. She doesn't let go at first but after a second she moves her head back. Her eyes are a bit swollen.

I manage to get up and pulled her up with me. When she is standing she let's go of me and wipe her eyes.

"Did they hurt you?" she looks fine though. I gave Fakude clear instructions. No man handling her and Fakude assured me that she didn't even put up a fight. He just didn't mention that she looks so frightened.

She shakes her head and put her hand on my arm for support. I wrap my arms around her and repeat how sorry I am.

We leave the station after having three officers confirm she wasn't harmed. She also says so but I can't help it. We drive silently until we reach home and she doesn't move at all. I get out and walk to her side to help her out. We walk hand and hand to the house and she stands without doing anything. I

kick the door closed and stand in front of her.

"Please talk to me Thembeka"

She blinks a few times and then tears start falling again. I wrap my arms around her and hold her tight.

"I was so scared" she whispers her voice sounding hoarse.

"I know baby. I was so stupid. I was trying to scare you. I shouldn't have done it"

She pulls away when my phone starts ringing. It's Qhude. I sent him to get Thembeka's car from the garage.

"Your car is here. That annoying noise is fixed" I tell her but she gives me a blank look.

"I took your car in. I told you before I left yesterday. You were yelling about being left alone and I told you I'll be sending the car in because I hate the noise it was making" she doesn't seem recall.

I grab the remote and open the door. Qhude drives in and I meet him halfway with my own car keys.

"I'll come get it myself" I hand him the keys and take

Thembeke's.

"Sure boss" he jogs to my car and leave. I close the gate behind him and go back inside. My heart breaks into little pieces when I find Thembeke standing in the same spot.

"Thembeke. Please forgive me" I beg.

"Can I go to bed?"

"Sure baby. Anything you want" I reply quickly and hold her hand when she walks to the bedroom.

I had a different ending in my head. We were going to talk about this, she was going to yell, sulk for a while and then laugh about how silly it was. Then we were going to find a way to get her to stop being reckless about this. I didn't imagine her being this heartbroken.

She crawls into bed and I get in next to her.

"Do you want something to eat?" I ask and she shakes her head quickly before she lays her head on my arm.

"Baby. I was just angry. I just wanted you to learn

some lesson. I didn't mean to make you like this"

She shifts closer and put her hands on me. I wish I can say it makes me feel better but it doesn't.

Thembeke can sleep in my arms and ask me for a divorce an hour later. Well, this time she doesn't even have to ask for a divorce. She might wake up and tell me to never call her again.

Chapter 81

Phili

I try Thembeke again and her phone is off. I've tried Nqubeko and he doesn't answer at all. The next option is to call Mluleki. His phone rings to voicemail.

"Still nothing?" Asks Dabula sitting down opposite me.

"Nothing. I'm....." My phone starts ringing and it's Mluleki.

"Mbulazi"

"Hi. I still can't find Thembeke and I managed to find Nqubeko earlier but now he is not answering"

"They are fine. Nqubeko said she is sleeping" it sounds like he is in a large and empty place.

"Okay. Where are you?"

"I'm at home but i'm going out in a short while. Do you need anything?" I hear voices.

"No. Are you alone?"

There is a pause before he replies "No. I'm not alone. I'm with Lindo and i'm going to drive him back to uLundi"

"Okay. I think i'm going to see Thembeke in Nqubeko's house"

"I'll send a car for you. No uber nonsense Phili" I wonder what uber did to him.

"Okay fine" It's not use arguing. I'm starting to think Mluleki is a control freak.

"He should be there in the next 30 minutes or so. Call me when he arrives. Okay?"

"I will. Bye" I end the call and put the phone down. I turn to Dabula "Thembeke is sleeping. Mluleki is heading to ULundi with Lindo and he is sending a car to pick me up because he doesn't want me riding an uber"

Dabula laughs a bit and looks at me.

"And you didn't throw a fit?"

"About what?" i'm not a fit thrower. I'd like to believe that i'm an extremely calm person.

"Him dictating your movements. The Phili I know would have taken an uber just because she wants to" I can't exactly tell him that Mluleki did things to me when I took an uber. Things I enjoyed but still satisfied so I don't want any punishment just yet.

"I don't know. Maybe i'm tired of being difficult or something. Plus I have other things in my head" I grab a cushion and hug it.

"Such as?" he turns to face me and place another cushion on his banded knee.

"He offered to help me with ways of making money.

He mentioned an investment. Just to make sure my kids inherit something in the future. So i'm thinking about that"

"And have you decided?" he asks his tone remaining the same. I guess he is not shocked or thinking of me as a gold digger.

"I don't know how to decide or what to decide. I mean I've never had a real job before. My Matric was bad and now I just don't know"

"So you want to go back to school?" I've never thought about going back to school. Years behind the desk seems like a drawback. I feel I'm too old to be going back to school to fix Matric and then more years to study for a qualification.

"I'm too old. But I'd like to earn a living. I can't depend on you and Thembeke. And I can't just be happy to have Mluleki wanting to invest on my kids. If he changes his mind then what?"

"First thing first. You are not too old. You can still rewrite your Matric. Get better marks and there is no age limit in University. Some people go there after

reaching 30. Some graduate at 40. So forget about being old. You are fine. Plus no one can take education from you once you have it" he advises.

"I know bhuti. But what about the kids? If I go back to school"

"They are at school too" he sounds like he might add 'duh' in the end.

"I know but...."

"You are making excuses. You want to study. Go study and do whatever you want with your life. You know Phili I used to stay up all night and wonder. Like, why us? Why now? Why like this. Then I told Nqubeko about it. Did you know what he said?"

I shake my head and wait for this to continue.

"He said. Take the opportunities life offers you Dabula. Absorb as much as you can so you don't wake up one day and wish you had used all opportunities. I listened and that's what I plan on doing Phili. I'm going to work and study and do everything else I need to do so one day I don't look back and wish I had"

I nod. He continues.

"These people came to our lives for a reason. They came when we needed them the most"

"Thanks bhuti. Let me go get ready before the guy gets here" I stand up and take my phone. Dabula is right. I have to use the opportunity. Starting with savings accounts for my kids.

** **

Thembeke.

Nqubeko shakes me awake and I hold him tight as a thank you for the waking up. I was starting to scream out loud. I could hear myself but I wasn't able to wake myself up until he woke me up.

"It's a bad dream" he rubs my arm while I bury myself on his chest. A tear escape my eye and I wipe it on his shirt.

"I think I need food" I pull myself off him but he stops myself. I'm not hungry. This is called comfort eating and I need it.

"I'll make something quick" he offers.

"I'm craving inhloko ne dombolo (cow's head and dumplings)"

"Okay. I'll go get some for you" he gets up. I lay my head down on the pillow and close my eyes. The memory of the dream comes back and I open my eyes quickly.

Nqubeko takes his phone and leave. I wait until I head a door close before taking my phone. He charged it and loaded airtime. I go to music player and play the loudest song I have. I need the noise. It helps to keep the quietness away. I never realized this before but after the night in that place I realized I hate the quietness. I couldn't even hum a song to myself. All I could do was cry and cry silently because I couldn't scream my frustration and fear.

The song ends and I play another while going to the lounge for louder music. I put Beyonce CD and play

it loud.

I start singing along to some random words as I take a broom and sweep the lounge. Nothing comes up so I move to the kitchen and sweep the kitchen too. I move to moping the floor and mop the outside area in the kitchen.

My phone rings just as the song ends. I wipe my hands on my skirt and answer the call.

"I'm outside. Can you let me in?" It's Phili.

"Sure" I open the gate for her and wait at the door as she gets out of the car and walks inside. The car doesn't drive away but she goes back and says something to the driver before he drives off.

"I think i'm dating my father" she laughs as she hurries over.

"Why?"

She doesn't reply until she is closer and starts frowning at the noise.

"Why so loud?"

"I'm cleaning. Why are you calling Mluleki your

father? Who was that guy?" I go back inside and she follows.

"Mlu hates uber. I have no idea why. He sent the car for me. I really needed to see you.....gosh i'm yelling. Can we turn it down?" She picks up the remote. I nod and watch as she turn it off completely.

"I don't think he hates the uber. I think he hates the drivers"

"He is dramatic. Anyway forget him. How are you? Your face looks puffy like you've been crying" hand actually reaches out and touch my face.

"I had some bad dreams. I'm fine now. I'm cleaning the front. Come" I don't want to sit still.

She follows and I take the mop to continue moping the area.

"Any particular reason why you are moping outside at this time of the day?"

"It was dirty and i'm waiting for Nqubeko to come back with my food"

She nods and goes quiet. I continue quietly but

inside I'm not silent at all. I'm asking myself why me. Why do these things have to haunt me like this. Why do all the bad things have to come back now. I was always a good girl. I listened when spoken to. I cleaned everything that needed cleaning. I washed every dirty clothe and tried my best to be an obedient child but it was never enough. From being told to shut up to being reminded I had nothing. From the whipping to the silent treatment I never knew which one was better. Sometimes I wished they would yell and let it pass. Sometimes I wished a whipping could come and go. Sometimes I wanted nothing but I got something all the time. I thought I forgot all these things but I didn't. I just pushed them to the back of my head and told myself I've moved on from all of them.

"Thembeka!!"

Phili's frightened voice snaps me out of it. My hand is bleeding. There is a glass on the floor and the mop on my other hand. While dealing with the internal confrontation I hit the window with my fist and now the pain is settling in.

"Why me? Why abuse me like this? I never too his money. Why would I? I didn't even know what R200 looked like. Why would I take it. Why didn't they beat me up for it. A beating would have helped. It would have been a quick punishment instead of locking me into a room for two days without food. At night it was so dark. I couldn't see anything and my voice was gone. I couldn't cry out loud. He dragged me there and locked me inside for two days. Without food or water. I was only 11 years old" I feel Nqubeko's hands around me. He doesn't say anything but holds me tight. Sometimes he does hurt me but whenever I think about safety, he is my safe place.

Chapter 82

Nqubeko.

Thembeke's hand is covered by a white bandage. They had to stitch her hand and said her bones were a bit creaked so it will take time to heal. I

bought her a pink sling thing to rest her hand but we all know it doesn't matter right now. She hasn't taken the pills because they will make her sleep but she can't sleep yet. Not before she talks to Dr Ngcobo. That's the thing about loaded shelves in your head. Once they burst open you can never shove everything back and shut them again. You need to open them up, sort them out again. Throw away some things to ease the load and once everything looks neat again, only then you can push them closed and hope they don't burst open any time soon. We are here right now waiting for Thembeke to open her already open shelves and start sorting things out.

She asked me to call Dr Ngcobo and I did. When I offered her some privacy she asked me to stay. Opposite me there is Phili who hasn't stopped crying ever since I found her panicking while trying to stop Thembeke's outburst. when I asked her to try to calm down Dr Ngcobo said I should let her be. She said from time to time it's important to allow people to cry for an event that needs them to cry. It

let's the emotions out instead of burying them in. I didn't argue so I decided to hold the box of tissues close to her when she needs a new one.

"There are so many things in my head. I don't know where to begin" she says softly. I want to gather her into my arms and feel her hands around me but I don't move. The woman is watching me like a hawk so I sit still and wait.

"You can start anyway you like. We are here to listen" says Dr Ngcobo calmly. Thembeke smiles at her. I think she might be reminding her of her grandmother.

"Sometimes I used to think I've imagined it. Like it didn't happen but then I would feel it. The bruises on my back. The stinging pain when I bath or sit down. Sometimes when I take my clothes off they would stick and it would be painful to pull them off. Sometimes there would be blood sometimes nothing just pain" she stops and swallow. Phili let's out a sob and I push the box towards her. She takes another tissue and blow her nose.

"One day he tied me on a bedpost and placed something on my mouth. I couldn't close my jaws and the whole time that's all I focused on. That my jaw would lock and I wouldn't be able to chew and speak. I couldn't cry. I wasn't allowed to cry so I stayed silence and thought about my mouth until I woke up wet and dirty. I vomited on the floor and peed on myself but I don't know what happened in between. He said I had let the goats out too early and they ate his plantation" she pause and bites her lips so hard I start fearing she will start bleeding.

"Do....." I start to speak but Dr Ngcobo shakes her head quickly.

"Sometimes it would be a cold meal. I would cook and dish up. Everyone would eat but he would stay outside until the food is cold and then it would be my fault. On good days I got an insult on bad days I got a beating. Some days it was a belt some days a wire. Sometimes a slap across the side of my face and my ear would ring for days after. Sometimes I would tell myself to stop crying but sometimes that's all I wanted to do. Just cry. Just cry nonstop

until it feels better" she blinks and the tears slowly make their way down.

"And then it stopped. When I started high school it got better. The beatings would disappear for months and even when I got some it wasn't so severe. So it got better and I started focusing on everything else in my life to forget all that. But the words came regularly. That I was rubbish and I should be grateful that they raised me instead of throwing me out. I had no other home so I made peace with it. I forced myself to focus on the favour they were doing for me. Letting me stay even though I didn't deserve it. Like a loyal dog that you kick and beat but it has to come back because it's loyal and you give it food and shelter. So what's pain over everything else it needs that you give. That's how I saw it" she shrugs and wipe her running nose with the sleeve of her t-shirt.

"So the abuse was always the beating and the insults. Nothing more?" Asks Dr Ngcobo.

I'm holding my breath because as far as I know Thembeke was sexually molested as a child and

that came from the Khumalo family not Sibisi family.

"If you mean sexually? No. He never went that far" she replies.

Dr Ngcobo nods and writes down on her notebook.

"But someone did" she continues after a moment.

Dr Ngcobo stops writing and looks at her.

"Who?" I ask ignoring the protesting look on Dr Ngcobo's face.

"I don't know. I don't remember very well. It's always like a nightmare. Like I had a horrible dream but the pain was just there" she stares at me.

"Do you remember the day? Anything about the day. That day?" Asks Dr Ngcobo.

"We were practising for uMemulo. Normally they didn't let me do that with other girls in the area but it was our neighbour and all young girls were expected to sing. So they allowed me to go to the practise. We started after 6 and finished after 8. When we were done I'd run home because it was close. Others would walk in groups with some boys

there because they weren't afraid. On the day of uMemulo everything went well. I was happy too. Being given a chance to experience something I've never seen before. I didn't have friends but the girls didn't tell me to get lost that night. They let me walk with them. We laughed together and it was so much fun. Then we had some weird tasting juice that made everyone giggly. I didn't know it was alcohol. It wasn't bitter just burning after swallowing and then the weird taste would stay in your throat. I had some. Felt really hot and unable to stand for too long. I went to hide behind the house while repeatedly washing my face in a tank behind the house. I didn't want to risk being yelled at for being too hot and knowing I've drank things I had no business drinking. I stayed hidden until I passed out feeling like there was something heavy on me. When I woke up it was cold and I was in pain. It was my back. It felt torn. I went home and washed myself. I couldn't tell anyone and after some time I managed to convince myself that I forgot about it" she takes a deep breath and when she let's it out I can see her shrink back to the tiny woman I married

those years ago.

"How old were you?" I ask and Dr Ngcobo shoots a warning glance towards me. I ignore her and look at Thembeke.

"I was 13" she replies.

I start counting the years in my head. I have to find out whose Memulo it was and who did it. Someone out there saw something and kept quiet.

"That's all I remember" she finishes.

Dr Ngcobo nods and write down something on her notebook. Phili reach for the glass of water and drinks her hands visibly shaking.

"And all this was triggered the night in a cell?" She asks and Thembeke nods.

"The electricity went off and I was left in a dark. I couldn't see anything and when I tried to move, you know. When I used my hands to feel the bars all I could touch was this concrete wall. The endless wall that locked me in and left me in the darkness. When I tried to scream my voice wouldn't come out.

I was stuck inside a dark place with no voice. It felt like I was tied on a bed post and my mouth shut" her voice starts to drop and her chest is rising and falling fast. It's like she is working so hard to breath.

"She is having a panic attack. Call the Doctor" says Ngcobo getting off the chair. I quickly hand my phone to Phili and rush to Thembeke's side.

** **

She is fine, just sleeping after suffering from a severe panic attack. The baby is fine though but the doctor said she has to stay because her hypertension is too high. I didn't argue instead I suggested that Phili goes home because she is probably tired. She refused and I didn't push. I call Mluleki first.

"Nqubeko. I've been trying to get hold of Phili but her phone is off" judging by the noise I guess he is driving back to Durban.

"We are at the hospital. Thembeke had a panic attack" I move away from the crowded area.

"Panic attack? Why?"

"She had an outburst earlier. Punched the kitchen window and sliced her fist open in several places. They stitched her up and I called her therapist. Ngcobo decided to it was best to let her talk. To let it out and you have no idea how brutal it is"

Mluleki goes quiet for a long moment. I know he didn't hang up because I can hear him breathing.

"When she was 13 she got drunk. There was a Memulo close by and she got drunk with other young girls. Someone did something to her that day. She never told anyone about it"

Mlu exhales and I head him insult someone who is blowing his horn.

"What are you doing Mluleki?" I ask when I hear more noise.

"I was turning. I'm heading to the hospital now"

"You turned in the middle of the road?"

"And no one died. I'm almost there" he ends the call. I go back inside and head to the cafeteria.

"Do you sell cigarettes? Craven A?" I ask the young lady behind the counter.

"The pack?" She reaches over and pull a pack under the counter.

"Yeah" I give her the money and ask for a lighter too. The sells matches so I buy a box and go back outside.

I don't smoke but right now I need something to keep my head away from the dark thoughts. I want to murder someone.

I light the first cigarette and take two puffs before letting out the smoke. Nothing happens inside me so I take another puff and blow. I still want to kill someone and I can still hear Thembeke's voice as she told the story. I take the last puff and step on the remain piece. It's not helping.

My phone rings and I think it's Mluleki but it's Sandile.

"Yes"

"S'ngobile is coming out. The case was thrown out after the docket went missing" the way he says it sounds like he is accusing me of stealing it.

"That's good" I have no energy to argue with Sandile.

"So you had nothing to do with it?"

"No. So do we need to go pick her up or what?"

"I'm going to drop her off tomorrow evening. To save you the trip. But you have to know Nqubeko that if you stole...."

"I didn't steal it Sandile. If I wanted to steal it I would have sent someone to take it months ago. This one is not me" I can't believe that Sandile is straight out accusing me of this.

"Okay fine. We will see you tomorrow then" he ends the call.

I call Mluleki back.

"I'm in the packing area" he answers.

"I'm in the smoking zone" He knows where it is. Mlu

smokes like a chimney.

"Sure"

He appears after a minute. I hand him the cigarettes and the matches.

"Thanks" he lights one and start smoking.

"Someone stole the docket"

He doesn't say anything but continues to puff.

"I take that means you did"

"It was useless anyway. I had to wait until the whole thing started to die down" he finishes the cigarette and step on the butt.

"I see"

"So Thembeke is still sleeping?"

"Yeah. The doctor said she will sleep the whole evening. I just can't believe it man. How could she continue to live with that family after all this? I would have burned down their house if it was me" to think I actually respected her uncles all this time. Yes I didn't agree with the way they did things but

still they were Thembeke's family. A rotten family that abuses a child and make her believe it's for her own good.

Mluleki looks at me and I am forced to retell the story to him. He doesn't say anything until i'm done.

"Was it both of them?" He asks and I shake my head.

"They were all abusive but only one was brutal. I guess the other is guilty by association. He could have stopped it. Who ties a child to a bedpost to the point of dissociation? She was just a child Mluleki!!!"

"She dissociated?"

"I think so because she doesn't remember what happened after except she vomited and peed on herself"

"Where is Dr Ngcobo?"

"She had to leave after they admitted Thembeke" she promised to come back soon. According to her it was some kind of a break through.

"We have to go to her" says Mluleki already walking away.

I follow him back to the car.

"Why?"

"So Dr Ngcobo can explain what happens when a person reaches a stage of disassociating" he stops and looks at me as if he is remembering something.

"What?"

"Stockholm syndrome"

"What?"

Mluleki let's out a frustrated breath and looks away for a second.

"If Thembeke was abused as a child to a point of dissociation it means she developed Stockholm syndrome years ago" I don't get it but Mluleki is frustrated now so I let him be and get in the car.

He drives like a mad man as we head to Dr Ngcobo's offices. We find a front desk lady having coffee.

"Hi. Can I help you" she sounds pleasant.

"Can we talk to Dr Ngcobo. It's about Thembeke

Khumalo" says Mluleki.

"Dr Ngcobo is busy right now. If you can wait just for" she looks at the clock and turn back to me "15 minutes. That's her last appointment for the day"

I expect Mluleki to argue but he nods and walks to the waiting chairs. I remain standing and stare at the clock.

15 minutes feels like hours of waiting. When the door finally opens and a young girl walks out with her parents I wonder if she is going through what Thembeke is going through or not. They greet us and I reply before we walk to the office. Ngcobo looks frightened for a second.

"She is okay" I tell her and she nods before she sits down.

"This is my friend Mluleki. We have some questions. I hope you can answer some of them for us" I have to remain polite because this woman is going to help Thembeke.

"Can you explain what happens when a person dissociate" asks Mluleki.

"Dissociation happens when the mind shields a person from a traumatic event. It's a point where you feel disconnected from yourself and the event that's happening around you....."

"Did Thembeka experience that?" I ask and Ngcobo looks a bit uncomfortable.

"We know what happened. You are not breaking any confidentiality clause" says Mluleki.

"Thembeka went through a lot. She may have dissociated from time to time. It's very possible"

"She was raped. She didn't know who but she knew it happened. Did it happen then?" I ask.

"She was intoxicated. According to her memories she was under the influence so we can't know for sure"

"If it happened before does that mean it can happen again?" asks Mlu and I don't get what he means. I think Ngcobo is confused too.

"I mean if Thembeka dissociated before it means it can happen again" he explains.

"There is a possibility. Mr Mbonambi and Mr" she looks at Mluleki.

"Just call me Mluleki. It's fine"

"Mr Mluleki. Thembeke needs more therapy sessions. What she went through was horrific and it's going to take real work to help her heal. I know you both want answers and you want what's best for her. Collectively we can achieve that. She will need support"

"I get that and we will. But answer this for me. If Thembeke dissociated it means it wasn't the first time. It's possible she has done it before and more abuse must have happened during that time" asks Mluleki and Ngcobo nods.

"No"

"I'm sorry but it's possible" she gives me the sad look

"All this because I let her sleep in that jail cell. I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I was just angry that she was being reckless. She doesn't even know Clement that well but she stayed with

them until it was almost midnight. Worse she even fell asleep. I was just angry"

"She fell asleep?" Ask Ngcobo.

"With strangers around her. Three men she doesn't even know very well. She was just happy to be there. Anything could have happened and she wasn't even scared about it. That's what made me angry. Her lack of fear with those guys"

"So you let her sleep in jail?" Ngcobo is giving me a judging look. I feel worse so her judging face doesn't matter.

"It wasn't even a proper arrest. I sent a sleeping bag, told them to let her stay alone and not lock the bars. It was meant to be a lesson. To show her that it's bad to be reckless"

"A harsh punishment for a pregnant young woman Mr Mbonambi"

"I know. At the time I was just angry" the thought of miscarriage only came after I've done it.

"Have you ever considered seeing someone about

that anger?" She suggest and Mluleki gives me a look.

"I don't need it. I don't have anger issues"

"There is no shame in admitting an emotion" she presses.

"I really don't. I just need to focus on her"

"So you don't feel like driving to Thembeke's home and beat up her uncles?" She asks and Mluleki laughs.

"That's not the point"

"I think it is the point. From time to time everyone does go through something in their lives and they do need help getting over it" she is starting to sound too kind and I can't have that.

"For now I'd like to focus on Thembeke. She need me"

"Sometimes he feels he is not good enough which explains his anger when Thembeke was hanging out with guys around her age" says Mluleki.

I can't believe it.

"Don't look at me like that. There is no shame in admitting that" he turns to Ngcobo "She is younger than him so sometimes it shows"

"I don't have insecurities!!"

"He does but they are normal. They make him a person but he needs to deal with that" says Mluleki ignoring the annoyed look in my face.

"Yes she is a years younger than me but I don't feel that way"

"At some point he was convinced she is with him because she is suffering from Stockholm syndrome. That it's not out of love" I get up and walk to the door. I can't stand this kind of humiliation.

"Stockholm syndrome?" Asks Ngcobo clearly directing the question to me.

I look at Mluleki for answers. He is acting like an expert anyway.

"She married him when she was 18, basically she was sold to him"

I should continue walking out but I don't move. I

stand at the door and wait.

"We can schedule an appointment for you" she says with a kind face.

"It will be good for him" says Mluleki.

"Mr Mluleki please" says Ngcobo disapproving. He raises both hands and stay seated.

"I just need Thembeke to be okay"

"And you need to be okay too" says Ngcobo. Mluleki nods in agreement. I give him the evil eye and figure I can make an appointment and cancel it before it happens. She can't force me to come.

"Okay fine. We can have an appointment" I agree and Mluleki smiles as if I've just agreed to something big.

"Good. I'll talk to my assistant" she gets up.

"Can I ask something Doc?" Says Mluleki.

"Yes please" she smiles politely.

"Let's say Thembeke was suffering from Stockholm syndrome way before Nqubeko came to her life. I

mean her family abused her but she stayed and somehow continued to regard them as family after all this. Let's say she did all that because she was already under the effect. I mean, she could have said something. She could have exposed them but she didn't. She didn't even confront them. So I wondering, is it possible that when she married Nqubeko they transferred the power from them to him" he points at me.

"What are you saying?" I walk back to the chair he is sitting on.

"You said it yourself Nqubeko. When you went to get her in the police station she held on to you and didn't say anything about your actions putting her there. Isn't that what Stockholm is all about. Finding shelter in your abuser" says Mlu.

"I do not abuse my girlfriend" I shout. He has crossed the line.

"Please calm down" says Ngcobo.

"He is saying I've abused my girlfriend"

"I'm just making an example. She should have ran

away from you but she didn't. So I'm asking. Is it possible that Thembeke's uncles transferred the power from them to him" says Mluleki like he isn't insulting me.

"I get what you are saying Mr Mluleki but I can't diagnose something like that without talking to Thembeke first. For now I think we need to focus on getting her better and that means looking into everything" says Ngcobo.

Deep down I want to punch Mluleki but I don't want her to call the police on us and then me being in jail while Thembeke needs me.

"I'll personally make sure he makes an appointment and drag him here if I have to" he stands up and Ngcobo nods as if him saying that accomplish something.

** **

It's raining as we leave Dr Ngcobo's office. We both

run to the car and get in. Mluleki starts the car and drive out.

"Before you come to kill me in my sleep hear me out" his tone is amused. Like he finds this whole thing funny somehow.

"Talk" I don't even look at him.

"We are going to find the truth. Punish people for it and Dr Ngcobo is going to be our witness about it"

"I don't follow"

"If you are a weak man who has insecurities and attends therapy and has a therapist who has seen you at your lowest the last thing anyone would suspect is that you are capable of hurting anyone and me? Well i'll be you biggest supporter in your weakest moment in life" he smiles. I cold grin that many mistake for a genuine smile.

"Do you think we are going to find the truth?"

"Yes and someone will pay for it" he doesn't even stop at the red light and I don't say anything about it.

Chapter 83

Adult Content

Nqubeko.

We find Thembeke awake and sitting up. Phili is sitting next to her while Clement and his friends are all around her speaking in loud voices like this is not a hospital.

"Hey gents" says Clement when we walk in. I notice the flowers and magazines on the bedside.

I nod and go kiss Thembeke's lips.

"When did you guys get here?" Asks Mluleki putting his arms around Phili.

"We were here for something else and we saw her in the passage" says Clement pointing at Phili. "She told us she is here" he looks at Thembeke kindly.

"And you had flowers ready?" Continues Mluleki.

"We bought them in the store outside" says Ndlela.

"Hospital stay can be tiring. Recover quickly and we can have a rematch" says Alex before they laugh.

"I'm going to practice and beat your ass next time" says Thembeke sounding cheerful. It makes me jealous. She doesn't even know them that well but she is laughing like they are her best friends.

"Can I play too" says Phili and Mluleki grin vanishes quickly. It makes me want to laugh.

"No. You will play with me in my own house" he jumps in and we all look at him. I want to burst into laughter but I don't.

"Maybe we can all play" says Clement taking control of the awkward situation.

"Good idea" agrees Thembeke. Mluleki gives me the look that says 'hell no'

"Can we talk?" I look at Clement and he nods before he follows me out. We walk further down the passage.

"I'm sensing something. What's wrong?" He looks calm and I'm annoyed.

"You and your brothers keeping my wife in your house until midnight. How could you let her sleep instead of telling her to go home"

He doesn't look bothered instead he pushes his glasses in place and looks at me.

"You weren't home. She was sad Nqubeko. We tried to cheer her up and when she fell asleep we kept waiting for you to come get her since you knew where she was"

"And none of you thought it was a good idea to call me or take her home earlier?"

"Why? She was fine. I drove her home and made sure she was safe inside before leaving"

"In the middle of the night!!?"

"So I should have convinced her to stay the night?"

"In a house full of men? Men she just met?" I'm trying so hard not to put my hands on Clement.

"Wait, men? You make it sound like she was in danger or something" he looks like I just stabbed him in the heart.

"You hardly know Thembeka. You once kidnapped her so please don't act like she was 100% safe with you" I step back before he says something and I end up punching him in the face.

"I was desperate. My wife was dying!!"

"And you traumatized my wife"

"And she forgave me. She was safe with us. She felt safe and I don't care what you think of us but she like us and we like her too. We are friends with Thembeka" his tone is challenging.

"Be careful Clement. You don't want to make me angry" I warn.

"Or what? You will send your thugs to my house? All because I happen to enjoy Thembeka's company and my brothers seem to like her too. Is it because we are not South African's"

"Don't be childish"

"Then why do I get the feeling like you are treating me like some shady guy Nqubeko. Thembeka is a friend. I know I don't know her that well and it's fine.

She is kind and I like kind people. I think we all can do with a kind woman in our lives "

I take a deep breath and control my temper.

"She is vulnerable. She gets hurt easily and you can't blame me for being protective. You would do the same for your woman too" I hate having to bring up his pain but I have no choice.

"I would trust her and trust her friends even if I don't agree with her choice. We didn't do anything to Thembeke. We are not that type Nqubeko. We respect women"

"But you don't have a problem holding them at gun point" that seems to get to him a bit because he flinches.

"And she understands why and forgave me for it. You really should try the same" he walks away.

"I don't think I can. You crossed the line Clement and it seems like you have no intentions of keeping yourself away" I say it loud enough for him to stop and look at me.

"You shouldn't have married someone half your age if you can't deal with these things Nqubeko. Thembeka is young and from time to time it will always show" he walks away after. I watch him walk and tell myself it's not the place.

** **

I wait for few minutes before going back in. Thembeka is laughing and Ndlela is singing some song I have no business knowing.

"You should get some rest MaKhumalo" I say as soon as the song ends. The uninvited and not needed lot needs to go.

"I've been sleeping for hours already" she smile and rest her head on my arm. I glance at Clement and he is watching me so I bend down and kiss the top of her head.

"I know but we want you to recover quickly so you can come home" I drop my voice low enough for her

to look at me and giggle. I know this look and I love it. It means i'm charming her.

"And I hate it here"

"That's why you need to get as much rest as possible. I think the guys can visit next time" I give Clement the look that says I have the last word in.

"Thanks for the magazines and the flowers" she smiles at Ndlela.

"It's nothing. Just get better" he gives her a little salute.

"And we will come tomorrow. Bye Phili" says Clement taking his jacket. They all say their goodbyes and leave.

"I think I could do with some pies" says Thembeke.

"And we will go see if we can find some steak and kidney pie" says Mluleki before he takes Phili's hand and they leave us alone.

I lean over and kiss Thembeke's lips. She kisses me back. The kiss is slow and she seem to push her tongue in my mouth. I pull back when her hands

touch my arms.

"Hospital room my love" I whisper.

"Are we okay?" Her tone is serious and I sit down next to her before I answer.

"Do you forgive me? I wronged you my love and I feel so bad about it" I need to hear her say it. Only then I'll feel better.

"I forgive you. It was scary but...." She exhales and close her eyes.

"And I'll never do it again. I promise you"

"I want to get better Nqubeko. I want to move away from all those things" the energetic tone she started with drops and I put my arms around her.

"And we will. We are going to be okay" i'm not sure exactly how but it something that has to happen soon.

"But you are going to make me talk about it. I don't want to talk about it. Talking about it doesn't make me feel better. It makes me remember things I don't want to remember"

"But you can't live your life in a bubble Thembeka. At some point you will have to talk about it and accept it as part of your life. Trust me, I do want to lock you up and make sure you never experience discomfort again but we have to be practical here baby girl" it's not about my ego right now.

"So healing means therapy and having to confront my uncle?"

"You are already in therapy baby. You need to open up more"

She nods and leans back on the pillow.

"So you are going to do it? Be more open about the past so you can get the help you need?"

She looks at me and nod.

"What about you? I think you also need therapy"

"I know and I'll do it too. I'll make an appointment soon" I place my hand on her tummy. We have to be okay for this little person we are bringing but before all that someone out there has some answers to give.

"I can feel the movements you know. But I don't think you can feel them just yet. It feels like a soft touch inside me" she places her hand over mine.

"Really?" I stare as if I might see a soft movement too.

"Really. I think we are having a girl" she smiles and I wish she comes out looking like her.

** **

Phili.

I'm in Mluleki's house again. I wanted to go home to my kids but i'm feeling emotional and Mluleki said it might make the kids worry if I burst into tears in their presence. I feel like we did something to someone and we are paying for it now. How else could I explain all this? No one has such bad luck in life. Hearing Thembeke talk about her growing up made me feel like someone was tearing me up

inside. She didn't deserve any of it.

"Hey. No more crying now. You are going to get a headache" says Mluleki coming behind me as I stand in the kitchen sink staring outside the window.

Tears fall more and I wipe them before turning to face him.

"I just don't get it. Who does all that and still pretend to be a good person?" I fold my arms to my chest and that blocks him from pulling me close.

"Someone evil. Unfortunately one can't choose family" he steps closer ignoring the boundary i'm trying to keep between us.

"And she moves on like nothing happened. I don't get it"

He doesn't reply instead he starts brushing my arms.

"Do you mind. I don't want to be touched" I snap.

He looks surprise but he steps back a bit. I take Mluleki doesn't get told no often in his life.

"Not today. I'm not in a right place for sex"

"I never said we are having sex. Or i'm not allowed to touch you unless we are having sex?" His tone is annoyed.

"I didn't mean it like that" I don't want us to start fighting, not tonight.

He doesn't say anything instead his phone beeps and he attends to it.

I watch him when he makes a call. I've been around long enough to know when a man is calling and this is a woman in the other end.

"Okay fine. I'll be there to sort it out" he sounds really annoyed as he ends the call. I pretend to wipe the dry sink.

"I have to go out for a bit. You can go to bed. I'll be back in a moment" he leans over and kiss my cheek.

"So who is she? Why is she calling you?" I can't help it.

He stops moving and looks at me.

"I know you talked to a woman. So why is she calling you?"

"You want us to have a fight. I can see" he walks away. I throw the dishcloth on the sink and follow him. He takes the stairs two at the time and I have to run to keep up.

"Maybe I don't feel okay knowing you are out there talking to some woman"

We follow each other to the bedroom and Mluleki goes to the closet and takes out a gun. I stop moving and my mouth goes dry immediately.

"Get to bed. I shouldn't take more than 20 minutes" he instruct.

"I'm coming with you" it sounds insane even when I hear myself say it but I can't help it. Maybe he is right, Maybe I am trying to start a fight because i'm feeling frustrated on the inside.

"No. You are staying" his tone is not playing.

"If you leave me here alone I'll call and uber and go back home" I threaten and that makes him stop moving. He takes a step towards me and I step back.

"Whatever you are dying to have tonight i'll give it to you and more. Don't test me" his finger points my forehead.

"Then go and see"

He doesn't move for a minute but when it shows that i'm not backing down he shakes his head and walks away. I grab my jacket and follow.

"I'm warning you Phili. You are not coming with me" he speaks while walking and I continue to follow.

We both make it to the door and he opens it wide enough for me to walk out. I hesitate a bit before moving forward.

He closes the door and walks to the car. Its pouring and I walk close to the shelter until we reach the car. I'll never understand why they don't put their cars in the garage. Why have two garages and still park your car outside. It doesn't make any sense.

"Go back inside Phili" he says before he opens the door. I ignore him and open the passenger side. When I get in he shakes his head and gets in too.

** **

We are in the city center and we stop in front of a building. It's chaotic. It seems like there is a fight and someone is busy throwing things out the window while men are speaking in loud voices outside.

"Grab an umbrella in the backseat and come with me" he says and I do as told. He didn't say anything to me the whole drive. I guess we are talking now.

I get out and step on the pavement. He waits for me to walk across before we walk inside the building. Men part when we walk past and I notice that they've stopped arguing.

"Sello. Where is he?" He asks without stopping. One guy whom I'm assuming it's Sello is following us.

"Apartment 3B" he sounds like he speaks Sesotho.

Mluleki nods and takes the stairs. We go over two flights of stairs and by the time we reach the 3rd floor I'm out of breath. He walks down the passage

and reach 3B. I expect him to knock but he kicks the door instead. A man jumps up from the couch and there is a woman beneath him. She screams and grab something to cover her boobs. The man also cover himself with a hand. I look away feeling humiliated on their behalf.

"Ah Mlu....." He doesn't get to finish because Nqubeko grabs the umbrella on my hand and starts beating the man up. The woman continues to scream and the man is shocked to the point of being frozen.

"My building and you are turning it into a hoe house. My fucken building" yells Mluleko beating the man like he is killing a snake. Sello starts to intervene when the man starts bleeding and the umbrella is out of shape.

"Forgive him boss. He heard loud and clear" says Sello taking the umbrella in Mluleki's hands.

He turns and looks at the crying girl. Looking at her now I think she is just a teenager.

"Where do you live?" He asks her and she shivers

before she mumbles something.

"You are a university student?" He asks looking like he wants to start beating her too. She nods and Mluleki turns to the man and hits him three more times.

"A student? You are busy fucking a kid while treating this place like a brothel"

When he tried to hit him again Sello stops him.

"Sort out this mess. Get these people out of my building. I'll be back tomorrow and they are better be gone!!"

When he turns to face me I close my mouth shut.

"Next time I say stay, you stay" he walks out and I follow him.

We walk in silence as we leave the place and get in the car. He starts driving and I remain quiet.

** **

When we get back to his house I get out and run to

the house. The door is unlocked so i walk in and head upstairs straight. I can't get over what i just witnessed. Who beats another man like that?

I take the clothes off and get into my sleeping shorts and long sleeve. When he walks in i jump.

"What?" He stands there and stares at me.

I don't reply instead I crawl into bed.

"You can't act all shocked. I asked you to stay" he takes his clothes off and throw them on the ottoman.

"I thought it was another woman because I said i don't want to have sex"

"And you assumed i'm that person. Some faith you have in me" he shakes his head.

"I didn't mean it like that"

"You meant it how?" He comes to bed in shorts and nothing on his upper body. I can't help but stare.

"It doesn't matter. I was being a woman" I smile a bit but he doesn't return it.

"Goodnight" he gets in and turn off the light on his side.

"But we can have sex. I don't mind" I place my hand on his chest.

"Not today" he pushes it away.

"Because I came with you?"

"J ust sleep Phili"

"So you are angry?" I press on. Maybe i like the arguements because I can't stop myself right now.

"You think?" He gives me a hard look.

"And I want to make up for it. I'm offering you sex" I don't get why he is playing hard to get.

"I don't want it. You can't piss me off and think sex will sort it out. You disrespected me Phili. You had to see all that. Things I don't want you to be exposed to"

"So I don't get to make my own decision about all that?" I turn to the other side and shift closer to him.

"No you don't. It's my job to protect you" he turns to

face my and my ass is against him.

"Mxm" that's all I say before turning the light off.

It goes quiet for a moment and I shift again pushing my thighs against his. His hand rest on my hip and his fingers touch the fabric of the shorts.

"I love you" he whispers and his hand grips my hip hard "Don't let me fuck you tonight. I'm too angry and I might not be loving and gentle like you are used to" it sounds like a warning.

"Maybe I like it rough" I reply and he takes his hand away.

"Phili"

"It's my choice. I'd like to feel how it feels like when you are rough"

He doesn't reply instead he pushes the blanket off me and grabs a pillow before he pulls my waist up and stuff it underneath me.

"Don't forget protection"

I hear a drawer being open before he lowers the shorts and get it off on one leg.

The kiss is brief and before long he is pushing my legs apart and entering me in a hard thrust. I let out a sound before biting my thumb.

The thrusts are hard and fast. His hand is gripping my hair while pushing me down. He is quick and I feel my own orgasm approach fast and hard too. I brace myself for the pleasure while trying so hard to remain quiet. When it finally threatens to push me over the edge he stops and pulls out. I protest the loss of contact and he slaps my hand away.

"Ah ah. You left the orgasm in the car" he gets off me and walk to the bedroom. I turn over and stare in shock. He doesn't come back and I cross my legs just to feel that bit of pleasure but it's not the same.

Chapter 84

Nqubeko.

This is way easier than I thought. The house is quiet except for that dripping tap in the kitchen. He needs

to get it fixed and stop wasting water. We are already running low. I move around and grab a kitchen knife on the drawer before heading down the passage. He sleeps with the bedroom door open and the light turned low. I think he must be afraid of the dark and it makes me want to laugh but I don't. I remove the phone and throw it behind the chair. His bedside drawer is empty so he can't do anything even if he wakes up.

I sit down and check the time. It's after 2am he should be waking up now unless his senses are dead. I sit still and wait with the knife on my hand. He moves a bit before he jumps up.

"What the....." I stop him.

"I'm the one speaking now"

"How did you get in my house?" he shoves the blanket off him but I pull out a gun and that makes him stop moving.

"Through the door. It was really easy but i'm not here for that" I can see his chest rising and falling. He is scared and I am happy.

"What do you want?"

"It's really simple. Just stay away from my wife. Thembeke is off limits" I put the gun down next to me and pick up the knife before spinning the sharp end on the palm of my hand. His eyes stay fixed on knife.

"But shouldn't that be her choice?"

"I guess it's not. It's my choice and you don't make the cut"

"Because you feel insecure?" There is bitterness on his tone.

"You could say that I don't really give a damn. You see Clement, I don't fuss for no reason. Whatever you think I don't care. Just be away from her"

"Or what?" He gives me the challenging look.

"Or I'll have to come back and slice you open. I'd hate doing that but if I have to then I'll do it"

"All this just because we happen to enjoy her company?"

"Oh no. I'm not petty but when you reminded me

that she is half my age and that there will always be her age mates waiting in the wing I realized you were right and to keep people like you away I have to do everything in my power. It's nothing personal" i put my gun back and get up.

"And if i tell her?"

I guess Clement is the kind that doesn't know when to quit.

"Then i'll kill you. It's that simple. End the friendship and everything will be fine again" i throw the knife on bed and walk to the door.

"She doesn't deserve someone control and bully like you" he hisses.

"She also doesn't deserve a spineless wimp like you so between us no one deserves her but hey i got her first and i'm keeping her" I close the door behind me and leave the house. He doesn't follow so I drive out and head back to the hospital.

** **

I find Thembeka sleeping. The nurse assures me that they are both fine. I sit on the bed and watch her sleeping. She look so beautiful and very calm. This is how i like her.

My phone vibrates and I take it out. It's a text message from Amanda. She is asking if she can come see me this weekend. Why is she texting me at time of the night? I decide to call her back.

"Dad" she answers.

"Are you okay? Why are you not sleeping?" I leave the room so i don't wake Thembeka up.

"Lindo had a fight with mum. She threatened to kick him out of the house" she sounds like she is crying.

"Is he there?"

"Yes he is here. She locked herself in her bedroom and hasn't come out since then"

"Give Lindo the phone. I'll come get you myself this weekend. Is that okay?" I can hear her breathing before she says okay and then Lindo's voice comes

on.

"What's going on?"

"I told mum that I want to come live with you" he also sounds like he is crying.

"And what brought such decision?" I sit down on the bench.

"Because i want to. Don't you want to live with me?" He snaps.

"Not that tone" I warn.

"Sorry"

"What happened?"

"I simply asked her if it was possible for me to change schools and she called me a spoilt brat. I hate it there. I want a different school"

"So out of the blue you just want another school?"

"Yes. It sucks there" he growled.

"Aybo Lindo. You cannot just decide that the school sucks. Do you know how much she is paying for you to attend that school. You cannot just ditch it in

the end of the year"

"I was suspended anyway"

"I don't care. You are not changing schools and that's final. Go apologize to your mother" I order.

He doesn't reply.

"Don't make me repeat myself Lindo. You owe your mother an apology" I shout.

"Ey whatever dude" the line goes dead after. I make another call and this time it's Amanda who answers.

"Where is your brother?"

"He went to the kitchen"

"I want you to get some sleep. I'll come get you on Friday evening. Is that okay?"

"And I can have a sleep over with Celiwe?" She sounds cheerful now.

"Yes you can have a sleep over" I feel for the ladies but they will be fine.

"Thanks dad"

"Get some sleep now"

"Bye dad" I can tell she is smiling now.

"Bye my love" I end the call and make another to Nothile. Her phone is off so I leave a message asking her to call me so we can talk about Lindo's behavior.

I wait for few minutes but she doesn't call. Maybe her phone is really off and she is not Ignoring me. I walk back to Thembeke's room and find her awake and yawning.

"Nqubeko" she seems surprised to see me.

"Hey" I lean over and kiss her lips. She kissed me back and it turns me on.

"Is it not late?"

"It is but I couldn't go home so I stayed. Are you feeling good?" I sit down next to her and take her hand to mine.

"I'm feeling fine still sleepy. Those pills" she smiles and hold her tummy. I place my hand over hers and we both remain quiet for a moment.

"You are going home soon" I kiss her lips again.

"I'm glad. I'm craving salt and vinegar"

"The cafeteria is closed baby. I can drive to the garage though" I offer and she grins.

"That would be great. Could you get me some peanuts too"

"No problem" I get up and the nurse walks in. By the look on her face I can tell she heard the list.

"You can't have salt and vinegar. Not when your hypertension is already this high" she means business judging by her face.

"Just get me a fruit" she says disappointedly.

"I'll get you some peaches" I offer and she nods.

"I really can't allow you to eat salt and vinegar. It's not good for the baby" says the nurse apologetically. I think the look on Thembeke's face is getting to her.

"It's fine. I understand"

"I'll be back just now" I leave the room and drive a short distance to the garage. It's Thembeke's lucky

day because I get so many fruits and yoghurt. She will have some comfort food. I really wish I can get her the salt and vinegar but I have to think about the little person inside her. I buy unsalted peanuts and leave.

** **

She starts with peanuts and finishes them in a blink and move to the apples. She eats two and stops before she laughs.

"What?" I laugh too.

"I'm eating like a homeless person"

"A cute homeless person. You are eating for two so it's fine"

"And I don't like the food they are giving me here" she turns down her mouth.

"They can't risk giving you salted food" I think I need to watch what she eats at home too. We can't risk it.

"I know" she gives me a questioning look.

"What is it?" I can tell when she wants to ask me something.

"Are you going to kill them?" She lowers her voice.

"What?"

"My family? I told you how they treated me. So are you planning to hurt them?"

I look away because I can't look at her. Not when she is looking at me like wants to say something.

"I can't just get past it Thembeke. They need to answer for it" I also lower my voice.

"And their kids? You are going to take their parents away Nqubeko"

"They don't deserve those kids. What if they are abusing them?"

"I don't think they do. I think they did it to me because I wasn't their child" she bites the apple and blinks rapidly to get rid of the tears.

"Then they should pay for it. But I don't want you to worry about it. Just focus on getting better so we can get home"

"It was a long time Nqubeko"

"S'ngobile is coming home today. Will you be okay with her and Dabula and the kids or I need to make another plan" I change the topic.

"What plan? Are you going to let her stay in your house?"

"No. You are. I was thinking you should move in with me. Leave Dabula and the ladies there. Phili spend her time with Mluleki anyway so they should be fine" I'm taking a chance here and I can see her disagreeing on the inside.

"We can spend time together but you having enough space will do you good. All of us good"

She takes another bite on the apple and yawn.

"Think about it" I press on.

"I'll talk to my cousins and we will find a way to make it work" she lays her head down and I think it means no.

"Are you going back to sleep?"

"Are you going to stay" she takes a deep breath and

smile.

"I'll stay but after sunrise I have to go. The kids will need a driver to take them to school"

"Thanks baby" she shifts and I'm a large person by nature but I manage to squeeze myself next to her while she rests her head on my chest.

** **

Phili

I almost scream when I open my eyes to Mluleki staring at me.

"Sorry I didn't mean to scare you" he smiles and hands me a small box "For last night. I was cruel and you didn't deserve it"

I sit up and open the box. It's earrings. Beautiful earring.

"Wow. Thanks"

"So we are okay?"

I close the box and put it down before taking a pillow and placing it between my legs.

"I think we are fine. It was cruel but orgasmless sex never killed anyone" I shrug dramatically so he can feel bad about it.

"I was just angry and....." my eyes catch the time on his wrist watch.

"Jesus. I'm late. I need to get the kids ready for school" I throw the pillow away and get off the bed.

I even forgot that I slept naked after being disappointed last night.

"It's only after 6" he says calmly as I pick up my clothes and wearing the t-shirt inside out.

"Dabula can't get them ready himself. He has an early morning" I grab my phone and pick up my shoes.

He follows me downstairs and take his keys as I open the door. I hurry to the car barefooted and wait for him to unlock it.

"You have cute feet. I like them" I guess he has time for jokes so I ignore him and get in when he unlock it.

I don't even try Dabula. I've let him down. I should have came back early. I promised him that i'll always put the kids first and now i'm out chasing a dick and forgetting my own kids.

"There is enough time to get them ready. You are freaking me out" he says as his hand pushes my knee down. I wasn't aware that my leg is trembling.

"I shouldn't have over slept"

** **

We reach the house in a blink thanks to Mluleki's fast driving. I'm a bit surprised to find Nqubeko's car in the drive way. I leave Mluleki outside and rush to the house.

"Guys I over....." I stop when I find the boys sitting on the couch eating a cereal and watching cartoons.

They are both dressed in uniform.

"Hey guys" I greet them and they both nod. Peppa pig is my competition. I leave them and head to the bedroom.

"Is this okay?" Asks Nqubeko as he finishes brushing Celiwe's hair into a neat bun.

"Yes. Thanks Uncle Nqubeko" she says cheerfully before she sees me "How do I look mum?"

"Good. Very neat" and i'm not being a parent here. She really does look good.

"Go eat your breakfast" he adds before she bounces out.

"Morning" I greet Nqubeko.

"Hey. Are you good?" He picks up Celiwe's clothes and puts them on the laundry basket.

"I'm good. When did you get here?" I look at the bed. I know he made it because Celiwe can't make the bed this neat.

"Before Dabula left. I was with Thembeke"

I nod and follow him out. He heads to the kitchen while I check Dabula's room. Both beds are made.

"Do you think i'll make it to the team Uncle Q?" Asks Celiwe.

I hear the boys laugh about her playing soccer before Nqubeko tells them to stop teasing their sister.

"You will do just fine. Don't forget to take the earrings off before playing" he instruct.

I close the door and head to the lounge. Mluleki is there sitting on the couch quietly. I continue to the kitchen and find Nqubeko wiping the counter while 3 lunch boxes are sitting on the counter.

"You made lunch boxes?" I check what he made and he packed sandwiches even fruits.

"Yes. Celiwe doesn't like cheese" he opens the fridge and take out the juice bottles. He made juice too.

"Thanks "

He stops adding putting them in the bags and looks

at me "It was no trouble at all"

The boys walk in and put their bowls on the counter.
They take their bags and go back to the lounge.

"Let me get some coins for the tuck shop visit" I
hurry back to the bedroom and check the drawer for
coins. I take some and go give it to them.

** **

Nqubeko takes the kids to school leaving me and
Mluleki on the house.

"Can I make you some breakfast?" I know we left
without eating.

"No. Just coffee for me" he says and I nod and then
head to the kitchen.

I boil the kettle first and take out the mugs.

"Phili" he speaks behind me and I jump a bit
because I wasn't expecting him.

"I didn't mean to scare you" he walks closer.

"It's fine"

"Do you think I can be like that with your kids?" He leans against the cupboard next to me.

"Meaning?"

"Have them seeing me like they see Nqubeko"

"I'm not following" I am following but I'm still trying to digest the whole thing too. Since when is Nqubeko so hands on with the kids. I didn't even know that he knows how to comb and brush the child's hair.

"I'm with you Phili. I know we just began and you probably want to protect them but I'd like to have a relationship with them. I'm not trying to suck up but it's something I'd like to do"

"They know you Mluleki"

"But they are more closer to Nqubeko than me.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not being jealous" I look at him and he smiles "Okay fine. Just a bit. I'd like that easiness too"

"I see"

"So?" He looks at me.

"I understand and I'll try to help the situation a bit. Just to get them to think of you as a cool uncle"

"Don't. I'd like to have them warm up to me in their own terms" he raises his eyebrows.

"Meaning?"

"Maybe we can go out. Just us and do something fun" he suggests and I nod before turning to attend the coffee.

I pour two mugs and give him his.

"I've been thinking. Last night while we were sleeping. Well you were and I was up. I was thinking. That I'd like to marry you Phili. In fact I even saw the ring and tied string on your finger to get size while you were sleeping. Then I realized that you might freak out and say it's too soon and that you are thinking about the kids. So I'm thinking I should get to know the kids too and see if they like me before we become a family"

I choke on the coffee and spit it on the sink. A

cough follows while he gently hits my back.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I just don't want to waste too much time when I know that I want to be with you"

Chapter 85

Nqubeko.

I order another drink and watch Mluleki as he blows the smoke into circles before it fades away. He keeps shaking his head as he does this. It's a power of a woman. You see, women have a certain power in them. The kind that moves unmovable things and they do so, so easily. Phili is a tiny woman with sharp eyes and she walks in speed like she is always rushing somewhere. Her and Mluleki are two different people from two different worlds but as tiny as she is has managed to move Mluleki into a tight corner and left him feeling lost and pathetic.

"She didn't say no" I add and he gives me the

annoyed look. I look away and push laughter away because he might hurt me if I keep rubbing his wounds.

"She didn't exactly jump for joy" he replies with annoyance on his tone.

"Because you didn't exactly propose. You mentioned it"

"And she couldn't even hide that she doesn't want to marry me. Nqubeko, she became cold and removed. I felt like I had crossed an invisible line somewhere" he looks wounded. His phone rings and he looks at it "It's Aphiwe. I wonder what she wants" he frowns before he answers.

Aphiwe is a lady Mluleki hired for public relations bullshit. She handles things like party invited where Mluleki has to be this proper business man. She also handles the negative publicity he sometimes gets when someone decides to let the skeletons out. She doesn't call him often unless there is something he needs to do regarding the public.

"Right now?" He looks really pissed off now.

My phone also rings and it's Thembeka. I answer quickly because she is still at the hospital so it could be really important.

"Did you threaten Clement in his house? In the middle of the night with his kitchen knife and a gun?" She is yelling.

That spineless wimp. I should have killed him in his sleep.

"How could you Nqubeko? When will this obsession stop?" She is screaming and I can hear a nurse telling her to calm down.

"If you hurt him I'll never forgive you. Nx" she ends the call. I have my wife back.

"You have that unsettling smile on your face and it scares me" says Mluleki turning out his cigarette.

"Clement ran to Thembeka and told her. She just yelled at me" I put my phone away and down the drink before pulling out my wallet.

"And that makes you happy because?" He down his own drink and gets up.

"Because that's my Thembeke. I like her like this" I count the notes and pay for the drinks before we leave.

"Did you know about the Castle fundraising party. I don't even drink Castle. I don't get why I should be there. I don't benefit from them and it's not my scene at all" he sounds really pissed of.

"So there is a castle fundraising party that you are forced to go to" I try to make sense of his rants. He nods so I continue, "You need to have a partner, wear a suit and makes small talks?"

"And talk about some dumb local project that supposed to help the youth and gets them off the drugs and other nonsense they get up to" he waves his hand as he talks.

"Helping a community is really pissing you off" I tease as we approach the car.

"Nqubeko. These kids everyone is talking about won't get off the streets because of some projects that will exhaust them. They need practical help"

"Such as?" When did he start being so involved in

these things?

"Their parents. They need fathers, mothers or even older siblings who care and wants to help them. Pouring money on these project won't help. Heck they won't even help a struggling father raise his kids. We are donating to keep the fat guy fat and the struggling parties worse than before" he opens the passenger side and I let out a breath because I don't trust his driving.

I get in the drivers seat and start the car.

"So you don't want to help make money for the project?"

He gives me the 'you are being ridiculous' look and lights another cigarette.

"Please open the window" I remind him as we drive off.

"Plus Phili won't even come with me. I need a date because I hate arriving alone. It gives people a chance to talk to me and I have to act like I'm interested"

"Try her. She might surprise you" I advice and he gives me a glance before blowing the smoke out. I decide to stop talking until we get to the hospital. Mluleki stays outside to smoke another cigarette while I head to the ward to deal with Thembeke.

** **

I'm not surprised to find Clement in Thembeke's room. He has this satisfied grin on his face.

"Don't even touch me" says Thembeke but her face doesn't say so. I know my woman. When she doesn't want to be touched you can see it in her eyes but today it's just empty words so I lean over and kiss her lips. She kisses me back and I raise my eyes a bit to look at Clement. He looks away and I focus on sucking Thembeke's lips and tongue until she starts to relax in my arms. A moan escape her throat and I want to yell 'Yes' in Clement's face but that won't be gentleman like.

She pulls away when crosses her legs. She is horny and if it wasn't for the fool I would do her right here and right now. She won't appreciate if I continue while Clement is watching.

"When are you coming home?" I sit down and take her hands to mine.

"I'm hoping tomorrow"

"Good because I have something for us to do. Something you will like" I am lying but I can still do something and surprise her when she comes home.

"Such as?" She smiles and I can't help but stare at her. She makes me happy. I want her always and Clement needs to get lost for real.

"If I tell you it won't be a surprise anymore" I really need to do something totally out of this world but what?

"I see" she sits up and I touch her belly. It grew since she has been here and I love it. Our own person is growing and soon we will get to see him or her but I'm thinking it's definitely a her.

"I felt some movements again this morning. Small but they are there" she gets this animated look on her face and I catch Clement staring at her.

"Soon we will be getting kicked" I bend over and kiss it.

"I think she is carrying a girl" says Clement out of the blue. Doesn't he realize that he is not part of the moment. He is an outsider who refuses to leave my woman alone.

"No one asked you" I reply and Thembeke pushes my head.

"Don't be mean. Clement is my friend and you owe him an apology"

"Come on Thembeke. He held you at gun point" how could she forget so easily.

"And I understood and I forgave him"

"I don't trust him and because of that he is not allowed near you" I look at Clement and he is still wearing this grin on his face. Nx.

"Aybo Nqubeko you don't get to....."

"Hey guys" interrupts Vusi walking in followed by Thuba and Khethelo.

"Gents" I'm surprised to see them. Lately I've been neglecting the friendship. I really need to do better.

"We are not here for you. We came to see her. We heard you were at the hospital" says Thuba smiling at Thembeke.

"I'm better now. Thanks" she smiles and Thuba gives me the judging look.

"My wife was here and she mentioned seeing you and him in here. He never told us" says Khethelo pushing me away so he can be in front of her.

"He is wrong for not telling you guys" says Thembeke cheerful. I think we might have a men problem in our hands.

"I need coffee. Anyone else?" Asks Clement out of the blue.

"I'll come with you" offers Vusi. We all stare at them as they follow each other out. Thuba clears his throat first and Khethelo gives him a knowing smile.

"Stop it. It's offensive and you know how sensitive Vusi is about these things" says Khethelo as his hand touches Thembeke's tummy. "Hello there" Thembeke giggles.

"So are you excited about this?" Asks Thuba pointing the pregnancy.

"Very excited" that sets her off to talking about the things she has googled. Things she is looking forward to and wondering about. We all listen to her as she goes on and on about everything. Maybe this baby will finally heal any unhealed wound she might have on the inside.

*** **

Thembeke

The guys leave the hospital after the nurse has come six times to ask them to keep it down and then in the end she reminded us that it wasn't even

visiting hours. So they left and left me alone. I napped for a while only to wake up to Phili sitting next to me crying. My first thoughts are the kids but she smiles and tell me she is being silly.

"Tell me more" I press on while sitting up.

"Mluleki wants to marry me" she let's out a sob and covers her face as the tears pour out.

"And you are crying because?"

She wipes her wet face with a tissue and looks at me but her eyes are still filling up.

"Because i'm scared" she whispers.

"Of what?" I'm being impatient but I can't help it. I need to know if I need to start hating Mluleki or not.

"Because we just started and I don't want to get hurt. You know Mluleki. I am not his type Thembeke. He could meet some interesting woman out there and love her. Then what about me? The kids?" She cries more.

"Calm down. You are making me emotional and that can't be good if I want to leave this place today"

She smiles and wipe the tears.

"Have you told Mluleki this?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"I can't. I'm scared" she replies.

"Of what? Is he abusing you?" Now I am alarmed. Why would she be scared of everything about him?

"No he is not. It's me Thembeke. I don't think I permanently fit in Mluleki's world and he could drop me anytime. Let's face it. I have nothing and he has everything" she shrugs.

I understand her fears. When I divorced Nqubeko things could have gone bad really fast if Nqubeko didn't give a damn about me. I would have left the marriage with my qualification only and she doesn't even have that.

"I have nothing to offer the guy beside sex" she adds.

"What else do you want to offer?" I ask

"I don't know" she replies.

"You offer me more than sex. Anyone can give me

sex and I wouldn't want to marry them for that. I'm sorry you don't have lots of money to offer me but I am not looking for money. What do you offer me? You offer me a home. With you in know I have a home and belong to someone. That's what you offer me and no amount of sex could top that" says Mluleki at the door. We both jumped because we didn't hear him come in and we don't know how much he heard.

He walks in and push the door closed. His eyes look intense than normal but then again Mluleki has this weird thing about him. I can't exactly describe it but I know people feel it because when he walks in they look at him and pause whatever they were doing as if he has that effect on them.

"I had no idea you feel this way. You didn't tell me" he takes her hand and pull her up.

"I didn't want to sound dramatic" she whispers and looks down.

"Look at me" he commands and I find myself looking at him too. "Never ever let me hear you say

you can only offer me sex. I love the sex but I've been having sex since I was 14 Phili so sex would never make me propose to a woman and want to parent her kids. I would never do all these things for a woman that I only view as my bedroom pleasure. If that was the case I would pay you for service but I don't. I give you money because I want things to be easier for you when you purchase things. It's not payment for sex"

She nods and look down again.

"Look at me" he demands while lifting her chin. She looks up and nod. "Say it out loud. You understand?"

"Yes" she replies and he leans down before kissing her lips. I look away to give them privacy and look again when they are done.

"Dammit Phili. I've been going out of my mind trying to figure out where I went wrong" he snaps and wrap his arms around her.

"It was just me" she whispers.

"We have to deal with all that but for now I have this

rubbish function to attend and you need to get ready baby because I'm not going alone"

"Tonight?" She ask and he nods.

"You have exactly two hours to get ready. Don't worry about the kids. Nqubeko and Dabula offered to babysit" he looks at his wristwatch.

"In that case I have to go" she looks at me and I can't help but smile.

"Good plus I need you to learn how to network. When you go into business you will need such skills. MaKhumalo, we will see you tomorrow" he says to me before he picks up Phili's jacket and handbag.

"Have fun" I can't help but feel happy for her. She does need to chill and let the universe take care of her but we have to talk more about her going into business. If that man wants to offer her then we need to take everything he is offering.

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Phili

I feel hot. Not hot as in hot chick but hot as in I'm melting in this dress and it's not even heavy material. I am nervous and the make up makes it worse. I'm dressed in bottle green dress that had something that looks like diamonds on it but its not. It shines in the dark and I have a long weave in my head. The shoes are needed because the dress is too long and in my normal height it will look weird. It's a tight fitting dress that gives me hips and makes my stomach looks smaller thanks to the body shaper I wore underneath. It also hugs the ass and the tight that give an ass lift came in hand. The thing is I'm wearing a thong and I can feel it in my ass.

"Now you can go" says Mavis after she is done reapplying my lips tick.

"I won't fall" I try to stand straight but i'm nervous.

"You won't" She says as if she can makes of it.

"Okay" I take my clutch and head downstairs.

Mluleki is standing near the door and he walks to the stairs when I stand at the top.

"We might stay for exactly five minutes" he says as he comes up to take my hand and leads me down the stairs.

"No. You are going to teach me to mingle like business people" I hold him tighter on the last stair.

"You won't fall" he kisses my cheek.

"You better catch me if I do"

"All the time" he says in a serious tone and I go quiet.

**

The place is packed. They are serving beer and wine. I take the wine while Mluleki takes a beer and then we walk further in. The air is cool inside so I don't worry about melting. Mluleki guides me towards a group of men and women. They know him judging by the cheerful greet we get. The ladies

with them start complimenting my dress and I have to smile and try to remember where it came from. When I mention the designer they all look impressed by that and I feel better because it means they are not judging me.

Mluleki and the man start talking about the state of the economic. They talk about how the youth can be helped out the streets and I can see that most of these men are not thinking about the youth benefiting on this. They are all about themselves benefiting. Mluleki moves us and introduce me to another group. This one is full of younger people. I think it's those people who are born into rich families where they don't worry about finding work. They are talking about how poor people keep having kids and expecting the government to help raise them. The ladies seem to agree and I can't help myself.

"Maybe it's time people direct the problem where it should be going" I chip in and they all look at me.

"Meaning?" One guy asks and I can tell he is the arrogant type.

"Meaning having kids is part of life. People can't stop having kids because the economy is bad while rich people will continue having several kids. It doesn't seem fair. People need job opportunities, they need education and by education I don't mean teaching them hard labour like people always think the way to help communities is to make them work the garden" Mluleki places a hand on my back.

"So what else is there for a high school drop out with 6 kids and no skills. All she has is grant money" says another lady flicking her weave.

"The first question is why did she drop out? Most drop out because they are already living in poverty" I argue.

"Please. There is a feeding scheme in most schools" someone adds.

"So you can go a day on one spoon of rice and a cup of soup? Even in jail they get more than that. The feeding scheme you are talking about only takes place around 10. Can you possibly survive eating once, at 10 and your next meal is the next

day at 10 yet you are expected to pass and go to varsity" I can feel my voice getting emotional.

There is some silence and a waiter comes over with more beer and wine. I hand the half drunk glass to him and take the beer.

"That's why poor people shouldn't have kids they can't afford. If we have kids we can't afford we are subjecting them to that" says the arrogant guy.

"And if you die and leave them alone? Should society kill them because they are now orphans?" I ask and he looks annoyed.

"That's a different story. But the main fact is that these stupid women keep having these kids and expect to receive money from our tax. So basically we are paying to feed stupid women the kids from different men. Worse birth control is free"

"And it has never occurred to you that men have more kids than the stupid women you are blaming for parenting her kid? Have a look around. How many men have kids with different women while a woman has one kid with some loser who left to

raise the kid alone" Mluleki doesn't move his hand on my back.

"Are you are the tiny feminist with...."

"Watch it" warns Mluleki and the guy looks wounded. I guess he can't argue well without resorting to insults.

"So what do you think should be done?" Asks an elderly looking lady who has been observing in a distance.

"I think instead of blaming people for having kids we should focus on helping people with skills and learn to hold man responsible for the raising kids part. Instead of giving people in the poor communities tractors to plant we should give them a chance to plant and buy from them. You can't give people spinach to plant and then not buy the spinach. That means you are saying they need to plant for their own stomachs and life is not about eating in the garden the rest of your life. People need to make money. Give them something that will generate money for them and then they can eat in

their gardens when they need vegetables" i'm almost out of breath as I explain.

"What other skill do you have in mind?" She asks.

"It could be something like design. Have them design a brand of clothes that will sell and the community will benefit from it. Give them a cooking projects, make colleges accessible to people in poor communities not that they need to leave home and come to the city only to feel lonely and neglected and being told they need money and then their solution is to drop out. Give them more and then make men raise the kids too. Some of these kids are just crying for attention"

She nods and I sip the beer. Big mistake. It tastes really bad and I want to spit it out but Mluleki kisses my lips and I'm forced to swallow.

"So your big solution is to spend more money helping kids who wouldn't be a problem if their parents used protection?" Asks the arrogant guy.

"Yes. That's her solution. You also failed grade 11 and your father had to pay the school to take you

back after they felt you were too old to be doing grade 11. Your parents money is the only reason you are here. Without it you would be a high school drop out with no skills. Don't act like you got here on hard work and well planned life. If your parents die you would be left with nothing too" says Mluleki his voice sounding cool like he is not telling the guy off.

"You and I need to talk more. You seem to have things in your head and I want to know it all" says the lady giving me a card.

"I'll have Aphiwe call you for a meeting" says Mluleki smiling at me.

"Good. For now let me take her so I can introduce her to some ladies" she takes my hand and Mluleki nods before he takes the beer in my hand.

*** **

I haven't talked like this in my life. The lady gathered so many ladies and they all listened to me as I

spoke about the real challenges poor people face and it's not just them making babies. They have more pressing issues and the solution is not just birth control for women. The ladies listen start talking about projects we can do in all provinces to help families and uplift communities. To be honest I feel touched because when I was back home struggling with my brother I wished someone could offer me something to keep our lives going. Not to be ungrateful but beans and spinach doesn't help when you have a sick child that needs a doctor. Vegetables don't matter when there is a storm blowing your house. In the end getting the roof fixed needs money. The community needs a money making scheme that will benefit them for a while not something that will benefit only a few and the rest will be paid in beans and carrots.

The evening ends with few speeches from people who use big words and talk about how much they have donated in their favourite charities. Too bad some of these donations don't even reach where they are sent.

The dinner is served and we all sit down to eat. Mluleki keeps looking at me as he eats.

"What? Do I have something on my face?" I almost pick up a spoon and use it as a mirror.

"No. I love you" he replies and I smile.

"I love you too" I reply and he smiles before he squeeze my knee. I continue eating while he doesn't remove his hand.

The main course is followed by dessert and then people start moving to the dance floor. The lady next to me suggest we go dance a bit. I want to refuse but I force myself to go. It's not break your back kind of dancing. Most people are just there swaying side to side to the sound.

I follow her and she is friendly. I don't get her name but she mentions being married young to a man that introduced her to these things and how sometimes it can be lonely because her friends are single and she is young. He husband is older. He is grey in the head and he does look like he is close to retiring. But I don't think her marriage is bad

because i've watched the man look at her like she is a price. Hopefully he is not pretending to be a loving husband.

We dance until I feel a hand on my back and that makes me stop. It's Mluleki and he looks sleepy.

"Keep still" he whispers in my ear.

I don't move and I feel something poking my back.

"It's your fault. Your ass in this dress" he replies and place his hand on my side to keep me still.

"You shouldn't have looked" I argue.

"You shouldn't have danced. Give me a moment to calm down" he kissed my neck.

"Don't forget to call" the lady reminds me as she walks past.

"I won't" I smile at her feeling like a statue.

"We should go. It's not calming down" he says quietly.

"I don't mind leaving. Its been fun"

"Can't say the same for Ntobeko. You crushed his

ego" he laughs and starts guiding me forward. I move slowly so he can walk close to me. We only separate when we get to the exit. He is definitely hard and it's embarrassing.

"You have an appetite for sex" I comment as I slide in the car.

"You make me like this. You are sexy without even trying and I enjoy you" he gives me a kiss and close the door. I look out the window and spot Ntobeko. He is on the phone but he does look at me when I stare at him. I can't help but feel cold. I think he hates me now.

"I guess he is calling daddy"says Mluleki getting in the car.

"I think he hates me"

"Yeah he does. He is not used to be being challenged. Spoilt kids. His family is feared in Ntuzuma" now i'm scared. Why didn't he tell me this before I got into a debate with him.

"Stop grinding your teeth. I said feared In Ntuzuma not by me. If he tries something i'll kill and the rest

of his family" he starts the car and we leave. I look back and he is watching the car.

"You do mean that?" I ask and he laughs.

"For you, I can kill everyone in Durban" he is still laughing but I think he means it.

Chapter 86

Phili.

I wake up covered in sweat because Mluleki slept with his arms and leg around me. When I tried to get away from his grip he dragged me back and made this protesting noise the whole night. In the end I gave in and slept locked in his grip. "Morning" he greets and kiss my cheek. "Morning" I rub my eyes and sit up. It's way past sunrise and I'm late again. "Before you panic and run out, I've called Nqubeko and he doesn't mind doing the morning run with the kids. You and I will have breakfast and talk for a bit" he smiles and leave the bed. I follow as we both head to the bathroom. I wash my face while he brushes his teeth. "So, what are we talking about?" I wipe with a dry towel while he hands me

my toothbrush. "Are you kidding me? Girl what you did last night showed me a side of you I didn't know and I want to hear all about it" he smiles and kisses my lips. "I was just sharing what I wish someone had done for me. When we were struggling back at home things like gardens didn't help us much. We had other problems and we were both craving some assistance on what we can do to help ourselves. Imagine telling someone who already have kids that they shouldn't have. What good will that do? It doesn't help the person at all. Things like thinking about the number of kids should be advised to kids even then just find a way to make them see not to tell them they will amount to nothing. You are breaking them down that way. People need to know that you can advise without insulting, be firm without cruelty and when saying something with kindness it's received better than the yelling" I stop talking when he is staring at me with this grin on his face. "You are gorgeous. Even more so, when you get all passionate about these things. You are going far Phili and I am lucky to get to share this with you" I can't help but smile and continue to brush my

teeth.

Mluleki makes us breakfast and burn the eggs but I still eat because he is happy and I'm feeling good about myself. We eat and wash dishes before someone arrives and Mluleki lets them in. it's a woman. A tall woman full of confident even her long strides show. She smiles and hug me before she shakes Mluleki's hand. "This is Aphiwe. She is here to talk to you about..." He trails off as if unsure what to say. "My job is to make you not just look good but sound good and get you into places where you will leave your mark"she sounds so sure of herself. "Why?" I ask because there is nothing wrong with my look. She looks at Mluleki and he smiles before he takes my hand to his. I follow him to the lounge even though there is hardly any privacy. "I know you are feeling ambushed but Aphiwe does the public relation things. She helps me keep the business man in me alive. Her job is to make you look good and also make sure that you spend less time with less important people. The

business network side of things is large Phili and people get side-tracked easily. You are fresh face and you have fresh ideas. People will want you and some not to help your project but to milk the energy out of you. Aphiwe helps with that” I nod but I’m not convinced. he takes my hand and lead me back to her. “All yours Aphiwe” he says to her and the head back upstairs.

We head to the lounge and sit down. She pulls out her diary and start telling me about parties I have to attend to meet real investors. She list companies that I can approach for some funding. I listen to her as she speak and wish I can speak like her. Be full of confident and speak like I don’t fear sounding like a frustrated rant. An hour passes before she is done. She promises to call and arrange a meeting with Melissa, the lady from last night. I thank her for that and then make a mental note to have a clear proposal for my idea. Aphiwe leaves and I go upstairs to Mluleki and find him on the phone. He ends the call and kiss my lips. I kiss him back and

he takes us to bed with me straddling him. "That was my finance guy and I want to fund your project. He wants a formal proposal and only then I can start pouring money in" he pulls my head closer and start kissing my neck. "I'm thinking about adding Thembeke and S'ngobile to the mix. The three of us together" I suggest while trying to fight the mood away because I'm turned on. We didn't have sex last night even though we left the party with him standing firm. By the time we made it back he was no longer turned on and I was thinking about Ntobeko and his feared family.

"Anything you want baby. So what do you see this working out?" He pull the elastic of my shorts and slip his hand in.

"I'm thinking this large company that will help to uplift the community. I know we can't build a company from scratch and have it making profit in a year but i'm hoping it can employ a very large part of the community" I place my hands on his shoulders for balance. He smiles and continue to touch me. I keep talking until trying to get my idea

into a large clear picture that he can see himself. I know it's going to be challenging and i'm scared but there is something brewing inside me and it wants to come out. Mluleki listens and keeps nodding to everything while his fingers keep touching me until I am riding them to climax.

He holds me tight when I finally climax and then flip us over so he is above me.

"So we've find your passion" he kisses my lips.

"I think so" I wrap my legs around him.

"So now you will make a business plan. Collect everything you need and Aphiwe will help you with everything" he stops kissing my lips and stares at me.

"What?"

"I'm amazed Phili. This is a different side of you and I love it. I pulled a real gem in a slipstream. I love you baby"

"I love you too" I lift my head and kiss him. We both get lost in the kiss and move on the passionate love

making.

**** * * * * *

Thembeke

I'm surprised to wake up to Clement sitting next to me. My movements startle him because he jumps a bit.

"What's wrong?" I pull myself up.

"Nothing is wrong. Sorry I didn't mean to scare you" he looks alarmed. I think my reaction scared him. I really need to stop panicking so easily.

"Thank God" I lay my head back down and look at him. He looks tired and I think something is wrong.

"Talk to me. What's wrong?"

He clears his throat and fix his glasses.

"I feel like I can talk to you. I don't know. Maybe it's because my wife liked you and thought you were

the kind of friend I needed but you are very easy to talk to. I don't want to lose our friendship" now i'm more alarmed because it means it's serious.

Already I am fighting Nqubeko to let me continue being friends with them and now he is talking like he wants to tell me to get lost.

"What is it? You are scaring me"

"Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you" he smiles and I feel my head relaxes a bit. I like Clement. I can't explain why I feel so drawn to him but I like him. He is like a brother I didn't have growing up. I love Dabula too but Dabula isn't Clement.

"You are doing so. Tell me what is it" I beg and he takes my hand to his. I really hope he doesn't declare feelings for me because I like him a lot but not that way.

"When I was young I had this friend. My best friend Andrew. He was the kindest person I knew. We used to be very close. So close we even shared a bed from time to time. We were just young boys in a boarding school and we were surrounded by other

boys you know" he shrugs and I squeeze his hand back.

"You had feelings for him?" I can't beat around the bush about this. I know that homosexuality is a very sensitive topic in many places and people don't speak so openly about it but I'm not people.

"At the time I didn't know. I only realized when he passed on that what we shared was way beyond friendship" he blinks the tears away.

"What happened to him?"

"He was in a helicopter crash. His father owned a farm and they had a helicopter. One morning they left and never made it back home"

"That's horrible. I'm so sorry" he nods and removes the glasses to wipe his eyes.

"When he was gone I moved on with life but no one else ever made me feel the way he did. Even when I met my wife and married her. Don't get me wrong. I loved her and I was committed to us. I've never even looked at anyone else like that"

I nod and let him continue.

"But now she is gone and I miss her. I feel like God gave me to soul mates and took them away. Lately I've been thinking about Andrew a lot. At the time we both knew what we felt for each other and now i'm here alone having to figure this out myself. It just doesn't seem fair you know" he is now really crying.

"I don't even know why I'm telling you all this. Maybe it's because when she was going she told me you look like someone I can trust. She was always a good judge of character. She was kind and loving despite having that rotten family"

I still hold his hand and feel bad. I wish Nqubeko could hear this so he stops thinking that Clements wants me. He is just a heartbroken man needing an ear.

He continues to cry and I let him be. Sometimes crying helps.

**** * ****

Nqubeko arrives and his face falls when he finds Clement sitting on the bed. He hesitates a bit before he walks to me and kisses my lips. Today he is not showing off anything so the kiss is just a peck on the lips and then he acknowledges Clement.

"Thanks" says Clement as he gets up and leaves.

We wait until the door is closed before we both speak at the same time.

"Sorry you first" says Nqubeko.

"I'm going home today. BP finally went down. They want me to eat boiled food and stop drinking fizzy drinks" I complain while Nqubeko smiles at me.

"You are coming home that's all that matters"

"But I want tasty food not that. You know I like salt"

"I know but we can change our diet for now. Just a few months my love" he smiles and I feel like I haven't seen this genuine smile from him since I got here.

"You know I love you right?" I ask while taking his

hands to mine.

"I know my love and I love you too" he squeezes my hands and smile even wider.

"And you are over your worrying about Clement?" I expect his face to change but it doesn't.

"He is the least of my problems"

"Good because he is just a heart broken person on Nqubeko and...."

"He is gay" he cuts me off.

"He is not gay"

"Bisexual, same different. I don't care anymore. I only care about you" he smiles just as his phone rings.

He pulls it out and frown when he answers. I focus on my own phone while he handles his own call. When he is done he looks bothered.

"What is it now?"

"Nothing. It's just my brother Mbuyiseni. You know Mbuyiseni never calls me now he is telling me they

are coming to Durban. Him and his family"

I also find it weird because Nqubeko is not close to his siblings at all, in fact Mluleki is more of a brother to him than any of his brothers and their wives never really befriended me so we are not close at all.

"So are you going to let them stay in your house when they come?" I ask

"No. I hope they have enough money to book somewhere"

"But you have a space in your house"

"No I don't. Amanda and Lindo might come up for a weekend. You are staying with me mostly and S'nqobile might stay with me if there isn't enough space in your house so no I don't have enough space for him and his family" he looks annoyed. Maybe one day I'll know the real reason why Nqubeko is an outcast amongst his own siblings.

Chapter 87

Thembeke

I'm unable to scream and the harder I try to fight the more I sink in and my body feels paralyzed. I continue to cry until I open my eyes and realize it's a bad dream. I've been having them ever since I left the hospital. When I was drugged I had dreamless sleep but now my reality is back in full force so I can't even sleep peacefully.

"You are having a bad dream" says Nqubeko looking at me.

I sit up and pull my legs up while he pulls up a pillow for me.

"Yeah it's one of those"

He nods and exhales before he put his arm around me. I move closer and rest my head on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry baby" he says quietly.

We stay quiet until someone rings the bell. Nqubeko gets up to attend the door while I get off the bed and go to the balcony. We are in Cape Town. This was Nqubeko's surprise. The moment we got home

after my stay at the hospital I found my bags packed and he told me he is taking to Cape Town to get some rest. We didn't imagine me being terrorized by nightmares as they do. It's been days and it's starting to affect daily functioning. Just last night I dozed off while getting ready for dinner and Nqubeko ended up cancelling but I didn't get proper sleep even then. The bad dreams were here in full force.

I stand for while just admiring the place. It's a cold day judging by people wearing jackets and boots but pregnant people experience these things differently. I'm feeling cool not cold.

This building is Mluleki's property. He offered the apartment for us and we didn't expect what he found. Starting with the fact that its on the top floor. The whole apartment is black and manly. The wall is painted grey. The floor is tiled black. The lounge has black leather couches, a very large screen TV and a fire place that burns black stones when you light it up. The dining room had black chairs and a matching black glass table. Large painting on the

walls and white vases here and there. The kitchen is huge and has black built-in cupboards that you can see your reflection in them. It took me a moment to see that there is a black stove in there. The fridge is large and black too but all the handles are white and the wall is painted in white but because the kitchen is fully furnished so you can only see few places where the wall shows. When I asked Nqubeko about Mluleki having a fridge full of food when he lives in Durban, he said the food is for the cleaning staff. They are allowed to come in cook and eat provided they don't mess up the place. So far I think they haven't because I didn't see anything broken or out of place.

The only place with bright colours are the guest bedrooms. One of them is pink another is blue with two beds and a large closet. I didn't need someone to tell me that he had them prepared for Celiwe and the boys should they come visit.

**

"Thembeke" says Nqubeko behind me. I wait for his hands to touch me and he does. "Everything okay?" He asks on a lowered voice. He knows that him speaking to my ear makes me horny. I try not to giggle.

"I'm fine"

He rubs my back and his hands feel warm.

"Should we go out for breakfast? I don't mind staying in and order something" he suggests.

"Mluleki has a fridge full of food. We are going to make food ourselves. In fact you will and I'll sit there and watch"

He pulls my head back a bit and kisses me.

"Okay fine. Let's go. One of the ladies was here to pick up some coffee. They are giving us some privacy"

I nod and we both walk back to the room. I go wash my face and wear Nqubeko's shorts and his vest. He watches me as I do this. The vest will definitely have my stomach when I take it off but he will be

fine.

We both walk a hand and hand to the kitchen.

"He had to have a black kitchen" says Nqubeko pulling a high chair. I hate the kitchen chairs because people don't make them for short people like me. One has to climb up, it's stupid if you ask me.

"Let me" says Nqubeko when I try to pull my leg up. I allow him to help me up.

"Thanks my love. Now can I have some cereal while you cook?"

"No problem. The lady left the milk" he checks the cupboards until he finds the cereals and makes a bowl of me.

"So what do you want to eat?" He is searching the fridge as he asks.

"Fish" I reply and watch him as he raise his head to look at me.

"For breakfast Thembeke"

"I'm craving a fish. We will Google the recipe" in fact I've been thinking about fish since last night. The craving is not that bad but there is fish so why deny myself a chance.

"Okay fine" he takes it out "Anything else?"

"Yellow rice fried with vegetables"

"Fried rice? How am I supposed to make it yellow?"

"We will Google" I take his phone. It doesn't have a password so I head to Google.

"And if we don't have the needed ingredients? Are we going shopping?"

"No. I don't want to go outside" I reply quickly and he stops checking the cupboards and looks at me.

"Why not?"

"It's cold" I lie. I just don't have the energy to even dress up. All I want to do is to put my head down and sleep but I know the dreams will be here.

"It's not cold. You are wearing a vest and I'll buy you a thick jacket if you need one" he walks over to the other side and stare at me.

"Maybe tomorrow. Today I just want stay in and eat"

He nods but I can tell he will bring the subject back later.

"Okay fine. We stay in and eat" he agrees and continue searching Mluleki's kitchen.

** **

Our fish came out a mess but we ate it while laughing our head off for cooking with Google. To thank the man for cooking I washed the dishes and dried them while he was busy checking a movie we could watch and both enjoy.

"I think I've found it" he announces.

"Okay i'm coming" I pick up the ice cream and join him in the lounge.

We sit on the floor with Nqubeko behind me and me between his legs.

"Who falls asleep first will cook dinner" he teases.

"I won't sleep" I reply before resting my head on his chest.

"We will see" he laughs.

We both sit in silence for a minute before Nqubeko starts touching my love handles.

"This part right here is soft" he whispers.

"I know"

"And I love looking at the back of your neck. You have hair in your neck. Soft hair" leans down and kiss my neck.

"That's ticklish" I complain before tempting to cover my neck.

"I know and I love it" he removes my hand and kiss me again as I burst into giggles.

"You know that I love Thembeke" he says after he stops touching me.

"I know and I love you too"

"And I can tell that you struggling with sleep. That's why you are feeling low"

I don't reply instead I hold his knees.

"And I'm willing to walk this journey with you. I don't want you to feel alone"

"Thanks Mbonambi"

"And I don't want you to ever feel like you can't tell me anything"

"Sometimes I feel weak. Like I shouldn't be alive" I feel him holding a breath before he wraps his arms around me.

"You've had suicidal thoughts before?"

"Yes I have but chickened out because I am afraid to die"

"When was this?" He asks his arms still around me.

"When I was still young. I don't have them anymore. I mean, I have so much to live for" I feel a gentle movement in my stomach. It's like the baby is reminding me that I have to live for him or her too.

"So you will continue with therapy?"

"Yes I will. I can't sleep so I might as well just go

through the whole thing"

"And I'll be here for you my love"

I turn around to face him and give him a proper kiss.
He kisses me just as hard.

"We are watching a movie" he reminds me when we
both pull back.

"We will continue after this" I reply while
unbuttoning his shirt.

He stops my hands and stares at me for moment.

"I never want to live without you Thembeke. We are
going to be fine. Feeling weak is part of life even
when someone else sees nothing but strength in
you. You are the strongest person I know and I'm
glad I get to have you in my life" he lowers his head
to my lips and we share another kiss while I
continue taking his shirt off.

** **

Phili

The place is packed. It's a different world here. Ladies look beautiful as they cling on their rich and handsome husbands. Mluleki introduced me to a totally different world now. They call it a fundraising dinner when you pay thousands to eat and that money is supposed to go to charity but we all know how these things work.

"Are you coming out tonight?" Asks Mluleki as I do the final check on the mirror. He is waiting next to the door as the guy waits behind him to move the car to the parking lot.

"Almost done" I reapply the lipstick and check if I didn't stain my teeth while at it.

"You look beautiful" he adds as he extends a hand. I hold on to him and get out of the car.

"Thank you" the air feels warm and the sky is clear. Its a beautiful night.

He hands the key to the man before we both walk to

the entrance. Two waiters hands us drinks at the door. I walk in first and stop when I notice how beautiful the place is. It's black and gold and people are busy standing in groups while sipping their drinks.

"Walk tall" says Mluleki resting his hand on my back. I'm wearing a black dress that ends on my ankles. The back is open and secured by a gold chains. The bra underneath is strapless and i'm wearing thong to avoid showing panty lines on my ass.

I walk further into the room and two ladies wave at me. I don't know them at all but I wave back.

"And wear a smile always" he whispers just as two guys approach us.

"Gents" says Mluleki first.

"Mlu and Miss Khumalo" one of them says before shaking my hand.

"Hi" I smile politely.

"I told my wife about your project. She wants to be part of. She feels bored and this is a perfect

opportunity for her to keep busy" says the second gentleman as he looks around a bit and then spot a lady. He waves her over and I assume it's the wife.

"I also saw the proposal. It was so informal I had to sit and read it" says the first guy smiling. I guess this is Mcebo I emailed an edited version of the plan by mistake. They really need the reversing app for emails.

"It got sent by mistake. I'm sorry" I try not to show my humiliation.

"It's fine. I'm just teasing" says the man as they laugh.

"Dudu this is Miss Khumalo. The lady we talked about last night" the man introduces his wife.

"Hi" I return a smile and shake her head.

"Come. Let me introduce you to others" she takes my hand and Mluleki nods we walk away.

** **

Dudu can't stop talking once she starts. I've been smiling and acting like i'm interested as she introduced me to her friends. Then she went on to complain about some party they went to and how boring it was for her. Her friends also contributed on the topic as they admired the decoration and shared where one can find some of the things for their own homes.

"So you want to start a charity project?" One lady asks while looking at me. Her eyes settle on my dress.

"Yes I am" I reply confidently.

"I might join. I have a friend and she runs this organisation. She told me even though it pays slow but you do get some money plus the government is rewarding tenders to charities lately"

"Imagine if we could get one" Says Dudu looking at me.

"Paris next year" the ladies say at the same time. I'm not sure what Paris is because the only Paris I know is in France and I don't get the excitement so I sip

the liquid and say nothing.

They continue to talk about shopping and fashion shows while I look around for Mluleki. He looks up and smile before he walks over. I'm saved because I was starting to feel bored.

"Still okay?" He speaks in my ear.

"Yes it's good. I haven't seen Melissa" I look around one more time but still I don't see her at all.

"She is here somewhere. You will see her once we sit down"

"I need the ladies" I hand him my glass.

"I'll get you a refill" he smiles and I walk to the ladies.

** **

This place is beautiful. Their restrooms have a waiting area if there is a line. I go in and use the available toilet.

"Did you see her?" Says someone walking in.

"I saw her. She is not his type. I wonder what he sees in her" they both laughed.

I stand still because I fear they are talking about me.

"He did sleep with you at some point" another voice replies and they continue to laugh.

"He is very good in bed I won't lie" the lady continues.

"Didn't you fear Dan finding out about it?"

"Dan knew I was cheating but he would totally flip if ever finds out that it's him. He thinks it was some fuckboy I picked up"

The go quiet before I hear the tap running. Now I can't get out because they will know I was listening to their conversation. I continue to stand still until I hear a male voice. This is the ladies and a man shouldn't be here.

The ladies tell the man to use the another toilet as this one is for women. He refuses and I hear their footsteps as they walk out. I also get out and find the man just standing there.

"Sorry. I'm a bit drunk" he laughs. I wash my hands quickly and ignore him. When I head for the door I feel a hand on my butt.

"You sexy young thing" he grabs my hand when I try to rush out.

"Let go of me" I scream and yank my hand. He stumbles a bit and grabs my dress. One of the chains on my back snaps and the fabric tears a bit.

"Acting like you don't want this" he yanks the dress harder and it rips just as his hand closes around the neck like and yank the dress again.

I scream on top of my lungs while trying to fight him off me. He is trying to get me down but I fight back because if I fall he will overpower me.

"Help!!" I scream and try to hit him but he keeps trying to tear the dress off me. When a chance presents itself I kick him hard between the legs.

"You bitch" he returns a quick punch before he bends over and I use this chance to run feeling the blood dropping from my nose.

The first person who sees me screams. My dress ripped and falling on my upper body and that bastard also snapped my bra, one of my boobs is falling out.

"Phili" says Mluleki running towards me. I can't speak, I'm crying and my nose is bleeding.

"Francis was in the toilet. We tried to tell him to leave but he refused" one lady explains.

"We need to stop the nose bleed" someone says and a white lady puts something over my shoulder.

"Come this way" someone says and suddenly i'm taken to another room and one lady is pressing something on my nose. I'm shaking and I feel sick.

"Some ice" someone places a cold towel on my forehead and instruct me to lie down.

"Phili" it's Mluleki running in.

He comes to kneel in front of me.

"She needs to lie down. It will stop the blood. Her nose doesn't seem broken" says the lady.

"I'll stay with her. Can you get my car. Tell the guy to

pack at the back. We are leaving" he instruct while sitting next to me.

The ladies leave us alone and Mluleki makes me lie down on his lap.

"He didn't hurt you anywhere else?" He asks and I shake my head.

He nods and continue to hold the towel on my forehead.

We sit for few minutes before there is a knock and a man walks in with Mluleki's keys.

"Thanks" he takes the keys and the man walks out.

"Let's get you home"

I sit up and my nose throbs but it doesn't seem to be bleeding more. He places his jacket on my shoulders.

We leave the room and walk to the passage and walks past the kitchen before we reach the exit. The car is there and Mluleki opens the door for me. I get in and closes the door before jogging to his side.

The car takes off in speed as we leave.

"Phili" he speaks and I turn my head to look at him. He holds my hand and I think he can feel that i'm shaking.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there to protect you"

It's not his fault so I squeeze his hand back before closing my eyes. I shouldn't have come. This is not my world anyway.

Chapter 88

Nqubeko

I check the bedroom and Thembeke is still sleeping. This is the first time she has slept for over five hours without fighting things in her dreams. But I can't celebrate just yet. She is far from healing. What they did to her was cruel and healing will take years of therapy and acceptance.

I call Tiko first. His phone rings twice before he answers.

"Boss"

"Where are you?" He sounds like he is driving.

"I'm heading to Babanango"

"Good. I want you to make sure no one gets hurt. Even if it means waking them up but I want three houses burnt to ashes tonight" He should be there in less than an hour from now.

"Yes Sir. And the girl?" He means Pretty. I don't want her to get caught in the cross fire. Her main job is the keep Sdumo busy until I say otherwise.

"She will be fine. Let her focus on Sdumo for now. Just go there and do what I say"

"Sure boss"

I end the call and call Pretty. Her phone goes to voicemail before she calls me back.

"Nqubeko"

"Tomorrow at 8 be in Vryhied. I'll send you details of the person you are meeting. Don't mess up Pretty"

"For what?" Her tone is full of attitude.

"You owe me a lots of money Pretty and the trauma you caused my family so you are in no position to ask me questions. Tomorrow at 8 be in Vryhied. I'll send you details" I end the call and call Mluleki.

"Nqubeko"

"How is she?"

"Sleeping" I can tell that he is smoking.

"And that bastard? Tell me you have him"

"Not yet. For now my main focus is Phili. That pig crossed the line Nqubeko" he click his tongue.

"I know" I push the door a bit and check if Thembeke is still sleeping. She is still snoring and it makes me happy. She needs some rest.

"I'm going to kill him but he won't even see it coming"

"And Phili? When she finds out about it?" Something tells me that Philu is not the type of woman you can just tell that I had someone killed.

"She won't. Let's talk Sdumo. Tonight is the night"

"Tiko is heading there as we speak. Pretty will be in Vryhied tomorrow to get the package to Julio" she better not mess up.

"That's good. While Tiko is that side i'm thinking he can sniff a bit about Thembeke. Someone knows something Nqubeko"

"I'll ask Tiko to stay a bit eDlebe and see if he picks up something"

"Good. I should get some sleep. I suggest you do the same" that's just talk. I hardly sleep with Thembeke jumping up every minute but today she has slept longer maybe I can sleep for a bit too.

"We will talk later" I end the call and send a text to Pretty about meeting Julio for the package.

** **

Phili

Mluleki presses his hand on my mouth before i could scream.

"Hey it's just me. I didn't mean to scare you" he let's go and I take a deep breath. I wasn't expecting to open my eyes to Mluleki starring at me close.

"What time is it?" I feel like I just closed my eyes but I can tell it's morning already.

"It's after 5 am. Are you feeling okay?"

I nod and pull the blanket up to my neck. I'm feeling down after last night and I don't even want to leave the bed or the house today.

"Come" he pulls the blanket away from me.

"It's still early" I complain but he takes my arm and pull me up.

"You will go back to sleep after this"

I really don't have the energy but I still get up and let him lead me out of the room. We go down the passage before he pushes another door open. The first thing I notice is the mirror. A large mirror that seems out of place because there is a punching bag

hanging on the roof behind it. I also spot a lingerie set on the chair near the mirror. I hope Mlu doesn't think I'm in a mood for sex games right now because I don't.

"Stand here" he makes me stand in front of the mirror. I didn't wash the make up properly last night. I have some dark marks from the eyeliner. I look like a mess. But I stand still and look at him through the mirror. He grabs a chair and sits down behind me.

"What do you see in that mirror?" He asks after he sits.

"Meaning?" I turn to face him.

"Turn around and tell me what you see" he lights a cigarette.

I stand for a moment trying to work out what he is doing but so far I'm blank.

"Tell me what you see" he repeats.

"I see myself and you behind me"

"Forget me. Just look at yourself" he blows the smoke into rings before it disappears into air.

"I see myself"

He nods and look at me. I think it means continue so I continue.

"My face needs a proper wash to remove make up properly. My lips are dry and I'm drowning in this t-shirt"

"I didn't say count your flaws. Your face is fine. Your lips are fine too. Are you in pieces?"

"What pieces?" I want to look at him but he will tell me to turn around so I don't.

"Broken pieces. Are you broken somewhere?"

I shake my head.

"Out loud" he commands.

"I'm not broken" I say quickly.

"Francis is a pig and he took nothing from you. So he doesn't deserve to exist in your head and heart. You hear me" his voice is commanding.

"Yes" I reply my voice shaking.

"So promise me that you are not going to make him

win by shrinking yourself into something else when
he doesn't deserve to even cross your mind"

Tears fill my eyes and I look down to my feet.

"Eyes on you" he commands again.

I wipe them with my hand and look at myself.

"I'll deal with Francis but I don't want him to take a
piece of you with him. You hear me"

I nod as more tears drop.

"Say it out loud Phili. Francis won't take me with
him"

"Francis won't take me with him"

"Repeat"

I wipe the tears and repeat.

"It wasn't your fault"

"It's not my fault"

"It will never be my fault"

"It will never be my fault" I repeat.

"I'm a strong woman. I bend I don't break. I may

stumble but I don't fall and if I do fall I pick myself up and limp forward"

I repeat the words as Mluleki said them.

"Stand tall and shoulders back" he instruct.

I do so.

"Repeat the words" he orders.

I stand still and repeat the words. He orders me to repeat them four times more before he nods.

"What he did is not your fault"

"It's not my fault"

"And it will never be my fault"

"And it will never be my fault" I repeat.

"Good" he stands up and moves closer to me. I stare at him through the mirror as he wrap his arms around me.

"You are beautiful" he kisses the top of my head.

"You are strong" he kisses my cheek.

"You won't run and hide" he kisses my other cheek.

"And i'll be there holding your hand through it all. Not because you need your hand held but because I want to be beside you all the way" he moves to stand in front of me before he kisses my lips. I kiss him back my hands touching his cool skin underneath the shirt. He lift me up and I can feel him hard as he pulls me up. His hands squeeze my butt cheeks and I moan against his lips. He moves fast until I feel my back against the wall. I hold him tight as presses me against the wall and I feel his hands on my thighs before I feel him pushing inside me.

"Mlu" I whisper remembering the condom.

He pauses and looks at me. I feel defeated as my head tells me to go with it. I hold him tighter before he starts moving.

It's intense and quick because i'm afraid to fall but I do want to come. He keeps going until I'm moaning his name very loud and reach an intense point of no return while feeling him as he comes inside me.

A moment passes before my head reminds me that

I just had unprotected sex against the wall.

"I'll deal with Francis" he whispers in my ear and I hold him tight because I fear falling.

Chapter 89

Phili

Mluleki holds me tight and covers my lips with his when I reach the orgasm. It feels so good so I lock my ankles around him and also wrap my arms around him.

A moment passes before he goes soft and slips out but he doesn't move. He keeps me locked in his arms and continues kissing my lips slowly. I kiss him back and rub my arms up and down his side.

"Damn Phili. You shouldn't let me touch you without a condom. Now I can't stop" he smiles and kisses my nose.

I smile back but say nothing. It's a sixth time we have raw sex today and we both agreed it shouldn't

happen again. Not unless I want him to impregnate me which would be totally wrong because i'm not ready for another kid.

"I love you" he whispers.

"I love you too"

"We should go get the pill now and pick up the kids for dinner" he doesn't move though.

I exhale and inhale again. I smell him. He smells good but that's not all, he smells like a man who just had sex.

"If you fall pregnant would you hate me?" He asks and starts tracing his finger on my neck.

"You are heavy" I remind him and we both laugh before rolls off me. I turn to face him as he slip his arm beneath me and pulls me even closer.

"Would you?" He repeats when I don't reply. The truth is I would but I fear how he might react to that. Mluleki doesn't have a child and I have two.

"I wouldn't hate you but I'll be disappointed in myself because it's my responsibility as well" it's

the safest answer I can think of right now.

"I don't want you to take this the wrong way but I don't want it to happen" he squeeze my shoulder.

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I don't want us to have a baby. I'm happy to be a father to just your kids. Adding Dabula's and as well as Thembeke's baby. I think that's enough for me" this is totally unexpected. The way he began I thought he was telling me he wants one.

"So you don't want your biological kid?"

"No" he replies and it sounds like there is something left unsaid but I let it pass. We will revisit the subject later.

"Then we should really get up now so I can go get the pill" he nods and let me go. I get up and pick up my dress before slipping it on. He will straighten the bed while I shower and make myself look presentable.

** **

I wipe the fog on the mirror and stare at my reflection. I look okay. I'm not broken at all. That man did not take anything away from me.

"You are beautiful. Smile" says Mluleki behind me. I didn't hear him come in

I exhale and smile.

"Do you want a sandwich?"

He shakes his head and look at me up and down. I have a towel on so I know he is not seeing the dimples on my butts.

"I'm sorry for today"

"For what?" He hasn't done anything to piss me off yet.

"Unprotected sex. I shouldn't have done that. It's unfair"

"It's not your fault. I also went along with it so it's okay"

"So we are cool?" He takes my hand to his. I hold on

to him and nod. He nods as well and we stare at each other through the mirror.

"I need you to confront Francis" he says and I immediately let go of his hand. He grabs my shoulders and that forces me to face forward and him behind me.

"You have to. Its the only way to make sure that you are over the incident" he insist.

"By forcing me to go back there?"

"Yes. He needs to know that you are fine and that he didn't take anything from you. It will do you good"

I don't reply and he wait for few more seconds before remove his hands. I turn and walk past him without saying anything. How could he spend the whole morning teaching me to get over the incident and then force me to face the monster again? How will that help?

I head to the bedroom and get dressed while he showers and then go wait downstairs. I should be leaving but I don't feel brave enough to dare Mluleki right now so I wait like a respectful girlfriend.

He comes down after 15 minutes. He looks nice in dark navy tracksuits. I put on my shoes and take my phone.

** **

The evening wasn't exactly a success. My kids wouldn't relax and Mluleki couldn't relax as well. The idea was to take them to the movies, go for dinner after that and then take them for shopping a bit. The reality was different though. Celiwe, who always have something to say and picks activities first whenever you want to spoil them, today she couldn't pick a movie. She didn't leave my side as we were leaving the car. It was like she was afraid of him. The two boys would normally spend the whole time arguing with Ngubeko about which team is better and which player is richer but today they whispered to themselves and each time Mlu tried to join in they stopped. I could see it was making him uncomfortable as well. So I cut the whole thing

short and we were back home in less than 2 hours.

"Thanks for tonight" I tell Mluleki as he grabs his keys getting ready to leave. I'm staying because i need to talk to the kids. They come first.

"It's cool. It was a disaster but it's fine" he leans down and kiss my cheek.

I don't know what to say so I nod and walk him to the door. Dabula and S'nqobile are outside sitting at the back. I can hear them laughing from time to time.

"Text me before you sleep" he adds before he opens the car door.

"I will. Let me know that you got home alright" I reply and open the gate.

"I will. I love you goodnight" he gets in and close the door.

"Me too" I don't add goodnight because we are going to talk on the phone before we sleep.

He drives off and I go back inside.

** ** *

My kids are in the bedroom playing with toys and eating all the junk food Mluleki bought. They seem so happy to be eating his money but they acted like he was a scary person.

"Do you want this? It has jelly in it"

"No take this. It's bitter"

The boys both say at the same time and push the chocolates towards me. I move them aside and sit down.

"We need to talk" I adapt to my motherly tone while smiling so they don't think I'm attacking them.

Celiwe puts down the popcorn and looks at me. The boys copy her and now they are looking at me with such expecting eyes.

"Do you guys fear Uncle Mluleki?"

The boys nod quickly. Celiwe chew and nods after.

"Why? Has he done something that scared you?" My

mind is starting to make images I can't take. What if I've been blind this whole time.

"Because you said we shouldn't trust strangers and I heard him yell on the phone. He said he was going to cut him in half and sell him to the highest bidder" says Celiwe her hand swiping across her midsection to show half.

"I know I said you should never trust strangers. But uncle Mlu....."

"Is a mean looking stranger sometimes" says the boys at the same time like they are singing a song.

"What?"

"He looks mean sometimes and he sits on the couch like this" continues Celiwe as she moves to the edge of the bed to demonstrate "and his face is not smiley at all" she sits with her legs open and her face in a frown that makes me want to burst into laughter but I don't.

"Yes he does sit quietly and his legs do stay to far apart. So you don't trust him because he is a stranger, he yelled a threat to someone on the

phone and he looks mean most of the time?"

"Yes" they reply at once. I can already tell that Celiwe is the one who told the boys that Mlu shouldn't be trusted and that he is always so mean.

"I understand. Beside all that, is there anything that would make you guys uncomfortable around him?" I look closer to their faces to see if there is something hidden. You can never be too sure when it comes to these things.

Both boys look unsure so they look at Celiwe because they trust her. If she says yes its a yes for them too.

"No. But we like Uncle Nqubeko better. He is very nice" says Celiwe.

The boys nod in agreement.

"But uncle Mlu is not going to replace uncle Nqubeko. You guys can enjoy both uncles"

"So you won't make us move in with him? We like it here" says Celiwe and again I see the agreeing nods. I've been neglecting them and Celiwe needed to

have answers for the boys. I can't blame her for telling them these things.

"No I won't. We are all staying here" I reply and Celiwe looks confused a bit. There is clearly more she needs to say.

"Even after you get married?" her voice is low and I see both boys look at her in shock. They might be into wrestling and toys but they know what it means to be married.

"Married? Who told you I'm getting married?"

"I heard him tell uncle Nqubeko that you guys will get married. He stopped talking when he heard me walk in but I heard that part" says Celiwe.

"I see. Look guys, I'll never leave you alone. I'll never pick anyone else over you. You guys don't trust Uncle Mluleki and that's fine. We are going to treat uncle Mluleki like a stranger until you guys feel ready to trust him. Is that okay?"

The boys wait for Celiwe to confirm. She nods and they follow.

"And I don't want you guys to hide anything from me. If anyone makes you uncomfortable I want you to always tell me about it. We don't keep secrets from each other. Right?"

"yes mama" they all sing at once.

"You are only allowed to eat one bar of candy the rest has to wait for tomorrow"

I expect a protest but they don't. They start picking up the unopened stuff and put it back on the plastic.

"Guys. I have uncle Nqubeko on the line. He wants to say goodnight" says Dabula at the door. The chaos start as they race to the phone and argue about who should speak first and who has more to say.

"Okay. Let's put him on loud speaker" suggests Dabula fearing for his phone.

The chaos doesn't stop. They all leave the bedroom while screaming their day to Nqubeko. I doubt he even hears them as they compete for his attention.

My phone rings and its Mluleki. I let it ring a bit

before answering.

"I got in safe" he sounds like he is in a bar though.

"What is that noise?" I'm sure I hear voices and someone asking for a refill.

"I am at the bar. I just want one drink and then I'm going to bed"

"Are you okay?" I don't even care that he lied about being home.

"I'm fine. Yes I'm disappointed that the evening wasn't a hit but it's okay. I mean your kids really do prefer Nqubeko over me. That was very clear"

"They are kids Mluleki. I tell them to never trust strangers so I can't fault them. Its a process my love. Give it time"

He doesn't reply instead I start hearing someone suggesting they leave.

"Stop it" hisses Mluleki.

I wait three seconds to hear more.

"Come on. You know I can heal all that pain I see in

you. I'm wearing your favourite bra" says a woman.

"Hello" I speak so Mluleki can focus on me.

There is no reply to me. I keep hearing the noise and then glasses.

I stare at my phone for a moment before ending the call and then calling him back. I can't stop imagining a woman in his arms wearing his favourite bra. He has a favourite bra?

The phone rings to voicemail.

I try again and same thing happen. Now i'm worried. She wanted to leave with him. She is wearing his favourite bra and she wants him. The images in my head are not looking good.

I try again and this time someone answers.

"Hello. Mluleki"

"Ah I think he left his phone behind. He just left. He can get his phone....." says someone who doesn't even sound like Mluleki.

"He left with someone?"

"Aaaah, ahhhh....." the man hesitates and I jump quickly.

"I know he is very familiar with hired entertainment. I'm his sister using his girlfriend's phone. I won't tell her" I lie.

"Yes he left with her. He always come here to pick her up. I'm sorry" says the man realizing he is saying too much.

"Its cool" its not but I said i'm his sister so it has to be cool.

"Can you please let him know that he will get his phone from Syabonga. I'll leave it with him when I leave"

"Sure. Have a nice evening" I end the call and continue cleaning up the mess on the bed. I guess Mluleki will never stop sleeping with prostitutes.

Chapter 90

Nqubeko

I stop dead on my tracks. The takeaway is empty and Thembeke is leaning back on the couch naked on her upper body and she touched her stomach with oily hands. She looks up when she feels me watching her.

"You are done? That was fast" she sits up and fix the cushion behind her.

"I told you I was taking a quick shower. You ate the whole thing?" I point the container on the coffee table.

"It was amazing. I swear I've never tasted a fatcook that good. The sausages were even better" she laughs and her hand rest on her swollen tummy.

I nod and clean up. I have reasons to worry. The fatcook was as big as a baby's head. A large pack of french fries, two large sausages, two cheeses and few fried ox liver pieces. She ate the whole thing in one go.

"Do you think you can get me a pocket of chips in the cupboard?" She requests as I leave the room for the kitchen.

"We are out of those" I lie. She can't possibly eat anything more right now.

"There is popcorn in the top cupboard. I'll have that even though I wanted real chips" she complains and I feel like a bastard so I open the cupboard and take the chips.

"I found them" I say out loud before taking them back to the lounge. She sits up and takes the pocket.

"Thanks my love"

I watch her as she starts digging in. This can't be right.

"Let's go out tonight. We will go to a restaurant and have dinner. We can even watch a movie or go to a club. There is an exclusive club in town. I know someone who can get us in. Just for an hour or so" I suggest.

Her eyes don't light up and she doesn't even look like she is hearing me right now.

"Can I have some?" I point the chips and she turns the pocket towards me. I take a few and eat them.

"I don't have anything to wear for a night out and i'm too lazy to get out of the couch"

"Thembeke we came with two suitcases full of clothes. There is that navy dress I like. You can wear those shoes you like so much. The one with red sole. Come on" I beg. We haven't done anything since we came here. She just eats and sleep. I'm starting to think its boredom.

"Or we can watch a movie, have sex and have ice cream" she suggests with a smile on her face.

"No. We are going out. We can have sex after"

"Bondage?" I can see her starting to shine with excitement.

"If I say yes you will get off the couch and we can go out like normal people?" I bargain and she instantly gets up.

"Say no more" she grabs her slippers and disappear to the bedroom. I follow her and check if she is really showering before making a call to Dr Ngcobo. It's late but hey she gets paid for this so she has to answer.

"Mr Mbonambi" she answers when the call get through.

"Evening. I'm sorry to bother you so late. I just need some advise please" I check the shower and it's still running so she is not listening to my call.

"Is Thembeke okay?"

"She won't leave the house. All she does is eat and stay in. Don't get me started on her appetite. I fear she will get sick if this goes on" I move to the balcony and close the door behind me.

"She refuses to go out?" She asks.

"Yes. We are in Cape Town. The place is beautiful. She should want to explore the city but nope. She just eats a mountain of food and snack on whatever she finds before she sits on the couch and watch TV. She looks demotivated"

"She is pregnant so the appetite could also be fuelled by that but she loss of energy is not okay. Have you suggested something she might like? Anything that you know she loves?"

"She wants to spice up our sex life. Not that I think it needs spicing but she wants to try bondage. So I said if we go out she can get her fantasy" its good that its a call not face to face. Dr Ngcobo is old to be hearing about my sex life.

"And you have a problem with bondage?"

"How am I supposed to make love to her while she is tied up and pregnant. The images I get in my head are not good" Its even worse not that I know what she went through.

"Have you told her about how you feel?"

"There is no reasoning with her when she has her mind made up. It's either I give in or she will start crying. That makes me feel even worse"

The doctor takes a deep breath. I guess she is also realizing how complicated this situation really is.

"That's emotional blackmail and you can't give in all the time she does it. She needs to learn to reason Mr Mbonambi. Bringing up the subject gentle and talking it out might help. Express your fears and make sure she listens. In life one doesn't always

gets their way" her tone has gone from a friendly therapist to that of a grandmother telling her grandchild about the harsh reality of life.

"I'll try"

"And Mbonambi, Thembeke will cry. It's human nature to cry so don't always fear seeing her tears to a point of compromising yourself to avoid seeing her cry. She needs to understand that sometimes you just don't get your way"

"Thanks Ma'am" I see the door opening which means i need to end the call "I have to go now but i'll be in touch"

"No problem. Just be gentle when you touch on the eating subject. Don't make it sound like an insult" she sounds like she wants to laugh.

"I will. Bye" I end the call before she reaches the balcony. She is naked and I stop her before she comes out just in case someone can see her.

"Were you calling Phili and the kids?" She smells like a shower gel and I fight the need to take her to bed.

"No. Someone else. I have an idea" I throw the phone on the bed.

"About what" her hand keeps playing with her nipple. I wonder if she is aware of her actions or not.

"Our night out. You want something different? I'm thinking role play" its the safest thing I could think off right now.

"Role play how?"

"Get dressed. Wear something sexy and a car will come pick you up in an hour. They will take you somewhere. When you get there you are a single woman and you will be for the rest of the night. Single people are allowed to pick up strangers and take them home for a night" I wink and she smiles shyly. This will be so much because I have the upper hand.

"Wear something sexy baby. Let me make arrangements" I take my phone and leave the room.

** **

Thembeka

The place looks nice. Very cosy compared to the idea I had in mind. Nqubeko's driver dropped me off and stayed because Nqubeko said to never leave me alone. I'm wearing a black little dress that accommodates my pregnant stomach. I wore a leather jacket over the dress just to make sure that I don't get cold. I wore the shoes Nqubeko love so much. I think they are the most expensive pair of shoes I have and Nqubeko loves them more than me but he thinks it's the other way around.

"A refill miss?" Asks the barman as I drain the liquid in my glass.

"Yes please" I push the glass. It's a non alcoholic wine so I don't mind another drink. "Does this place ever gets crowded?" The decor is mostly white and the sitting area looks comfortable. It looks like a place where rich people would hang out when they don't want to rub shoulders with the rest of us.

"It does. Tonight it should pick up. But mostly we try to keep things manageable. The crowd does get things out of hand when it's not well managed" he refills my glass.

I have no idea what it means but I nod. The door opens and two men walk in. They look like Indians but I know they are not. Some colours do look like Indians. It's a Cape Town thing if you ask me.

They walk to the bar as the other guy makes a call the other orders drinks.

"Hi" he seems to notice me now.

"Hi" I reply while looking at him. He smiles. A wide grin that leaves me breathless. I'm pregnant and I haven't felt sexy in weeks now so getting a man's attention makes me feel all warm and fuzzy.

"Is it okay to invite you for drinks with us? We are on the corner over there" he points the table.

It's tempting but I'm waiting for Nqubeko. I'm supposed to be a single woman in the bar and he will be a stranger.

"Just you?" I point the other guy as well.

"We have few more friends coming over" he smiles and I can't get over how handsome he is.

"That's great. I'll come join when they get here" I reply and he laughs. The barman calls the waiter and hand her the drinks for the corner table. Both men follow her and the other winks at me.

I sit still and sip my drink.

Three ladies and two men walk in. The moment they do they start laughing and cheering. I guess they are the people who were coming later. The ladies ignore me but the guy greets before they join their friends. It's a good thing I didn't join them.

** **

"Is this seat taken?" A man speaks next to me and I look at him. It takes me a moment to realize that i'm staring at Nqubeko. He looks so different. He had a hair cut. A stylish hair cut and trimmed his beard.

He looks so handsome and very different. The Nqubeko I know can look so damn fine in normal pants and a t-shirt. This Nqubeko is wearing a black t-shirt, black jeans and dark timberland boots.

"The seat. Is it taken?" He asks again when I don't answer.

"It's not" I say it quickly when I snap out of it.

He smiles and push the chair closer before sitting. The barman takes his order and he tells him to refill my drink as well.

"So tell me. Why is a pregnant woman sitting alone in a place like this?" He doesn't even smile.

My smile fades when I look at him. He looks so different. The man that I know and married doesn't look this. I haven't seen him looking like this at all. Nqubeko is a suit person. He rules the business world without him saying it out loud, but right now he looks like a handsome man picking up a single woman in the bar. But i'm a very pregnant woman in the bar.

"Who said pregnant women can't have fun?" I reply

and he smiles. A quiet smile that doesn't stay long in his lips.

"So you like having fun?" He asks and I nod.

"What kind of fun?"

"Anything that makes me happy"

He nods and takes his drink. A moment passes before I look at him and find him watching me.

"It's rude to stare" I tease and he laughs and raise a hand.

"Forgive me. You are just so damn beautiful. I can't help but stare at you" he smiles and it makes me want to weep. Its the way he said it that makes me want to weep.

"Even though I'm fat and I eat like a pig"

"What?" He looks puzzled. I think I've ruined the whole thing.

"I have a huge appetite. I just can't stop eating. This baby is turning me into....." He cuts me off.

"The sexiest woman i've ever laid my eyes on and

believe me, I've seen beautiful women in my life"

"You really think I look sexy?" i'm no longer role playing now.

"Are you kidding me? Babe, have you looked yourself in the mirror lately. There is no one finer than you" he takes my hands to his.

"Even though my boobs...." He cuts me off again.

"Became a little bigger? They are still fine" he let's go and finish his drink before he pulls out his wallet.

"I'm paying for her drinks as well" he tells the barman who rings up the bill.

"We are leaving?" I feel like we didn't achieve our purpose. We just got here.

"Yes baby. We have places to see and things to do" he say impatiently.

"Hey" says someone behind us. We both turn and it's the same guy I talked to earlier. He smiles and Nqubeko frowns.

"Is he bothering you?" He jerk his head towards Nqubeko who raised his eyes to the question.

"No he is not" I reply.

"The offer still stands. You can come join us" he offers.

"Thanks but....."

"She is with me. Thanks for looking out though" says Nqubeko cutting me off. The man looks like he wants to say something but stops.

"It was nice to meet you" he adds before walking away. We both watch him walk away.

"Wow. I guess he couldn't help himself" says Nqubeko offering a hand to help me off the chair.

"So we are going back to the apartment?" I ask while pulling my dress down a bit.

he leans over until his lips are brushing my ears. It's ticklish so i let out a laugh "Yes but first i'm going to have you in the car and then make love to you later" he says slowly before turning to my lips. We kiss and the fools start cheering and clapping.

Chapter 91

Thembeke

The lights are turned low and Marvin Gaye's Sexual Healing is playing as Nqubeko walks in. He smiles and pulls out his tie on the back pocket of his jeans. He brings his wrist together indicating I should to so too. I obey and bring them forward for him to tie me up. He licks his lower lips and smile. "This is what you want, right?" says in a cool tone that makes me feel all warm and horny. When did I become this person? I nod and smile at him. "Out loud MaKhumalo" he whispers as he ties my wrist together. "Yes. I want this" I swallow hard as he smiles and pull the knot a bit tighter to check if it's secure enough. "Move further up" he instruct and I obey. He moves to the closet and come back with a bar. It's not a long bar but it has some strings in each end. "Feet apart" he instruct before placing the bar between my legs. I do that and try not to moan when he traces his fingers on my leg. "This bar locks. If you move your legs apart you can't close them again. So think carefully before you open your legs wide" "Okay" I try to make my voice sound all slutty but it comes out in a hoarse whispers.

Nqubeko laughs and kiss my thigh which makes me

move my legs and the bar locks. “It does that” he winks and kisses my lips.

** **

The song restarts and Nqubeko starts taking his shoes off. He takes them off slowly his eyes fixed on me. I wait as he takes the socks off as well. The jacket follows and the t-shirt follows. His vest comes off even slower than the shoes and socks. When he removes his jeans he starts grinding his hips slowly. Nqubeko doesn't have a six pack but he does have a nice stomach not a potbelly. The jeans come off leaving just his underwear. He dances slowly to the song and I'm all warm in the face. My centre is all hot and filling up. We did have some in the car but it was mostly him working his lips on me so I'm all wet and ready. The song ends and my legs have opened much more. He walks closer and climbs the bed before he grabs the bar and pulls me towards him. My legs open even further and he raises an eyebrow. “So scandalous’ MaKhumalo. Look how wet you are” he runs his hand over my wet flesh and turn it over for me to see. It's dripping

wet. I bite my lips and say nothing. “You want to cum?” I nod quickly. “I didn’t hear you. Do you want to cum?” his voice is full of authority. “Yes” I take a deep breath. “Make yourself cum. Here is a video” he grabs a remote and turns on the TV. A woman is furiously rubbing her clit and moaning so loud. I’m shocked. I grew up being told that pornography is dirty and one shouldn’t make it a habit to watch it. “Don’t go shy on me. You are not getting my dick until you’ve cum on your own” “But....” I start to speak but he places his hand on my lips. “No buts. Just make yourself cum like she is doing” I close my eyes and lower my hands until I’m touching myself. I’m slippery. “Go on baby” he encourages. I touch myself three times before the pleasure rip through me so hard and I’m left shuddering as the wave of pleasure slowly passes. I didn’t do it like her at all. She is still furiously rubbing herself and moaning. “Dammit baby. What do I do with you” he bites his lips and kisses my thigh. “I just need a good sex” I whisper not knowing what I do with my wet hands. Nqubeko notices this and smile. “Then I’ll give you good sex baby” he gets up and walks to the closet.

He pulls out something that looks like ropes with safety pads. I stare as he walks back and grab the bar pulling me back to the very edge of the bed. His knees pushes me legs wide when the bar comes off but he holds my knees instead. I padded strings are for the knees. It bends them as he ties it around my knee and lower thigh. I feel so exposed and unable to close my legs even when I try to move. “You want to be restricted? Tied like this?” his voice is sexy and deep. “Yes” I don’t even hesitate. He does the same to my left knee. When he is done he pulls me up back to the middle of the bed before unbinding my hands together. I stretch my arms and rub the wrists. It wasn’t tight but I have marks from the pulling when I came. “Hands together” he instructs and I obey as he ties them again. This time he pushes me down on the pillow and ties my hands on the bed post. “You want bondage? I’m giving you bondage” he says and kisses my lips. The kiss is long and deep. I find myself moaning and pulling my arms.

** **

There is so much teasing I'm panting and trying so hard not to yell at him to get on with it. "You don't cum until I tell you to" he instructs. I nod this time and close my eyes as I feel him stretching me wide. He does it slowly until he is all in and I can't even wrap my legs around him. "Shit" he grunts and pulls back. I cry out at the loss of contact but he goes back in immediately and balances himself on his forearms. My inner muscles contract and I can tell I'm going to come. He doesn't stop thrusting and each thrust touches a certain place inside me and I can't stop moaning and moving my lower body to meet his thrusts. "Don't do it Thembeka. I'm warning you" he hisses and stops moving. "Please don't" I beg while desperately trying to get him back. He stares at me his face going soft and then he lowers his lips into mine. We kiss and he starts moving again. He doesn't break the kiss but the thrusts are now deep and fast. It intense and I'm going to cum. "Please" I beg as he pulls his lips away from mine. "Not yet" he pushes me up until my thighs are resting on his. My moans are turning into loud screams and that encourages him to

thrust deeper and harder. When the orgasm finally hits me he reaches his own and stills inside me with my muscles around him. “Shit” he gathers me in his arms as I feel his seed inside me. A minute passes before he pulls out and unties my hands. “I love you Thembeke” he whispers “I love you too” we stare at each other and laugh. “I didn’t hurt you?” “No but I need my knees untied baby. I’m tired” He grabs a string and knot comes off. My left leg is freed first and then the right leg follows. He rubs the back of the knee before he kisses my swollen tummy. The baby kicks and I know that Nqubeko can’t feel the kick but I’m happy to feel the kick when he touches me. “You are so tight. The way you are so tight I’m wondering if you will be able to stretch enough for the baby to come out” I don’t know why he has to bring it up this topic. I’m already trying so hard not to think about having the baby come out of me. Who knows, maybe by that time there will be a miracle. Some scientist will find a less painful way of giving birth.

Chapter 92

Phili.

"Phili. The police are here" says S'nqobile waking me up from sleep. She looks frightened. I sit up and check the time. It's almost midnight and we are all here so I don't understand why the police would be here at this time for the night.

The buzzer goes off again and we both jump. Dabula also wakes up. I hear his door opening and closing.

I slip on my slippers and rush to the passage. Dabula is already in the lounge opening the door.

"What do they want?" I ask as I follow him out.

Two police men step closer to the gate while the second police car is parked on the street.

"Miss Philiswa Khumalo. Is she here?" Ask on of the policeman as we approach.

"It's her" says another. I stop getting closer. What if they are here to arrest me? But I haven't broken any

law.

"Do you know this man?" Another police pulls out his phone to show me a photo. Dabula is closer so he sees the photo first.

"It's Mluleki" he tells me.

I step closer and look at the photo. It's Mluleki. He looks all bruised up.

"What happened?" I ask unable to stop myself.

They don't answer instead the second police car is open and the policeman helps Mluleki out of the car.

"It's just bruises. He needs some painkillers and some sleep" they help Mluleki gets closer to the gate. Dabula quickly opens in and Mluleki holds on to him for support.

"We could have taken him to the hospital but we didn't want people asking questions Mluleki can't answer. Tell him, next time he might not be so lucky" warns the policeman as they go back to their cars. I lock the gate and follow behind Dabula as Mluleki limps to the house.

** **

Dabula puts Mluleki on the couch and I get a wet towel and the first aid kit to clean him up. He winces with each touch but says nothing. Dabula leaves us alone and S'nqobile also says goodnight after watching everything standing in the passage.

"I'm sorry" says Mluleki the moment we are alone.

I don't say anything instead I focus on covering the small cuts on his arm with a plaster.

"Phili" he says again when it's clear that I won't answer.

I ignore him and close the kit before taking it back to the bathroom.

I got the bedroom and S'nqobile is back in bed with Celiwe. I take a pillow and a blanket before taking it back to Mluleki.

"Thanks" he says when I give him the pillow.

I nod and turn down the light.

"Please. Let's talk" he begs.

"There is nothing to talk about. Get some sleep. The pills should kick in soon" I reply quickly and start walking away. He grabs my hand. For an injured person he moves very fast.

"Then you will listen. Sit" he commands his grip tightening on my arm.

He let's go when I wince. "I'm sorry. Please hear me out" he begs.

I remain standing for a moment before finally sitting down opposite him. He also sits and wince when he moves to fast.

"I went to attack Francis. He called his men and we had fight. He is worse than me. Francis is at the hospital. Broken ribs and dislocated jaw" he explains while scratching his cheek.

"But you were in the bar and you left with a hooker. I called and the barman had your phone"

"Daisy was just a trap to get me drunk and take her

home with me so Francis and his man could set me up. She confessed and I went to confront him" he click his tongue.

"Set you up how?"

He looks at me and says nothing for a full minute. I remain quiet and wait. He takes a deep breath.

"They were going to say I raped her. Can you believe it? First he tries to shit with you and now he...." The sound of his fist hitting the table makes me jump.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to do that" he rubs his fist.

"So how come the police brought you over instead of the hospital?" Or jail? But I don't say that out loud.

"Sometimes its who you know" he shrugs.

"So you didn't sleep with Daisy?"

He looks at me in shock.

"That's why you are angry? You think I cheated on you?"

"I called. We were talking. Then she talks about your favourite bra and suddenly i'm forgotten. How

would you conclude if you were me?" My voice is a little louder.

"I would give you a benefit of a doubt" he shouts.

"Well you do have a thing for rented women. Even the barman knows"

"And i'm not sleeping with the barman. Whatever he thinks of me I don't give a damn but you. You could at least trust me"

"And I do"

"Mxm. J ust go to bed. I'll be gone in the morning" he says dismissively.

I don't move.

"I am allowed to have doubts Mluleki. The day wasn't exactly a hit and you were angry when you left so what was I suppose to think?"

"I wasn't angry. I was disappointed. It hurts that your kids acted like I held them hostage with the outing. They don't like me and there is no faking it" he fixes the pillow.

"Give them time. They are still trying to find their

way around all this" I really need to talk to Celiwe about this.

"And you? Do you want them to like me?" He asks before laying down.

"Of cause I do. What kind of question is that?"

"It's a question"

"You know I do but I can't force them into a situation. They are just kids trying to find their way around all this" I hate that I sound like i'm making excuses for my kids.

"You mean they are just kids who prefer Nqubeko then me. I get it" he turns and face the other way.

"I can't talk to you when you are like this. We will talk in the morning" I don't wait for him to reply. If people aren't sleeping I would slam the door so he knows I wish to slam him for being dramatic.

** **

I find S'nqobile still awake and biting her nails. She is nervous about something and I hope it's not something that will piss me off.

"Phili" she speaks before I could get back to bed.

"What is it?"

"I think I need to move to J ohannesburg"

I stop moving and look at her.

"As in J ohannesburg?" I ask just to be sure. I'm angry so it's easy to misunderstand when you are angry at something.

"Yes. I'll look for a job there and see where life takes me"

"To prostitution? What else is out there for women like you and Me Nqo? Do you think there is someone out there willing to take someone like you in that place?" She winces and I realize i'm being harsh.

"You will be alone there. They will abuse you then throw you out to the street as soon as you stop making them money" I move from my bed and sit

next to her.

"But here its not like we are getting a happily ever after. What will happen to us should Nqubeko decide he has had enough of our family? He will throw us in the streets"

"Forget Nqubeko. I'm working on my own project Nqo and I was hoping that you and Thembeke could be part of it. I want to keep it in the family. J ust the three of us doing something that will not only make us money but will help many women like us out there"

"Part of it as what? I can't handle anything that requires top level education"

"Stop selling yourself short. That is exactly why I wanted us to work together. We have different skills and all of them are needed" I lower my voice when it sounds like I'm yelling at her.

"Okay fine. I hear you but you and Mluleki don't seem to be going smooth. What it he decides to step back before we even start? I'm not trying to be a party pooper but these things happen"

"Even if Mluleki walks away i'll find a way to raise money and get us running. I've tasted the level I want Nqo and I'm not letting anyone take it away" If he dumps me I'll still use his connections and start on a smaller scale but I won't give up.

She nods and pulls the blanket up to her neck. Seeing her do this makes me realize that i'm not doing this okay. Nqo is allowed to be afraid and I should offer comfort instead of yelling.

"Look Sisi. You and I are not going back there. Not after all this. Its okay to be scared but we are not going to let fear keep us in the corner. We are going to be fine. Together we are going to be okay" I offer my hand and she holds out her before she smiles.

"Okay" she gives me a squeeze before letting go. I also get into bed and fix the blankets around me.

"So when Thembeke comes back we are going to start working on your project?"

"No. I have three proposals to do and we are going to start tomorrow. We might have to go see Miss Hilda in Tongaat tomorrow evening" she is coming

with me and I hope Mluleki won't throw a fit when I take an uber. But I'll deal with that part when I get there.

** **

Nqubeko

"Nqubeko" he answers on the third ring and I hear the beeping of the door as he steps out.

"Its too early for you to be dropping Phili off. Did you stay over?"

"I beat up Francis last night. Jack and his assholes brought me over to Phili. Perfect alibi" he explains and I hear a lighter going off.

"What did you do Mluleki?" I hiss because I can't be too loud. Thembeka is still sleeping.

"I would have delayed. I was willing to take it slowly until I was satisfied but they sent Daisy over to

seduce me. She was going to cry rape Nqubeko. Can you imagine Phili hearing that I've been accused of sexual assault? They crossed the line. So I dragged Daisy over. Had her spilling her guts and then went over to Francis. He called for back up and I gave it to him good. Someone called Jack and they brought me over. Which was good because I was nowhere near Francis's hospital room last night. I was on the couch in Thembeke's house" I can hear him pulling the cigarette and then exhaling slowly.

"So Francis is dead? Before Phili could confront him?" He said he wanted her to see him at his lowest so she doesn't carry the incident with her.

"She wasn't going to do if anyway. Like I told you before, Phili doesn't take instructions on something she is not willing to do. I can see it on her face that she wasn't going to do that"

"Give the girl a break. She is still adjusting to everything else" unlike us, women can't just become something different that quickly. Phili is a stubborn person by nature. Mluleki has to accept that.

"Yeah well even her kids don't seem to like me. I'm starting to think maybe I wasn't cut out for Family anyway"

"Don't say that. Those kids like you they are just as scared as you are" it can't be easy seeing a man take your mother all the time.

"Ey Nqubeko. I tried. Bought them things, tried to engage in their conversation. I don't even know what dragon ballz or what is power rangers. I thought power ranger was a battery or something but still I could feel the rejection. They'd rather it's you"

"It's not rejection. It's a slow process Mluleki. You don't want to be a one hit wonder, right? You want to be a full time parent and for that it needs to be unrushed. You want to build trust not buy it. Be open and welcoming. They will come to you on their own terms. Just don't take Phili away from them for too long" I try my best to make him feel better.

"Or I can just leave them alone. No one said loneliness kills"

"You can't. You love Phili. Its not a passing crush. You love her with all your heart. You can't walk away from her Mluleki. If you force yourself to leave you will only break your hearts because she loves you too. J ust take a deep breath, finish your smoke and go back inside. If you see those little people greet them. Let them watch their Power Rangers and if they ask a question engage with them. What you are feeling is what they are feeling for you too. You can be a bit scary when you just sit on the couch and say nothing. Plus those kids have gone through a lot in a very short time" my phone beeps. It's Danger sending me a name. I still can't believe that they have found something about Thembeke's assault that day. That's the thing about small communities. Someone always know something and any right digging gets you the results. I just didn't think it will be this quick.

"Danger is texting me" says Mluleki.

"It's probably the name. He did say they got a lead very fast. Like I told you, someone always sees something Nqubeko.

"Yeah" I put the phone on hold and open the text message.

It's two words. Josiah Mbonambi.

"Mluleki"

"Stay in Cape Town. Stay there" he replies quickly before the line goes dead.

I stand still and stare at my phone. The name is there. Josiah Mbonambi.

"Nqubeko" Thembeke's voice penetrate my thoughts. I look up and she is standing at the door smiling at me.

"Morning my love" I rush to her and wrap my arms around her.

"Morning" she wants to let go but I hold her tighter. I need to calm down before she sees my face.

"Have you got any special kicks today?" My hand reaches between us and rest on her bump.

"Yes. I can't wait for them to be stronger so you can feel them too" she starts to pull away from and I force myself to hide the kind of anger and pain i'm

feeling right now.

Another text from Mluleki.

"I'm craving a pineapple" she walks to the fridge and luckily we have a pineapple in the fridge. I open Mluleki's text message. He is ordering me to stay in Cape Town.

I decide to call him as Thembeke starts eating grapes and pineapple at the same time.

"You stay there. I mean it Nqubeko. That woman needs you more than this. Just stay there and give her the best time of her life" he instruct.

"What are you going to do?" I try to sound all calm so I don't scare Thembeke.

"I'll call you back" he ends the call.

I stare at Thembeke again. When I was marrying her Josiah and his kids weren't thrilled but I thought it was because they don't like me. They did spread those lion and cub stories after all. But now I'm seeing things differently.

"Babe. Tell me, Before we got married. Did you

know uncle Josiah?"

Thembeke stops eating and looks at me.

"Yeah. He came to my home a few times. My uncles always said he owes them four cows" she replies and goes back to eating.

"Four cows? For what?"

"I don't know. But he did come to pay some money" she puts down the slice of pineapple and looks at me. "Now that you mention it. He did come to pay a very large sum of money. I remember my uncles saying they wanted real cows not money and him saying he couldn't just bring the cows over. They had a huge argument but I never knew what it was about"

"I see. Bring that pineapple and those grapes in bed baby. It's still early"

She nods and takes the packages. I let her walk ahead and follow her while typing on my phone.

"I think Thembeke's family knew about the rape. They asked him to pay and he paid them in cash" I

press send and wait for Mluleki's reply.

He replies quickly. "Those bastards. But you stay in the Cape Nqubeko. I mean it"

"I think these grapes are off" she starts spitting them out.

I put the phone down and hold out my hands so she can spit them on me.

"Taste the pineapple as well. It might be off too" I suggest. It's surprising that she has eaten a handful already but now they are off.

She takes a slice and bites. She makes the face when she notice that I want to laugh.

"Pineapple is fine. Its the grapes"

"The grapes are fine. The dramatic person inside you doesn't like them anymore. I can't wait to meet her" I dump the mess on the trashcan and rinse my hands.

"Me too. It could be him though" she laughs.

I dry my hands and go back to her. She looks so beautiful which makes me emotional because who

could hurt someone like this.

"Are you okay?" She asks and I nod quickly.

"I'm fine. Let's feed the baby some pineapples" I get into bed next to her and kiss her lips.

"After this we might need to add a banana" she giggles.

"Whatever you want baby. Anything for you both" I reply.

Chapter 93

Thembeke

I can tell something is wrong but Ngubeko is hiding it from me. He hasn't been okay since I found him in the kitchen talking quietly with Mluleki. I asked and the answer was "it's nothing serious, just business" then he smiled before he started making love to me. Not that I hated sex but the way he was, was just scary and I tell could that he was emotional about something. "Are you going to swim over or I should come over there?" I don't want to swim. I just want to stay in this water and float like this stomach isn't

heavy. The weather is hot today and it feels good to be swimming in a hot sun. "Come on in" I reply and watch my feet. He jumps in and swim towards me. It been good, everything just going smooth until that phone call and now it's just okay. I want him to talk to me. Tell me what's wrong. "Hey" he lifts me up and I let out a laugh. I can't help myself. "Hey yourself" I hold on to him when he finally lowers me down. "You look beautiful" "Thank you" sometimes I do feel like Nqubeko is feeling sad for me. It a feeling I get whenever he looks at me like there is something he wants to say but won't say it. We did spend a lot of time not communicating but we both got used to giving each other what we always assumed the other needed. "I wanted us to go overseas you know. Just be miles away and then it happened" he says and I see the sadness in his eyes. "My breakdown?" he nods and holds my hand when I start to float again. "Ngcobo said it was going to happen anyway so I think we should be glad it came and went" I take his other hand and start kicking my feet in the water. "I never want you to feel like that again" "It's something we both have

no control Nqubeko. Life will happen the way it wants. We accept what we can't change” He doesn't reply and I continue to swim still holding on to him.

*** **

“I know you love water but you have to eat now” says Nqubeko for the 3rd time now. I'm starving but I'm having so much fun in water I just don't want to get out yet. “Few more minutes” I beg and go under the water. I deep myself few more times as Nqubeko stands there with his hands on his waistline and a disapproving face. “Young lady you better get out of there before I come get you myself” he warns and it makes me laugh. “Yah yah pa. I'm coming out now” I swim the stairs and pull myself up. He rushes over with a towel. “Come eat. I made some sandwiches” he takes my hand to his and we both walk back to the apartment. One of the ladies sees us and waves with a smile on her face. We wave back and laugh because she is giving us the same look the adults give a young couple. The difference is that we are not a young couple. I sit on the couch covered by a dry towel while Nqubeko

serves me sandwiches. Looking at them I realize why the lady was smiling. She made the sandwiches for Nqubeko. “How much did you pay her?” I take a bite. “She offered. She saw how excited you were to be swimming and said you will be out of energy by the time you come out” he sits next to me and take his own sandwich. “It was nice. Haven’t enjoyed being playful like this” “I know. I’m starting to think I should prepare for two kids” I stop chewing and look at him. We are not having twins. “The new born and the mother who is turning into a new born herself” he ducks when I try to hit him. “But I love it baby. You are allowed to be as childish as you want my love” his tone is going back to seriousness which means the issue is around me and my upbringing. “Nqubeko. If there is something about me you will tell me, right?” “Yes” he replies quickly. There is definitely something and he is hiding it. “Even if you think I’m weak and I won’t be able to handle it” “You are the strongest person I know and you can handle anything” “But I’m afraid of giving birth. I don’t think I can go through that” I might as well confess since we are being open

about everything. “I’ll get you the strongest painkillers money can buy. You will get everything to make sure that the experience is better for you” he leans over and kisses my forehead.

**** * * * * *

Phili

“That wasn’t so hard was it?” I ask S’ngobile as we leave our meeting. She was beyond nervous but thanks to Hilda’s outgoing nature. She was able to come out of her shell and before long we were all laughing. “She wasn’t even scary like I feared” she smiles and fixes her skirt for the 31st time since she wore it. “Now stop pulling it down. You are going to rip it” I slap her hands away. We both laugh and walk to the parking lot. I requested an uber after not being able to reach Mluleki on his phone and that guy he told me to call if I need transport wasn’t picking up. I have no idea where he is and I’ll wait for him to come back. “Do you mind if we go for coffee?” she asks before we reach our uber guy. “And a proper lunch; I’m hungry” I suggest. We both get in the car and the guy start driving off.

We leave Hilda's offices and head to the city. I'm busy looking through my documents while Sngobile is busy chatting to Dabula on her phone. "I'm starting to think we are being followed" says the driver. We all check behind us and there is a car following us. "There is no licence numbers" says Sngobile her voice shaking. "Keep going. We will stop at the police station or garage" I tell the guy and he also looks frightened. "And if they run us off the road?" asks Sngobile "Why? Do you have enemies? Ladies if you are in some kind trouble please tell me. I'm just an uber guy" says the man sounding like he might burst into tears. "We are not in some trouble. They could be after your car" I argue. Why assume we are the ones in trouble. It could be his competition or those taxi drivers hating him for taking the business away from them. My phone rings and we all scream. I think we are now scared. It's Mluleki. He picks this moment to call me. "Mlu" I answer. "Tell that fool to slow down. Does he want to lose control or something?" he yells. "You are behind us?" I turn to look again and the driver is waving us down but he doesn't look like

Mluleki. “No but I asked you nicely not to use uber or any other requested transport but obviously you can’t be told anything Phili. That’s Lungelo and he is going to drive you back to the house. Tell that boy to stop and get out” he instruct. “Where are you?” how did he even know that I took an uber? “I’ll be back tomorrow evening. Just get in the car and let Lungelo drive you. We will talk about this when I return” he ends the call. “And?” asks the driver not slowing the car down. “You can slow down. But keep going please” there is no way I am taking such instructions from Mluleki. You don’t vanish and surface when you want to order me around. I am not that person. “So it’s Mluleki?” asks Sngobile still looking behind us. The car slows down and the guy behind us indicates that we should stop. “His pet. Just ignore him. You will take us to the mall for lunch. We will take a local taxi for home” I tell the guy. He seems unsure but he doesn’t say anything. It’s time that Mluleki learns that I can’t be controlled. Not by phone.

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Mluleki

I can't say I'm shocked. Phili is a hard woman to tame but there is no rush. She needs patience and I have loads of that for a woman I want. I never really expected her to be a submissive but she needs to know some limits to testing me. "Do you need a moment?" ask J unior. "No. We have to finish today" I have to go back and deal with Phili before she goes too far. "So you are going to let her get away with it?" he looks bothered. "Get away with what?" "The disrespect. She disrespected you; boss" "She is testing her limits and it is all fun and games J unior. No one needs to die" someone just needs a firm reminder that will come disguised as pleasure she is looking for. He nods and keeps walking. I follow, I never thought I'll be back here so soon and for something like this but life has other ideas. It's a sleepy place that looks great in summer but can be a bit dry in winter. I think I would have loved it if it wasn't so harsh on everyone I know. "If it was me, I would have backhanded it to her" he says quietly. "You never backhand a woman J unior. No matter

what she does you never lay your hand to her like that. It cages them and trusts me, you don't want a caged woman Junior" As much as most people think a woman you scare into a corner is respectful but it's not that at all. She turns into something that you might find good for a short time in a long run she turns into a stranger. "But women can be annoying. Sometimes you just want to get laid and she will want all the trimmings" he complains and I laugh. The boy has some growing to do. "Then you give her all the trimmings. Love is about that. She gives and you give as well" I advise. "Until she is out there running the streets" "A well-kept woman doesn't run the streets. They do that out of boredom" Thembeke comes to my head. She used to be out there with her fake friends while Nqubeko was busy chasing the money and Nobuhle. "So you think we can do better to stop the hood behaviour?" he asks looking amused. "One, you pick a hood chick and expect a suburb behaviour then you are in for some eye opening. A woman remains what she was when you met her and expecting a big change that doesn't come from inside is just selfish. You

pick a hood you deal with her hoodness or let her go or if she wants to change then it's all good" I wouldn't want Phili to lose herself for me. As much as I want her rolling with the big shots of business world but behind closed door I want her barefooted and smiling like she is enjoying an inside joke. I want her to remain my Phili. "I hear you; boss" he doesn't sound convinced. If there is anything that I've learnt on Nqubeko's problems is that never ever neglect someone who gives you comfort. If Nqubeko loved Thembeka right from start we wouldn't be trying to piece together what she didn't even know was broken. We wouldn't be discovering all these things now and he wouldn't be drowning in guilty because he never saw it coming. ****

Getting inside is easy. They have a dog but the lazy bastard is greedy, he is busy enjoying a steak we got for him. The door is easy to break in and the house is very quiet. I make my way around the bedroom. They sleep with the door closed but it opens quietly. If I wasn't in a rush I would wait until

his senses kick in but we have to go so I have to wake him up. The woman wakes up first and I quickly cover mouth before she wakes the kids. I don't want to scare them too. "What...." he doesn't finish when he sees a gun on my hands. "One wrong move I'll blow your brains. Trust me I don't give a damn but I doubt you want to die today" I warn before removing my hand on her mouth. She remains quiet and the man recognises me. I'm cool with that because where is the fun when people think some stranger got in. "You sit there and be quiet. I do the talking today. You speak when I ask a question" instruct. He nods quickly. "Look outside the window" I order and move aside so he can walk past. He does so and I hope Junior is done. "Josiah gave you some cows. You know what he did and you asked him to pay. He gave you cows. Am I wrong?" I ask and he doesn't reply. I give him a moment to gather his thoughts. I'm a fair person. "Thembeke" that's all he says. We are right on track with memory jogging. "Yes. A helpless Thembeke that Josiah raped and you asked for cows instead of calling the police. But who am I kidding? You

never cared about her anyway” I move from the lady and stand behind him. I want to pop his head as he stands but there will be no pain in there. He needs to suffer. Two bulls drop on the ground. There is no sound just both of them falling. “No....” he doesn’t continue as two more cows also drop on the ground. “We gave them slow poison. Each day you will lose four cows until there is none left. You didn’t have them before you sold Thembeke to Josiah so we are putting things back into order”

He is shaking. His mouth opens and close but no words come out. I’ve made many people speechless before. “Then we come to the abuse. You and your brother abused Thembeke as a child and to top that, you convinced her that she had no other options. That the abuse was part of being an orphan. That you were doing her a favour. We are going to put things into order. I thought about this long and hard. You don’t need a bullet, nope you need to stay in fear and watch your life waste away but be unable to fix it. I’m going to set you up. You won’t know when and how but the police will come

knocking at your door and take you to jail for a crime you didn't commit but you won't be able to prove that you are innocent. Once you are inside someone will make you his bitch and make your life miserable. You tie a child on a bedpost and leave her to stand there as punishment? Let's see you take the punishment" I stop talking when my voice starts giving away my anger. "I'm sorry. I was...." he starts sobbing. "When you are inside I'll take the kids. You don't deserve them after all" "Please not my kids" begs the wife her voice trembling. "Because you didn't know what they were doing?" I don't even turn to face her. She doesn't reply and I ignore her. "I know you will tell your brother and he might try to run but he can't outrun me. I came to you first and I trust you will pass the message along. You both won't see it coming" two more cows drop dead. He gasps but says nothing. "It's sad that these cows never asked to be involved in this but you got them involved" I step back when his arm move. His fist lands on the gun that I used to block his hit. He punches like a bitch but its good for him because a man with a broken arm can't protect himself. "What?

You thought I'm a weak child too? No, I'm your match and we are just starting" I walk to the door and leave it open. He doesn't follow and J unior has his gun drawn. He should have believed me when I told him that these men are cowards by nature.

*** ** I leave J unior in the BnB in uLundi and drive back to Durban before the night ends and a new day starts. "You did it" asks Nqubeko answering his phone. "Did you even sleep?" I tease him. "No. We had a movie marathon with Thembeke. She just fell asleep after a long day playing in the pool. "So she is fine?" with Thembeke you just never know. "She is fine just letting out the child in her" I can tell he is grinning. I could tease him but I do the same when it comes to Phili. "Spoil her man. She deserves it. Let me call my own woman and get some sleep Nqubeko" I end the call before he starts asking me questions. Phili's phone rings once before she answers. She should be sleeping. "Why are you up?" "Celiwe had a tummy ache but she is sleeping now. Are you driving?" she is always alert. "Yes. I heading to Durban" I wait for

a question but it doesn't come. "What was wrong with her tummy?" I continue. "Too much snacks" she laughs. "I'm sorry you had to wake up and deal with all that""I'm a mother so it comes with a tittle" "I guess. So can this guy take this mother for breakfast?" it's only few hours away anyway. "I heard you rocked your presentation and that deserves some celebration" She laughs and it makes me hard. "I thought you will be angry that I went against your uber protest""Ah baby I am angry but I won't let that overshadow your brilliant work. We will deal with the uber issue later on and I might rethink the whole thing if you convince me otherwise" "Convince how?" she asks and I laugh. "I don't know Phili. I'm open for surprises" I drop my voice so she gets a hint. There is a laugh and I have to slow down this car if I want to make it back to her. "I love you Phili. You and the kids. You are my home" after years of looking finally I think this is where I belong.

Chapter 94

Thembeke

A door closing wakes me from dosing off. It's Nqubeko with takeaways. Unlike the past two days; today it's raining hard and it's very cold. I quickly grab the remote and pretend I was flicking through the channels but in truth I was falling asleep on the couch.

"I'm back with your beans" he announces before heading the kitchen. I get up and follow him. I've been craving sugar beans since last night and I couldn't eat anything else so this morning Nqubeko had to go get some in restaurant down the road.

"It smells good" I open the take away and dip my finger in before kicking it.

"Here is a plate before you burn yourself" he opens the cupboard and hand me a plate.

"It's not too hot but I'll dish up before you grow more grey hair worrying about me" I tease him while dishing the beans to the plate and he adds steamed bread on it.

"I'm allowed to worry....." He stops talking because my phone is ringing.

"It's in the charger. I'll go get it" I put down the spoon and hurry to the lounge.

It's my aunt and I wonder why because they don't call me at all. Ever since I found my real family and left them they don't even ask me for money.

"Hello" I lean on the couch.

"Thembeka" she sounds like she is crying.

"Yes. What's wrong?" I can hear other people speaking around her. I think there is a bit of singing as well.

"It's your uncles. They are both dead" she cries harder and I hear other crying voices joining in.

"What do you mean dead?" Were they both sick? Was it a car accident? My head is trying to process everything but I'm failing.

"They had an argument last night. I was in the bedroom when I heard a gunshot. I thought they were killing a cow because the cows have been

dropping like flies. There are only 6 left and they were arguing about it. I left them. I shouldn't have left" she let's out a sob and I feel my own eyes filling up.

"So they killed each other over cows?" It doesn't sound like something they would do.

"It was more than that and that witch knows but she won't say what they were fighting about. The other day we woke up to dead cows. They spoke about it quietly but she took her kids and sent them to her family saying it wasn't safe. They continued to argue until that gunshot. I found him with a bullet in his head and that bastard shot himself in the mouth after. Both of them dead just like that" she cried and I wiped my own eyes.

"I'll be there tomorrow evening Aunt" if I booked a flight today I was going to be in Durban today and drive home tomorrow morning.

"Okay. We will see you then" she blew her nose before there was a loud voice insulting someone.

"Get her out of here" I heard someone yell and then

it sounded like there was a fight before the line went dead.

"What's wrong?" Asks Nqubeko pulling me closer to his chest.

"My uncles are dead. Both of them" even saying it doesn't sound real at all.

"Dead? What happened?" He wraps his arms around me.

"The other killed other and then turned the gun on himself. Something to do with dying cows. I just don't get it Nqubeko" I bury my head to his chest and cry.

He doesn't say anything but holds me tight as I cry for the uncles I grew up treating as my only family.

** **

The crying finally stops and I have no appetite for beans anymore. I go to the bedroom and start packing my clothes.

"What are you doing?" Asks Nqubeko walking in.

"I have to pack. Could you book us a flight home?" I throw the clothes into suitcases.

"We are only leaving tomorrow but I don't think you should be going there" his hand points my stomach

"You are pregnant and those people are the reason why you had a breakdown"

Judging by his tone I can tell he is not going to let me leave. I know this man and I can tell when he is going to say no to something.

"They are my uncles"

"Doesn't matter. They didn't even treat you right Thembeke" he sits down on the bed and looks at me.

"But I have to bury them" I give him a look that says 'Are you hearing yourself'

"Why? Pregnant women don't need that kind of stress baby. And that family is full of messy people. I don't think you should go"

"It's a good thing I'm not asking for permission or opinion" I throw the last dress in and zip the bag.

He raises his eyebrows and leaves the room. I finish packing everything and take a quick shower so I can take a real nap since it seems Nqubeko and I are having a fight.

** ** *

Sleep doesn't come now that I need it. I keep turning and tossing until I hear him coming in and then I pretend to be sleeping.

"I made you some food" he says before he walks closer. I want to sit up and take the food but my pride won't let me so I lay still.

"I know you are awake. Don't starve the baby" he puts the tray down and stands next to me.

I slowly remove the blanket and look at him. He looks at me and smiles.

"I added some meat on your food. Please eat"

I sit up and take the plate. The smell makes my stomach complain. I am hungry so I eat.

Nqubeko sits down and watch me eat while occasionally removing the mess on my mouth.

"If it was up to me you wouldn't care about those people. They didn't care about you" he says quietly.

"Nqubeko....."

"You've always been a money making scheme to them. They failed to protect you Thembeke and when the time came they sold you to me"

His words did hurt because they were true. I was sold to him because he had money. They didn't even consider that he was way older than me.

"Thanks for the food" i removed the tray on my lap and wiped my mouth with a wet wipe that he included on the tray.

He didn't say anything instead he got up and took the tray back to the kitchen. I laid down and pulled the blanket over my head.

He returned shortly after and i heard him take off his shoes and then his belt came off. I guess he was joining me in bed.

"So you had them kill each other?" i asked still under the blanket.

He didn't pause anything and after a second or two he was under the blanket pulling me closer to him. I turned to give him my back but that didn't seem to bother him at all. He stuck his legs behind mine and his arm around my tummy.

"Sleep a bit. We will talk when you are calmer" he whispered behind my ear.

"I don't want to sleep. Did you have them killing each other? The dying cows? Was that you?" My voice was breaking. I was going to start crying.

He pulled my leg over his leg and his finger traced the elastic of my panties.

"Nqubeko...." I tried to speak but he stopped me by moving his hand even further inside my undies.

"We killed the cows and they killed each other. They couldn't face knowing that we knew so they took an easy way out" his finger found where it was aiming and I took a deep breath.

"Knew what?"

He rubbed me a bit and kissed my neck while at it. I'm always sensitive lately so it didn't surprise me when my body began to respond to the touch.

"Knew what Nqubeko?" i asked again when he didn't reply.

"They knew who did it. Instead of calling the police they asked him to give them cows" he replied.

My head processed all this. My uncles knew someone raped me that day and they asked him to pay.

"It was Josiah" he whispered.

I nodded before turning around to face him. His eyes were filled with tears and his lips trembled a bit so i opened my legs wider and kissed his lips. He kissed me back hard and within seconds he was inside me. I held him tight as he started gentle until he was fast and his grip on my thigh was too hard. When i finally came i didn't even acknowledge it too hard. I wanted him to come so i squeezed my internal muscles as hard as i could until he was

moaning loud and his face tense. When he finally came i wrapped my arms and legs around him.

"What are you going to do to J osiah?" I asked

"I'm going to kill him myself" he replied before burying his head on my neck.

Chapter 95

Mluleki

I'm doing the kids run. It's not something I do but when Phili got help up in her meeting I offered to come get them. I don't even know why are they still going to school because most schools are done with exams and kids are staying at home. It's just this school with their "better than the rest" attitude. But it cost real money so I think they are trying to cover their money worth service. Saying I'm feeling nervous is an understatement. I'm a criminal and I've done the unthinkable but today i'm smoking nonstop because I'm afraid of three little people.

The bell goes off and in a minute I see faces in all corners. Some are running to their waiting parents while some are running to each other. I guess the evening hugs are being delivered before everyone heads home. I scan the crowd and spot Celiwe and her friends. One of them wears glasses and she keeps shaking her head and adjusting the glasses as they slip on her face. Celiwe is laughing at something and one boy walks past them. They all stand and look at him with adoring eyes. We are going to have a problem.

"I scan another crowd for the boys and spot them both. The other one is limping while being supported by the other. Two boys are carrying their backpacks. I step on the cigarette and march forward. The kids step aside and let me pass as I approach the limping guy.

"What happened?" I ask and they both jump. I don't think they saw me at all.

"I was playing rugby" he replies quickly and his voice sounds scared.

"Rugby? Since then do you play rugby?" I take the bags from the two frightened boys and they both run off at the same time. I'm not even that scary.

"Coach said if I don't play I won't be a man. I didn't want people laughing at me" he looks down and I can tell he is going to start crying.

"Show me that coach" I pick him up.

Celiwe has seen this so she comes running.

"Uncle Mluleki. What's wrong?" she asks.

"Show me your rugby coach" I demand as we walk back towards the classrooms.

"In the staffroom" says Celiwe running beside me. I see the security approach. It took him long enough.

"Sir....."

"Not now" I tell him before he even gets close "Show me the staff room" I ask Celiwe. She points the room in the corner.

"You are not allowed...." Continues the security clearly testing his authority.

"Not now" I repeat and head straight to the staffroom. They all look up when the door opens. Seven teachers and four mistresses.

"Who coaches rugby?" I demand while placing the kid on the table.

"I do" the man from the corner replies before he gets up. He is a large man. The type you don't fight but kill to make the process faster.

"Did you force my son to play rugby because if he doesn't play he won't be a man enough?" The ladies look shocked.

The door opens and three security guys walk in. One teacher has enough sense to tell them to stand back.

"Look. I didn't mean for the little guy to get hurt. You have to admit. He has the body for the it" he smiles and approach the table. I should have asked the kids to wait outside.

"How dare you tell my kid that he won't be a man enough? What gives you that authority?"

"I thought they are raised by a single mother....."
Someone says and I turn my head to see who but they stop talking.

"So that gives him a right to tell them they need to get all bruised up to be regarded manly?" I look at everyone in the room to show them I'm not the type to be tested.

"I apologize for the error. I thought I was encouraging him" says the coach

"By injuring?"

"It's not that serious. He needs to rub and get some rest" says the second teacher trying to take care of the situation.

"Why don't I pull your muscles and call the kids to pound on you and then you tell me it's not that deep?" I give him a hard stare. He quickly looks away.

"I can take him to the doctor if that will please you Sir" I can see another lady rolling her eyes.

"Do you have kids?" I ask her and she shakes her

head.

"Then you are not a woman enough so you roll your eyes at me again I'll take them out" I kick myself immediately for that one because there are kids here.

"You can't threaten her like that" jumps in the security.

"Or what? These are our kids. We send them here for education and not for them to be told injuries makes you man enough. He can play chess and he will still be a man enough. He could be gay and he will still be a man. You do this nonsense again I'll come here and we will see what defines a real man. Now apologize" I demand.

He looks like he wants to argue but I see another teacher giving him a hard stare.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have forced you to play. Whatever sport you play won't define you. You will grow up and be a man even if you don't like sport" he holds out his fist and I nod to the boy to fist bump him.

"Are we okay now?" He asks and the boy nods.
There is even a smile on his face.

"Good. While we are here. Is there any sport you
would like to play?" I ask and he shakes his head.

"That's settled" I pick him up.

"But physical education is important" the lady chips
in her tone sounding shocked.

"Physical education and forcing kids to play a sport
they don't like is not the same. I'm not a teacher but
I know that. Good day ladies and gents. Let's not
have this again" I take the kids and leave.

*** **

I'm surprised to see other parents still outside with
their kids. I thought only black people were gossip
lovers but clearly I was wrong.

"Celiwe" some boy yells and waves at her. She
check if i'm looking before waving back.

"Who is that?" I ask as I open the door for them to get in.

"His name is Luke" she says shyly.

"Same class with you?" I put the backpacks between them.

"No" she says quietly.

"I see" I buckle them up and buckle the other kid in the front before walking to my side. Another tall white man approach the car. I wait for him.

"I'm Gerald Frederick" he extends a hand.

"I'm Mluleki Mbatha" I shake his hand.

"Ah. Nice to finally meet you. My boy has been taken by your daughter and as a father I try to take interest on his interest because if I don't someone will and I'll be left wondering where I went wrong"

I want to laugh at this but I doubt Mr Frederick will appreciate it.

"What do you mean?"

"Come on. We've been boys before. We know how

this goes. He likes her and I thought we might as well give them a platform to explore"

I never thought I'll ever come across someone like this man in my life.

"How old were you when you first had sex?"

He immediately turn bright pink.

"I don't see how that....."

"You want them to explore. You want your kid to learn using my kid. If your son wants to start having sex you think he can use my kid to practice"

"Oh no I didn't mean that" he laughs nervously.

"Good because if I found out that your son is trying to teach my daughter sex I'll come to your house and chop his dick off" I put a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"I thought we could just let them go out on a date. Just a kids date and we can both go with to make sure nothing inappropriate happens. I wouldn't let my son do that to her"

"Good. I'll talk to my wife my wife and Celiwe. A date

won't be that bad but one single thought about my daughter that way he won't have any tool take explore"

The man nods and I smile at him before opening the door.

"Good talk Mr Frederick"

"Yes, yes Mr Mbatha" he walks away and I laugh before starting the car.

"How about we start in the pharmacy and then get some burgers before we go home" I suggest.

I expect nervous voices but I get a cheerful yes. Kids are weird but they do grow on you if you give them a chance.

** **

Phili.

I check the clock again and it's almost four pm.

Mluleki said they are coming home over an hour ago.

"Maybe they...." I start speaking but S'nqobile stops me.

"He would have called. They probably went to the mall" she takes the phone when I reach for it.

I'm starting to think I shouldn't have asked him to pick them up. I should have cancelled my meeting and went to get them myself.

"If they have anymore junk food they will get sick" I've been thinking about caster oil since these people eat anything they get.

"Let the kids be. You and I didn't have people who wanted to spoil us. Let Mluleki do that" she is so calm. For someone who is jumpy most of the time I must say she seems to trust Mluleki.

"I hope he didn't try to force them to like him. He is not patient enough. They need to come to him not be forced"

"The kids like Mluleki. They love Nqubeko more but

they like him too. He is just closed off which is understandable since he doesn't have any kids but give him time and you will see. Kids love safety. Nqubeko makes them feel safe that's why they adore him. Once they sense safety on him they will open up" she advises.

I nod and check the gate again.

"I'm making a snack. Do you want any?" She drags her slippers to the kitchen.

"No. I planned dinner for Mlu. If I eat anything I won't eat later" I follow her to the kitchen.

"I miss Thembeke. Don't you?" She takes out the bread.

"Yeah I miss her too" as much as she called often but I missed her being in the house.

"When I was in jail I was scared that i'll be alone when I came out. It was Mluleki who told me that Thembeke will welcome me with open arms in her house. So far I've felt like I belong" she smiles and I smile back too.

"So Mluleki contacted you often?"

"Not only that. He also paid for my security. He had people looking after me in all corners"

I need to thank Mluleki for this. Someone else would have said it wasn't his problem.

"I was surprised to find that Nqubeko is quite popular on the inside. One man actually said I resembled that tiny woman Mbonambi married. I was shocked since we were in a female section but there are men there. To shocked that they knew Thembeke too. One said she looked like a ticking time bomb" she laughs.

"What does that mean?" I ask while checking the curtain if I can spot Mluleki's car two streets away.

"Because we are tiny and most tiny women are said to be responsible for much damage once they burst. The dynamite saying"

"Oh I see but we are not that tiny. We were small before now we are almost average" I argue.

"No. We are not average. It doesn't help that you

guy picked guys who tower over you" She ducks when I try to hit her with a slice of lettuce.

"And you are violent as well" she teases and laughs.

"You also need to go out there and see people. Who knows, you might find your own tower" I tease her.

"Don't let me sitting in this house fool you. I do have someone and they are not towering over me"

I stop moving and look at her.

"You are dating?" this is news to me.

"Yes and I'll introduce her some day. The kids are here" she says as she takes her food and leave the kitchen.

I follow her and she is telling the truth. Mluleki is driving in. I open the door and wait as he parks and gets out. I see Celiwe holding a large teddy bear in her arms.

He walks around and let's them out before they carry their backpacks and other shopping bags. He open the passenger side and carry out the boy. I can see a bandaid on his thigh.

"What happened" I walk the them.

"He played rugby. He pulled a muscle but I took him to a pharmacy before we went for lunch. How was your meeting?" He kisses my cheek.

"Pulled a muscle how? He can't walk? Is his leg swollen?"

"Mah. Relax. I'm fine. Uncle Mluleki gave me a rub and i'll sleep it off" he says so calmly. Where are the tears? Every injury is accompanied by tears in this house.

"Yes champ. You will sleep it off" says Mluleki carrying him to the house. I follow them feeling like i'm being left out.

There is chaos inside as Celiwe brags about her flowers and a teddy bear.

"Can I put them in a vase?" She asks and I nod before she walks off. He puts the kid down and I sit next to him.

"So it doesn't hurt that bad?" I ask while touching his leg.

"No it doesn't but I won't play rugby and i'll still be a man" he says proudly.

"A man?" I ask looking at Mluleki.

"Something stupid the coach said but I straightened it out" says Mluleki sitting on the armrest.

"I feel like I need to be updated on everything" I look at him.

"No problem. We will talk about it later" he smiles and I catch my kid smiling at him too. Something big must have happened for this kind of energy to shift.

Celiwe walks back from the kitchen with her flowers in a vase. Her grin is super wide as she walks past like she can't even see us looking at her.

"Do you want anything to eat?" I ask before she disappears.

"No. We had burgers and ice cream" she replies before she closes the door.

"I should get going. Ngubeko and Thembeke are coming home. I need to pick them up at the airport"

says Mluleki getting up. I get up to walk him out and confirm our dinner tonight.

"I have no idea what happened but they look happy. That teddy bear must have cost you a fortune"

He stops walking and looks at me.

"You were right. The kids are not hectic. They just need to know that you have their backs" he leans over and kiss my lips "You mentioned dinner tonight"

"Yes. Dinner"

"I can't wait" he bites his lower lip.

"Me too" I raise my eyebrows. He doesn't know what's coming his way.

"Oh before I forget. There is Luke Frederick. His father suggested we let Luke and Celiwe go on a date to explore. I told him we will think about it and that if Luke even thinks about Celiwe that way i'll make sure he has no tool to explore with in the future. So I doubt we will be hearing from the Fredericks any time soon" he laughs and shakes his

head. I'm left speechless.

chapter 95

We find Mluleki waiting for us at the airport. He hugs me before he takes the bags to the car and Nqubeko holds my hand as we follow him to the car. They both look like there is something they are not telling me. I decide to ignore it and get in the car. “So there is Fredrick, and he is proposing that we let Celiwe and his son go on a date because the son likes Celiwe,” says Mluleki getting. “What?” asks Nqubeko, taking the cap off. “I told him to get lost” says Mluleki before they both burst into laughter. “But I think that’s a good idea” I chip in and both men look at me like I just suggested we sell Celiwe to slavery. “Over my dead body,” says Nqubeko. “I told him I’ll remove his dick if he tries to have sex with my daughter,” says Mluleki, and Nqubeko looks proud. “But we want Celiwe to experience dating in her life and there is no time like the present,” I press on and Nqubeko gives me the look that says ‘don’t even try’ but I’m stubborn so he should know by now. “So our daughter will start dating at two?” he

asks, and Mluleki laughs. I give him the evil look and he looks away. “Don’t be ridiculous. Celiwe is not two. She is a teenager and dating is a party of growing up,” “Not to some horny teenage boy,” says Mluleki. “That boy should forget it. Not in this lifetime,” says Nqubeko. They are wasting their time because Phili and I will organise this date for Celiwe. She is a teenage girl and dating is part of life. We want her to experience life as a normal teenager. We never got to date anyone growing up. She can’t experience life like us. We find Phili and S’ngobile chilling on the couch, and they look like they are in the middle of debating something serious. “Wow, you look well rested” says Phili, giving me a hug. S’ngobile puts down her phone and hugs me too. Nqubeko greets and takes my bags to the bedroom. “I should leave you ladies to relax” says Mluleki, looking at Phili. She nods and smiles at him. I think I have loads of gossip to catch up tonight. “I’ll text you when I’m ready” she says and Mluleki nods before he leaves the house. Nqubeko returns and sits next to S’ngobile. “So you guys are doing good?” he asks, and S’ngobile nods before her head

goes back to her phone. Something is on that phone and her eyes light up each time she finishes typing something. “We are just glad to have her back,” says Phili, looking at me. He looks at her, and smile and I smile too. Having my family getting along with Nqubeko is one of the greatest feelings I couldn’t choose between them. “So is it okay if I bring Amanda for a visit?” he asks and I don’t reply. I don’t mind, but Amanda being in my house will mean she is visiting Celiwe and Phili needs to be okay with it. “That will do Celiwe good. She is bored, and it’s been a while since we yelled at someone for laughing in the middle of the night,” says S’ngobile. “Yes, it will be nice to have Amanda over” agrees Phili. “And sleeping arrangements?” asks Nqubeko, looking at me. “You don't need to worry about me. I have plans for few days” says S’ngobile. We all look at her and wait for more details, but she doesn't look like she wants to volunteer with more. “Well?” asks Phili, looking at her. “Yes, I am going Phili. thanks for worrying but I have to do this for myself” she puts her stubborn face on and I want to laugh about it. “So you won't even introduce us to her

before you go for days?" argues Phili. "I'm not a child, Phili. I need to do this for myself and you can argue, but it won't help. I am going" she gets up and leave the room. "Okay, what just happened?" I ask and Nqubeko laughs. "Olivia is fine. I know her and she won't do anything S'nqobile doesn't want" says Nqubeko. "You knew that S'nqobile is dating a woman, and you said nothing?" Asks Phili looking at Nqubeko. "You are not homophobic, are you?" he asks calmly. "Of course I'm not, but we don't even know her" she sounds like she might start crying. "When she is ready, she will bring her over. Now calm down and try not to baby S'nqobile" says Nqubeko getting up. He leans over and kisses my cheek before he says goodbye. I don't even walk him out. "What's going on?" I ask to Phili. "

Nqubeko knew that S'nqobile is dating a prison guard. A female prison guard" she looks shocked. "S'nqobile is a lesbian?" I ask and S'nqobile appears. "Yes, I am. They call us bisexual because we date both men and women. Right now I like Olivia" she sounds like she has been crying. "And Olivia. Is she gorgeous? It sounds like she is exotic. Can I see

her?” I ask, looking at S'nqobile. She says nothing, but hands the phone to me. I take the phone and look at the lady on the screen. She is mixed race judging by her long black hair and complexion. In this photo she is holding a camera smiling to the camera and she is wearing army boots and cargo pants. ” Damn, she looks all fine” says Phili first. ” i know” says S'nqobile takes the phone. ” So when are we meeting her?” I ask, looking at her. ” We can have as braai or go out but a braai will do” suggests Phili. ” Woah, let me date the girl and I'll decide when to involve family. You guys might scare her off with all the bossiness” she sits down next to Phili. I think we've resolved the awkward moment for now. ” So Mluleki tells me about a certain date request for Celiwe. I think we should say yes. I know they are acting like we are sending her into a porn shoot, but a harmless date won't do anything” I suggest and they both nod. The date is happening whether the man like it or not.

** **

Phili

I can tell that Mluleki is surprised because I am taking him to McDonald's instead of a fancy restaurant or a romantic dinner at home. He hasn't said anything but he is failing to hide the disbelief on his face.

I order two burgers and a drink before we sit in the corner to wait for our order.

"This is nice" he speaks after looking around the place and looking at the chair he is sitting on.

"Yes. I didn't want to bore you with cooking. Burgers will do" I try my best not to burst into giggles.

"We could have used the drive thru you know. Very simple" he raises his eyebrows before his eyes focus on a young couple walking past our table.

"I know but we get to see people walking past" I tease while trying to sound very chilled.

"And people will do what?" He eyes the couple again and then frowns a bit.

"What?" I look at the couple again. They look so

young, probably Lindo's age.

"Nothing. I'm just thinking that one of these days it will be Celiwe. Look at these kids. She should be doing homework or something" He looks really bothered.

"They are just having fun"

"It's not right. Kids can't even finish being kids, nx" he shakes his head and looks at his watch "And they are taking forever to finish" he adds a complain.

"We just got her Mluleki" I can't let him ruin this night because if he pisses me off then we will have a problem.

He glances towards me and I think he sees the annoyance because he exhales and smiles a bit.

"I'm being a bastard. Sorry my love. I'm just annoyed by the thought of Celiwe dating. I wasn't this pissed off earlier but now I can see how bad it is. It's wrong and we don't even know how that boy is raised. He could be a hooligan and it will break Celiwe's heart before she even reaches a right age to date"

"What age is that?" I ask just out of curiosity.

"I'm not sure. I'm thinking 27 years" he replies and I fail to hide the shock.

"27? She will be a grown woman by then"

"Good. Less chances of bad choices. Plus she will have enough time to pick a worthy guy. Someone good enough for her"

"A worthy guy? At 27 Mluleki?"

"Yes. Kids needs to be protected Phili. Not this" he points the couple. I also look and they both notice that we are talking about them. The boy looks annoyed but the girl smiles and continue looking at him adoringly. I guess she doesn't have a father like Mluleki.

"Just let the kids be" I take out my phone and text Thembeke. She is babysitting with Nqubeko tonight because S'ngobile is out with Olivia. Dabula is also home so I can relax.

*** **

After begging Mluleki to have his burger at McDonald's we finally make it home and I can tell he is so over the amazing evening I promised him. I want to try something different today. So I shower first and then let him shower after me while I pretend to be wanting an early night.

I'm wearing the skimpy shorts he bought for me and a bra as I wait on the bed for him to finish up. The shower stops running and he walks out with a towel around his waistline.

"I thought you will be asleep by now" he says before he bends over and kisses my lips.

"Not yet. I have a surprise for you" I slip my hand underneath the pillow and pull out handcuffs.

A smile spreads on his lips as he looks at the cuffs.

"Well, well. I think I like this surprise" this man is such a freak but I like it.

"But there is a little twist to this" I get off the bed and walk to the door to get the door I left outside. His eyes go all out when he sees a chair.

"I'm all game baby. Anything for you" he undoes the towel and lets it fall.

"Hold your brakes Mr, I need you to be dressed for this" I put the chair down.

He picks up the towel and quickly wraps it around himself "Done. I'm all dressed" he walks closer and I step back.

"Sit on the chair and hands behind your back" I instruct and he stops trying to touch me and looks at the chair. I picked the outside chair because the dining chair is heavy and the kitchen chair wasn't going to help.

He doesn't argue. He does as told and I click the cuffs in one wrist and use a tie on the next wrist to keep him secured.

"Good. Now sit tight and let me do this. It might be a little clumsy and....."

"It will be perfect. I have no doubt" he adds before I even finish. I smile and nod. He doesn't like it when I criticize myself.

I turn down the lights and turn on the radio. I couldn't find a perfect song so I selected some slow jam mix I found on YouTube and downloaded it.

The first song starts and I step in front of him while swinging my hips and slowly taking my shorts off. When the shorts come off i'm left in a red lace panties and the matching bra. I turn and bend slowly to pick them up making sure my ass is on his face as I do this.

He makes a sound I don't get but I continue and throw the shorts on the bed before moving to bra. I slowly undo it at the back and he licks his lips when he sees my nipples firming up because of the cool air.

"You like what you see" I tease while rolling my nipple around my finger.

"Damn baby" he tries to move but he can't because he is secured by the cuffs and the tie.

"How about this?" I take the panties off and repeat the same move when I pick them up. I jump back when he gets up from the chair. I should have tied

his legs too.

"If you get up I'll stop" I warn and he quickly sits back down.

"Okay, okay please don't. I'll sit still"

"Good boy" I throw the panties on the bed and move closer to him. He licks his lips and I straddle his lap feeling the towel between my legs. He is already firm and the towel isn't helping at all.

I shift closer and move the towel aside so he can feel me but I don't ease myself down to him.

"Phili" he grunts.

"You like this?" I whisper in his ear and nibble his earlobe. He moves a bit and I immediately stops.

"Don't baby. Don't get up please" he begs but I still get off him and walk to the bed before sitting with my legs wide apart. His eyes go all dreamy when he stares at me and his mouth is open but he doesn't say anything.

"We need to address the uber issue" I say while rubbing my nipples.

"Uber?" he frowns.

"Yes. The most used means of transport. It's faster" I let my left hand slowly make its way over between my legs.

"Why are we talking about uber?" He asks quickly.

I lie back and place both legs on the edge of the bed so he has a clear view.

"Because you are paranoid and I need uber since I'll be up and down with my business arrangements. It makes sense for me to use uber" I use my fingers to part the lips and he hisses. The wetness coats my fingers as I touch myself.

He exhales out loud and I hear the cuffs rattling but they won't give.

"Allow me to use uber. I need the freedom" I say firmly while pressing my sensitive spot.

"Dammit Phil. Untie me please. We will negotiate" he begs.

"Allow me to use uber. It's just a requested ride" I press harder and I can feel myself warming up.

"Shit" he grunts some more and i raise my head to see his face. His eyes are starring at me as if he wants to grab me but the tie won't give in.

"Ah. This feels good" I let out a moan and curl my toes on the bed.

"I'm warning you Phili. Untie me" he yells his voice sounding above me. I raise my head again and he is standing. The towel is on the floor and he is so hard.

I rub a bit faster while letting out another moan and pulling the sheet with my free hand.

A loud noise follows and I jump up. The chair is broken Mluleki doesn't even give me a chance to do anything as he grabs my legs and i land back on the bed. He is above me in a blink and he doesn't even slow down as he enters me. He goes in deep and his fingers on my hair and his lips covering mine.

The whole thing is fast and hard. I brace myself for the orgasm when i feel it approach and Mluleki pulls my arm up and holds it above my head when i finally come. He follows after and we both lie still in each other arms for a moment.

"I'll get you your own car and a driver while you wait for your own licence. No uber nonsense" he whispers in my ear.

Chapter 96

Mluleki

"So let me make sure I am getting this right. You and Phili were little adventurous and she cuffed your hand to the chair. But she doesn't have the keys" says Nqubeko clearly laughing in the other end. To be fair, I would laugh at him too if the situation was reversed.

"Yes. She misplaced the key. Are you coming to help me get this thing out of my wrist or not?" I try to sound calm. If I show him that it pisses me off he will enjoy every moment of this.

"I don't have the key but Thuba does. I can tell him to come and break you free" he let's out another chuckle.

"You know Thuba can't keep his mouth shut. I don't want them talking about my sex life Nqubeko" I don't even want them fantasizing about Phili.

"Okay fine. I'll go pick them up and come free you. Can you hold tight for few more minutes?" He teases before he ends the call.

I walk back to the kitchen and find Phili bending over the cupboard. She is wearing my shirt and I can see her ass as she reaches for something behind it. She is a smart woman. Too bad I just happen to have more control otherwise she could get away with a lot if she pulls some freaky shit like last night.

"Need help?" I ask and she jumps. She didn't hear me come in.

"Sorry, I think I might have dropped the key on this little space. I remember standing here and something dropping but I didn't pay attention at the time"

I step closer as she shifts to make space. I can see some marks on her neck. I shouldn't have put them

there.

"Let's see" I look closer and true enough I can see the little key stuck on the little space. It will take us a while to get it out so I decide to leave it there.

"It's there but Nqubeko is coming to get me out of this" I raise the cuffed arm and she smiles shyly.

"Last night was great. Beside me breaking the chair everything else was fine" I pull her closer.

"I'm glad you liked it" she rests her head on my chest.

"I like everything you do even if you are doing it to have a final say" I add and hold her tight when she wants to step back. "I mean you really went all out to make me agree to let you use uber. I admire that" I whisper in her ear.

"But you didn't agree" she replies and I feel her hands on my shirt. If she slips them underneath the shirt i'll have to fuck her on the table before Nqubeko gets here.

"Of course I didn't. Uber is more about your safety not my control. I don't trust drivers. Some of these

guys are rude and treat their customers like dirt and don't even get me started on the complains people have regarding different cars arriving on the pick up spot when the app says it's another car. The whole thing is not safe"

"So I have to have a driver? He will be your spy since you will pay him" her tone is accusingly but she is not wrong.

"Of course but that should motivate you to do your licence faster and get your driving freedom" there is no need for me to act like I'm not a cave man.

She doesn't say anything more but her hands have found a way underneath my shirt. Her touch turns me on.

"We need to replace the chair" I say so I can destruct myself from all this. She doesn't stop though.

"You didn't have to break it" she replies.

"You were masturbating right in front of me. What was I supposed to say?" Thinking about the way she did makes me even harder.

"You should have been patient" she laughs and I think she can feel me against her stomach.

"I just thank God that you were smart enough to use a handcuffs and a tie otherwise I would have broken an arm trying to free myself" I lower my head and kiss her lips. She kisses me back and for a moment we are just get lost in it.

** **

"Nqubeko is here" I tell her as I help her down the counter. I tried to stop myself but in the end I gave in and we did it on the kitchen counter.

"Let me go get dressed" she smiles and hurries up the stairs. I also fix my pants and go the lounge to let Nqubeko in.

"You look like someone who just had sex" he teases the moment he gets in.

"I just did" I close the door and extend my arm towards him so he can remove the cuffs.

"I guess it's a good thing that she only cuffed one wrist otherwise we would be taking to the hospital with broken arms" he unlocks the cuff and I rub my wrist. It's a little bit bruised but I'll live.

"Ha, ha, ha. Any news on Sdumo mission?" it's a while since I got an update and we can't let him get away with it.

"Yes. Second phase is done. We have to move to the third phase and then finish him up" he throws the cuffs on the table.

"And Pretty?" I lower my voice because Phili doesn't know about Pretty working for Nqubeko.

"I don't care. I'll only dump her to the nearest rehab and let her family deal with it. At least I'm not planning on leaving her as a junky on the side of the road"

I nod and look up the stairs just in case Phili is listening in. With her, you can never know.

"And Josiah?" I ask. The uncles are dead but Josiah still needs to pay for his sins.

"I think instead of killing him I need to expose him. Force him to confess and shame him and his family. Plus I do need to take them down a bit. They spread the lion and the cub story until Thembeke confronted me about it. They do need to answer for all that"

"But you wouldn't have need in that situation if you did things right to begin with" he gives me the 'don't you dare look'

"This is about Josiah and his family. We exposed the Khumalo family so we have to do the same for my family. We don't want to fear for our kids being around them"

"You do that. By the way my family wants to lay charges against Nothile. They feel she had a hand in Pinky's suicide"

Nqubeko exhales but doesn't say anything. I think he also suspected.

"I've tried to talk them out of it but she left some damaging evidence. From her threatening Pinky with denying the pregnancy to her going as far as

saying her life was doomed because Lindo was still going to continue with his life without smelling breast milk. It's too brutal and harsh Nqubeko. She went all out on a kid. A confused kid that feared abortion"

"Let the family do whatever they can to get justice for their daughter Mluleki. I'll bring Amanda over to make sure she isn't exposed to the scandal" he rubs his face. I hate doing this to Nqubeko but at this moment there is nothing I can do to help.

"I'll try to get them to see Lindo as a child too" I offers and he shakes his head.

"He needs to learn responsibility Mluleki. Don't let him get off the hook easily"

I nod and we both stand there quiet for a minute.

"So Phili has tricks in her sleeves" he starts and we both laugh.

"Dangerous tricks but luckily I'm always in control Nqubeko. I will not be pushed into a corner easily" I try not to think about her ass on my face.

"What was it for?" He lowers his voice.

"Uber. She wants to use uber but i've told her repeatedly that I don't like it. She won't listen and she thought she can just jiggle her ass in my face and i'll give in. Never"

Nqubeko laughs and I give him the warning look. It's not a laughing matter.

"Sorry. But she did try. You broke the chair and slept with your hand in handcuffs. She did try"

"I offered a car and lessons. I'd rather she drives herself. Until then i'll have someone drive her" it's better that way.

"You are acting like a man Mluleki. Let Phili use uber. Just make sure she gets the same person everyday and make sure he knows she is yours. She doesn't have to know" advises Nqubeko in a quiet tone.

"You mean heck the system?"

"No. Not everything needs to be dangerous Mluleki. Find someone to manipulate the app on her phone

so every time she sends a request it goes to the same person or it goes to your phone and you call your driver to pick her up. She won't even notice if you find someone who does a neat job"

"And if she uses a different phone?"

"Why would she? Her rides will be paid by you so she won't want to pay with her own money. And you will come out as a hero who was able to compromise to make her happy. It's really that simple"

"So I cancel the car?"

"Of course not. For the time being just let her think she won. Then you will get her a car and give her the freedom of driving" he advises and I nod. It makes sense when he puts it like this.

** **

Nqubeko

I leave Mluleki and call Nothile but her phone goes

straight to voicemail. She obviously doesn't know that she has a real battle coming her way. I call Amanda instead and she answers immediately.

"Dad"

"Amanda. It sounds like you are crying" I stop walking just in case i'm hearing things.

She doesn't reply instead I hear a noise. Something breaking and then voices.

"Get off the phone" yells the phone before the phone is cut off.

I make another call and it rings once before it goes to voicemail. I call Lindo's number and his phone rings for a long time before his lazy voice comes on.

"Where is Amanda?" I don't even greet him.

"Cleaning" he replies still sounding like he is sleeping.

"Cleaning what? Where are you?" Can't this boy hear the urgency in my tone.

"The kitchen. Uncle Scelo asked her to clean up the kitchen. The maid didn't come and mum won't raise

her salary" the line goes dead after.

I stare at my phone for a moment before getting in my car.

"Thembeke. I'm heading to uLundi. I'll talk to you when I come back" I tell Thembeke the moment she answers my call.

"Anything wrong?" She sounds alarmed.

"No. I just need to talk to Amanda. I might come back with her if that's not a problem" I don't want her to worry about this.

"Okay. See you when you get back"

"Love you babe" I add before ending the call.

** **

The trip takes me less than 2 hours. It's a miracle I didn't drive off the road in those curves. I've been trying to call her phone but it still off and Nothile's phone is also off. Lindo didn't even answer when I

called him again.

I get off the car and jog inside the yard because waiting for the large to open is delaying me. I knock once and push the door open. The first person I see is Nothile smoking in the lounge with a man sitting next to her.

"Nqubeko" she seems shocked and doesn't know what to do with her cigarette.

"Nothile" I push the ashtray towards her.

The man is smoking dagga. He doesn't move but gives me the up and down look. He must be calculating if he can take me if the need arises.

"Where is Amanda?"

"You drove all this way for your brat?" She laughs and I smell alcohol. Nothile is smoking and drinking before midday.

"Amanda" I call out because it's clear that this might be going too far.

"Dad" says Amanda appearing in the kitchen. She is crying and I can see a hand print on her cheek.

"Did you slap my daughter?" I turn back to Nothile.

"Come on man. Kids do need some discipline. It's not a train smash" says the man. Judging by Amanda's reaction I assume he is the one who hit her.

"Pack some clothes and go wait for me in the car" I tell her and she doesn't hesitate. The moment she disappears down the passage I turn to Nothile.

"You let him slap my daughter?"

"He was trying to discipline her. You should have heard her when I asked her to clean the kitchen up. Scelo thinks it's a bad idea to pay all that money to the cleaner when Amanda can clean. She is here all day after all" she doesn't seem bothered now.

I wait a few minutes before Amanda appears with her unzipped suitcase.

"Here" I give her the keys. She takes them and hurry off.

** **

The moment she gets in the car I head to the kitchen and grab a broom and a mop before going back to them.

"Here" I throw the mop to the man and break the broom in half before delivering the beating.

"You are a man enough to hit kids. There take the mop and hit me" I tell him while hitting him repeatedly as he tries to get off the couch and avoid major hits. The nice thing about hitting someone sitting down is that they don't think about getting up right away. They are always confused at first and by the time they try to get up they have to avoid being hit so their heads can't process everything at once. After struggling for a while he finally stands but I don't give him a chance to pick up the mop. Nothile is screaming and Lindo has joined the viewing.

"You dare put your hands on my daughter again i'll kill you" I add before putting down the sticks. The man is bleeding on his eyebrow and mouth. He

pulls out a knife and I pull out my gun.

"Don't let the attitude fool you. I can kill you right now" I warn and Nothile is still screaming.

"It's not over" warns the man.

"You bet. Try me again and i'll make sure your family buries your ashes. Nx" I turn to Nothile.

"Get out of my house" she yells.

"Don't even bother. I hope you have a lawyer because your problems are only piling up. I might also sue for custody of my daughter" I don't wait for another insult before heading to the door. Lindo comes after me but I ignore him. Him and his mother can sort themselves out.

Amanda is still crying in the car. I wait outside because i'm not sure how to comfort her right now. A minute passes before I remember that there is Phili. She would know what to say. Mluleki answers her phone and I ask to speak to her directly and Mluleki can sense that i'm not in the mood so he

hands the phone to her.

"Nqubeko"

"Hey. I need a favour. Amanda is crying and i'm not sure what to say to her" I lower my voice.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothile is drunk, her boyfriend slapped her and they made her clean the house because the boyfriend thinks paying for a housekeeper is a waste of money"

"Yoh. Is she there with you?"

I look in the car and she is still crying hugging her knees.

"Yes"

"J ust hug her. Say nothing for now. She will speak when she is ready" that sounds simple enough but Phili has raised three kids

"J ust a hug?" I ask just to be sure.

"Yes. J ust hold her. It will assure her that she is safe with you" she repeats.

"Thanks Philiswa" I end the call and open the door. She looks up and I open my arms. She let's out a sob before she throws herself in my arms. I hold her tight.

** **

See you on Wednesday

Chapter 97

Nqubeko

I've been walking up and down the passage trying to gather enough strength to knock on Amanda's door since we arrived and she disappeared in the bedroom. I want to talk to her, but I don't want to be too much to her right now. No one trained me in heartbreak, and I just discovered the father thing. The door opens with a crack and our eyes meet. She is still wearing her frown. I was right; she is naturally like that, and now I sort of find it rather

cute. Hey, I'm the father so I can be biased. "Dad," "Hey, are you feeling okay?" I ask and kick myself for asking a stupid question. Of course she is far from being fine. "I'm feeling better" she smiles and I feel a little better. "That's good. We can go visit Celiwe and the boys if you want to" I suggest because I know she loves those kids and Phili and Thembeke will know the right words to say. That isn't met by a charming smile on her face. "I was hoping we can just stay together and watch Big Bang" her tone is shy and I smile. At this moment she can suggest we rob a store and I'll offer a plan to get away with it. "What's big bang? I hope it's not those age inappropriate action movies with blood and guns," She laughs and fully exits the bedroom. "It's a comedy. The Big Bang Theory; Sheldon Cooper and his friends" I think she expects me to know what that is, and I can't even text Thembeke to ask. "Never heard of it, but I could do with a laugh," "You will enjoy it" she goes back into her room and comes back with a memory stick. "Do we need popcorn?" I ask. "We do. I'll make us a shake" she suggests and we leave the memory stick on the

coffee table and go make our shakes and popcorn in the kitchen.

** ** * * ** *The kitchen looks like a storm blew in and I've been scratching my head the whole time because I'm not used to the mess, but I can't tell Amanda that she needs to do better. "Done" she raises a glass in my face and she looks proud of herself. "I can't wait to taste" I try to sound cheerful. It looks too sweet and too pink. "Let me clean up and then we will go watch" she puts the glass aside and picks up the mess. I stand aside and watch. It's not rocket science that Nothile never taught the kids to clean up, but Amanda's attempt can be admired. I also help where she is leaving a mess behind. She should have done this instead of letting that fool put his hands on my daughter. We clean up and take our junk to the lounge. She puts the memory stick in and I stop her from pressing play. "Baby girl, we need to talk" I start and she sits still, her eyes looking frightened for a moment. "How long has your started seeing Uncle Scelo?" "It's been years, but sometimes he goes away and then comes

back,” she looks like she is counting in her head. “And this was the first time he hit you?” She nods and I also nod, but I can see there is more to this story. “Does he hit Lindo?” “NO, he doesn’t. But he yells at mum all the time,” I see a hesitation in her eyes. “And he hits her too?” She nods, and then her eyes fill with tears. That’s why she did nothing, because she is allowing that fool to put his hands on her as well. “She asked me not to tell” she whispers as tears start streaming down her face. “It’s okay, baby. You did well by telling,” She doesn’t seem convinced, but I open my arms, and she automatically comes. Phili was right about the hug thing. It works on both young and old. We stay like that for a few minutes before she moves and turns on the tv. We are about to watch The Big Bang Theory.

** **
** I admit I judged the big bang too early. Hours later Amanda has fallen asleep and we’ve watched so many episodes and laughed our heads silly. I gently put her head on the cushion so she

doesn't wake up with a painful neck. She doesn't wake up, and I put my jacket on her legs before picking up the popcorn on the floor and taking the plates to the kitchen. I check if she continued to sleep before leaving the room to make a call outside. Nothile's phone rings for a while before she answers. "Nqubeko," "What's wrong with you?" I ask, trying to keep my voice calm. "Why?" she asks, and I laugh. "So you are letting a low life beat your kid up?" "He was trying..." "That's nonsense and we both know it. The Nothile I know is way stronger than this. The Nothile that raised two kids doesn't deserve to take any nonsense from someone like that loser. Where is that Nothile?" I brace myself for an insult, or for her to hang up, but she doesn't. I can hear her breathing, so I wait. "I'm having a bad day, Nqubeko," she says at last. "A bad day? You are drinking before noon, Nothile. Doesn't sound like a bad day to me. You are having bad days, which lead to a bad life if you let it carry on," "You have no idea what I'm going through," she sounds like she is going to cry. "Yes, I don't but you know very well that my phone is always on and my door is

always open if you need any help. I don't even mind taking the kids to give you enough time to deal with life. All you have to do is ask," "You have enough problems, Nqubeko. The word around here is that your wife's uncles killed themselves and she didn't even show up to be with her family. Instead, you took her on holiday knowing very well that the family is poor and they would need all the help they can get," I think she is aiming to hit some sort of nerve in me but she doesn't know that I got Thembeke to stop seeing those people as her family. The Cape Town trip was for that. "You should know better than to listen to small town gossip Nothile. Thembeke is pregnant, and I took her on holiday to make sure she gets enough rest. That family is not important to me, she is, and because of that I'll protect her always. So don't think I have problems. I don't but you do. You are letting a dirty scumbag put his hands on you and that's the lowest level anyone could ever sink to," "How dare...." "Dare what? Tell the truth? She is trying to help you. You are lowering yourself to a level you have no business being in. A fuckin

punching bag for a loser who can't even hit a real man when he hands him a stick. Amanda doesn't deserve to see her mother become a bitch for an overgrown man-child," "You bastard...." she sobs, and I cut her off. "You deserve way better, and I can't believe you are too stupid to see it. The Nothile who wanted to be a Doctor and went as far as becoming one but she is nothing but a punching bag for a loser who smokes dagga and she still have some pride to act like her life isn't falling apart. You have nothing to be proud about. You are failing two people who should matter to you and you are trying to impress someone you have no business impressing. Does that sound like something a smart woman would do? I think not. Fix yourself up, lady," I end the call after and go back inside.

Amanda is still sleeping. *** **

Thembeke

A ringing phone wakes me up. I open one eye and answer hoping it Nqubeko but it's not. It's a man, and he greets like he is about to yell at me. "Can I speak to Thembeke?" asks after greeting. "It is

Thembeke and you are?” I sit up just in case there is something wrong. “You really have no shame” he starts, and I was right about him sounding like he is going to yell at me. “Excuse me,” “Just because you married that rich man and moved to Durban, it doesn’t change the fact that they are your family. This family raised you when you had nothing and today you can’t even come to support them in their time of need,” My head reminds me of two choices I have. I can either end the call and cry or tell this person to fuck off. I go with the second choice. “What kind of support do they need?” I ask, hoping my voice doesn’t betray me and that I don’t panic. “You are mocking me? You think you are better than us because you now live in the city and...” “With all due respect Sir, I have no idea what you want from me. The family you are talking about got paid actual money for raising me. Nqubeko paid lobola and also gave them money whenever they asked for it. That money is enough to cover all their costs,” “Since when did you become this child, Thembeke. We raised you way better than this,” he sounds different now I guess whatever energy he

had is slowly depleting. “When I found out that Josiah Mbonambi raped me and my uncles knew instead of calling the police because the man violated me, they asked for cows instead. That’s why they killed themselves. Nqubeko found out about it and confronted them so they killed themselves instead. So what kind of support do you think the family deserves from me?” There is no answer for a moment and I think about hanging up, but something says I should wait for an answer. “I had no idea Thembeke. Forgive me for calling,” he says, and ends the call. I put the phone aside and go back to sleep. I hope Nqubeko is okay where he is, but he will call when he is ready. ** ** *

**“Thembeke” someone wakes me from sleep. I open my eyes and it’s Nqubeko. The lights are on, which means it’s the evening already. I sit up and look at him. He smiles and kisses my lips. “Is Amanda okay?” I ask. “She is fine. They are having dinner. Are you not hungry?” he looks at his watch. “I am hungry. What time is it?” “It’s after 7. Come and have dinner” he extends a hand towards me. I hold on to him and he helps me up. “Someone

called, and I gave them a peace of mind,” “I know. My mother called and asked if you were okay. She was worried, and I was too far, so I asked S’ngobile to check on you and she said you were snoring,” he smiles. “Yeah, I slept well after” I stop putting my shoes because Nqubeko’s mother has no business knowing my family drama. “Your mother knows?” “Well, you told Mr Ntombela and immediately after your call he confronted your aunts and Josiah was in the yard. There was a huge fight, and the police had to be called baby. The community leaders want Josiah to face charges for his actions, and they will also hold your family accountable because they failed to protect you,” “I had no idea it was such a big deal today” I sit back down and Nqubeko sits next to me before taking my hand to his. “And all because you had enough courage to speak. I am so proud of you MaKhumalo,” he smiles like I just did something amazing. “And I didn’t even cry,” I grin “Yes; you didn’t even cry, my love. That’s why I’m so proud,”

** **

See you Friday

Chapter 98

Phili

It's a new week and the kids are no longer going to school and Amanda is here visiting. The house is noisy and I love it. Thembeke's uncles were buried the past weekend and she didn't want to attend the funeral. It made Nqubeko happy to see her stand firmly on her own two feet about the issue. To bad there is still a Josiah issue that needs addressing. S'ngobile went to visit Olivia and she hasn't stopped smiling ever since she got back. I'm truly happy for her because we all deserve some love. "Your phone is ringing" a voice stops my day dreaming. It's Thembeke holding out my phone. "Thanks" I take the phone and it's a landline. "Hello" I answer while

getting off the couch. “Hi. Can I speak to Phili Khumalo?” asks a woman voice in the other end. “It is Phili speaking. How can I help you?” I don’t recognize the voice. “It’s Nonjabulo Danisa from Danisa Outreach. I read about your company in a local paper this weekend and I’d like to be involved. I mean it’s only fair that we also help with such programs despite being a starting up company” “I was in the paper?” we haven’t seen anything at all. Not that we read newspapers but it’s a little different your face is in the paper. “Girl, they wrote an entire spread about you. Detailing the companies you are associated with and how you want the project to grow bigger than you first imagined it” I think I’m going to like this woman. “Wow, I think I need to start reading newspapers” I laugh and hope she doesn’t take this a wrong way. “You should. I’m not saying be obsessed but it’s helps to read good things about yourself. It boosts the confidence and we all need the boost every now and then” she says and yes I totally love this woman. “Exactly. So Zothando what can I do for you?” I bring us back to important business. “Yes. Okay, it’s like this. My

company wants to work with you. I have the final say in the matter but it would help if you can come and do a presentation for us. Me and the team” “When?” I can feel the heart slamming painfully in my ribcage. This is exactly what I pray about. I want people to come and want to work with me. “I know it’s short notice but if you can get here in the next two hours I can get them together and we have this presentation. If we don’t make it today the next available meeting is in three weeks and I’m chasing after Clive because once we have Clive in our corner then it’s good as done” I feel the cold sweat on my back. She wants me to come and do a presentation without preparing and without drilling this into my head for few days. “In the next two hours?” I ask just to be sure and my voice is trembling a bit. “Yes. If you have a transport problem I’m willing to send a driver to come pick you up and also have him drive you back” she offers. “No it’s fine. I’ll be there. Please sent me an address” I can’t miss this opportunity. “Great, I’ll send it just now. Thank you so much Phili. I can’t wait to see you” We say goodbye and end the call.

*** **

Thembeke and S'ngobile help me pick an outfit and I call Mluleki to let him know and he offers to drive me. It's unnecessary but he wants to feel like a man about it so I let him be. "Okay breath. It's in your head Phili and you love this so it will come back. Just keep breathing" says S'ngobile handing me a wet wipe for my sweaty face. I don't even wear makeup because I will make me worry about sweating and the mascara giving me the Emo look without me being aware of it. "Yes, go out there and knock them dead" says Thembeke smiling. They both high five and I laugh too. "Okay, Mluleki is here. I'll let you know how it went" I tell them before picking up my shoes. I'm wearing flats but I'll wear the stiletto when I get there. I walk out the house and Mluleki has the door opened for me. He kisses my lips before I get in. "I checked the company out. They are legit and I have faith that you will do great" he says when he gets in and closes the door. "Thanks my love" I close my eyes and take a deep breath. Life is about taking a chance. *** **

***Mluleki drops me off in the parking lot and says he will come get me when he is done. I thank him and get off the car. "Phili" he calls out before I can walk away. I stop and look at him "You will do just fine" "Thank you" I blow him a kiss and he makes a show of catching it and putting it inside his pocket. Even the security laughs while pretending he is not looking at us. I march on and praying hard that I don't trip and fall as I walk in these heels. I make up to the reception desk in piece and greet her with a smile. She smiles back and points me to the passage where there is another lady waiting. "Miss Khumalo" she greets before she turns indicating I should follow. "Hi" I reply trying to sound relaxed and calm. "They are waiting for you but I'd like to confirm first" she points the couch and I walk over to wait as she disappears into the office. I sit down and try not to chew my nails. That's unlady like and I can't be acting like that in this place. I can imagine the outcome. I can see the project up and running. A laugh draws me out and I hold my breath. I know that voice. I've heard it before and I never thought I would hear it ever again. The footsteps approach

and stop. I also look up and our eyes meet. It's Sazi. I stare at him and he stares back his eyes unblinking. "Miss Khumalo" says the lady at the door. I blink once and pray that he is going to be gone when i open my eyes again. It doesn't happen at all. He is still there. It's like starring at Ntethelelo's older version.

"Thanks " I get up and walk towards her. She smiles at Sazi before she speaks "Mr Danisa. They are also waiting for you"

"Thanks Xoli" he replies and I keep my head straight. Sazi Danisa. She said her name is Nonjabulo Danisa. I just never thought that i'll see him again.

"Woah!! Watch the step" says his voice next to as a hand reaches around me. I almost fell face flat on the floor as i was walking in.

"Thanks " I try to catch my breath and Sazi doesn't let go of me.

"It's fine" he replies and I manage move away from his arm.

I walk in and the room has over eight people sitting

around the table. They all stare at me and suddenly i feel small.

"Please come in Miss Khumalo. We are ready for you" says one lady and I can't be sure if it's Nonjabulo or not.

I nod and move forward even though it feels like i have cement around my ankles. Suddenly I can't even walk fast.

"She is a little nervous. I think we are intimidating" someone says and there is a laugh. A friendly laugh. I take a deep breath and apologise for the weirdness. I tell them i'm nervous but in truth, I'm shocked because Sazi Danisa is the same guy that left me pregnant and never looked back. He is my son's father.

Next chapter tomorrow. i can barely keep my eyes open guys.

Chapter 99

Phili

Despite a bad start but I ace my presentation. In the end one guy gets up and starts clapping. I feel better even Sazi is forgotten until Nonjabulo takes my hand and lead me out of the boardroom with a wide smile plastered on her face. She is exactly how I imagined her. She is short, could be rounder but it's clear she is weight conscious and she has this warm air around her. Her voice is even more friendlier when she is face to face.

"You are brilliant" she repeats and my cheeks are starting to burn from the wide smiling.

"Thank you for the opportunity" I try to sound as happy as I feel.

"It was actually Sazi's idea to force the presentation today. Don't tell him I told you, but his idea was brilliant. You were amazing and I know I'm starting

to sound like I'm nuts but girl you rock" she smiles and I smile back. It's hard not to. I even ignore the Sazi part.

"Mrs Danisa. They would like to have a word" says someone at the door.

"I'll be in touch Phili" she turns and waves the girl from the reception desk. "She will walk you out and next time I promise we will have a proper chat" she gives me a hug and the things i'm carrying almost fall because I wasn't expecting this.

We say good bye and the girl walks me out. Mluleki is not back yet. I search my bag for my phone and I can't seem to find it. I balance the laptop bag on my feet and proper search my bag.

"You forgot this" says Sazi's voice behind me.

I turn and he is holding out my phone. I left it on the table.

"Thank you" I take the phone.

He bends down and picks up my bag.

"You look good MaPhili" he smiles. No one has

called me MaPhili in years now.

"Phili. Everyone calls me Phili" my voice sounds sharper than intended. Yes I am angry but I don't want to sound bitter about it.

"I apologise Mashobane" my phone rings and he stops talking. It's Mluleki and I press yes as I start to walk away from Sazi.

"My love"

"Yes baby. I'm around the corner. I hope i'm not interrupting. Are you done?" He asks

"I'm done. I'm waiting for you now" I reply and look behind me. Sazi is still standing there watching me.

"I'm here baby" he says and I see the car already. I don't even wait for him to drive into the parking lot I meet him at the gate.

The car stops and I put my things in the backseat before getting in the passenger seat. In the mirror I see Sazi still standing there. He only walks away when the car also starts moving.

"How did it go?" Asks Mluleki adjusting the rearview

mirror. I think he also saw Sazi but i'm not sure if I should bring up the subject just yet so I put it aside. I'll need to talk to the girls first.

"It went well" my tone is no longer cheerful like expected and Mluleki sees this.

"They didn't make you uncomfortable in any way?" He asks. It's the Francis issue. We don't call it by name but we both know what it means.

"No they didn't. It was good. I was just nervous at first but you know me, Once I get into the mood I speak nonstop" I smile at him and he smiles back.

"Are we celebrating tonight or we wait a bit? We could take the kids as well" he suggests and I shake my head.

"I'd rather be with you" I hold his hand and he squeezes mine back and nods.

"I'll cook for us then" he says quietly and I nod before the car falls back into silence. Why did life have to bring Sazi back again. The last time I saw him was the day I told him I was pregnant. He left for Johannesburg soon after and we never heard

from him again. Why do I get to see him now?

** **

Mluleki

I wait until Phili's breathing gets softer before getting off the bed. I slip my boxer shorts on and take her phone with me. While she was busy riding me like it was the last time her phone beeped several times. She never checked the messages so i'm checking them for her.

I head downstairs and sit on the last stair without turning on the lights. The glow provides enough light for me to see if anyone or anything is moving. I check the number first. It's an unsaved number and all messages are from this person. I click the first message. They are congratulating her on the presentation. That's sounds harmless but I check the second message. Phili wasn't the same after

she went there and that man waited until she was in the car before he went back inside. You do that for people you care about not random strangers you are hoping to get into business with. The second message is about how good she looked. The person asks about Dabula and Celiwe. Clearly it's someone from her past. I read the third message. This one clearly states that there is some history between them. It's clearly a man and he remembers the last time they saw each other. The last message this person is asking if she is happy to with me because she deserves the best. I can feel a cold sweat going down my spine. I take the number and delete the messages in Phili's phone before using my phone to Google Danisa Outreach. Google shows me different articles but I go to images first. I saw that man and I need a clear photo of him. These messages can't be coming from the woman and he stood far too long when I picked her up.

The first image I see is a man and woman. A couple standing in front of their company building. They are both grinning but there is something

familiar about the man. Like I've see him some where before.

** **

Nqubeko takes forever to answer. He can't be sleeping already. It's just 10pm.

"Mlu"

"I just sent you a photo. Tell me you've seen that face before"

"Let me check the photo" I hear Thandeka and Celiwe laughing in the background. Sounds like they are playing cards.

"And?" I ask impatiently.

"Give me a moment" he replies and I wait a moment.

"Mlu" he says and I reply with a grunt. He has to know someone who looks like this. The face is too familiar.

"Yes I recognise the face but i'm not sure where. He

looks like someone we see all the time. But who?"
He also sounds puzzled. At least I know I'm not
insane.

"I don't know. We can't be seeing the same thing
Nqubeko"

"I know. Maybe it will come back" he replies before
he accuses Awethu of cheating.

"They are still up?" I ask because they should be in
bed.

"Yep we are playing cards. Since there is no school
anymore. We negotiated bed time and it's 10:30
until January 2" he laughs.

"I see. Well enjoy. I'll have Xola check out the photo
and maybe do some background check on him"

"Why?"

I tel him about how the guy stood there and
watched Phili until I drove off and also about the
messages.

"You think it's him?" He asks with the door closing
behind him. He just left the lounge for some privacy.

"Something in my guts tell me there is something there and Phili just made the sweetest love to me. I know she is all kinds of sexy and sweet and knows how to fuck me but tonight it was different Nqubeko. I can't be imagining this"

"So you think it's the ex?" He asks and I hate having to admit it outloud but I think so too.

"Yes. Unfinished business somewhere"

"But isn't the man wearing a wedding ring?"

"The ring doesn't mean anything Nqubeko"

"Phili wouldn't cheat on you"

"I know but it doesn't mean it's okay for anyone to purposely chase after my woman. It's disrespectful" As a man he should know that you have to respect some boundaries.

"I know and we will deal with him once we know the real story. For now let's find out who he really is"

"I'll send a message to Xola"

I hear a noise behind Nqubeko. It sounds like someone is yelling in pain.

"What's going on?" I ask because there is more noise.

"Ntethelelo just walked to the door. He is sleepy and he refuses to go to sleep before everyone else. You know how stubborn he is" explains Nqubeko and I imagine Ntethelelo forcing his eyes to stay open when all he wants to do is close them.

"Mluleki" says Nqubeko his voice sounding strange.

"What?"

"It's Ntethelelo. He looks like Ntethelelo only he is older. That's why we think we've seen him before"

I stop tapping my finger on the rail and think about Ntethelelo as a grown man.

"That man is Ntethelelo's father" he whispers.

Chapter 100

Thembeke

The entire house had a late night, so I'm not

shocked to wake up to quietness. I leave the bedroom and head to kitchen because the baby and I are starving.

“Morning” says Nqubeko, appearing in the lounge.

“Morning, how was the couch?” I kiss his unshaved cheek. The beard is ticklish against my skin.

“Hard but a man has to do what a man has to do” he laughs and kisses my neck. I let out a giggle.

“Yes. Breakfast?” I offer and he nods “Thanks for cleaning up” we left the lounge in a real mess last night. Nqubeko has fixed it nicely.

“It’s cool” he takes my hand and we walk to the kitchen hand in hand. I make a cereal first so I can keep eating while making breakfast for everyone else. Nqubeko helps with the eggs and sausages.

“So you think you can move in before the baby comes?” he asks, and I stop making toast and look at him.

“But this is my house” he gave it to me for my peace of mind. Yes, he spends more time here than he

does in his own home, but still it's my house.

"I know and your house hardly has enough space for the baby's room" he looks at me like I should have known this already.

"But the baby only needs a cot and we have a space for the cot"

We are going to have a fight. I can see the chains in Nqubeko's head telling him to argue and pulling all the tricks known to mankind.

"A chest of drawers for the clothes. A breastfeeding chair. I think toys as well. Those things need a room Thembeke not a small space" Yep, I was right. We are going to have a fight about this.

"There is a space in the closet. I'll breastfeed in bed" I reason and turn back to toast I was busy with.

"Because you don't want to come and stay with me?"

"Who said I don't? It just makes little sense," I argue, and he says nothing. A tiny person walks in rubbing his eyes.

“Morning Ntethelelo” I greet him and he smiles.

“Morning Aunt Thembeke and you uncle Nqubeko” he climbs the high chair and sits.

“You are up early today. There is no school” says Nqubeko, staring at Ntethelelo like he is studying something.

“I know but the stomach doesn’t know” he replies and I laugh.

“True” says Nqubeko, his eyes still fixed on Ntethelelo. I ignore them and focus on the breakfast so this person can eat.

Nqubeko takes out his phone and snaps a photo of Ntethelelo while acting like he is looking at something on his phone. Now I know something is going on, and he better tell me the truth as soon as this child goes to the lounge with his breakfast.

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Amanda is the second person to wake up, and she

also comes to wait for breakfast in the kitchen. Lucky for her, she finds me almost done and I tell her to give me two more minutes. She says thank you and starts playing a game with Ntethelelo. I let them be until I'm done and hand them the food. Nqubeko pulls out a chair and sits down before he eats.

“Okay out with it” I stand next to him and stab an egg in his plate.

“You are eating my food” he pushes the plate away when I try to grab another one.

“You snapped his photo. Why?”

“Who?” he asks, and I give him the hard look. I've learnt that with Nqubeko you don't play the run around when you want the truth.

“Okay fine, sit down and I'll tell you” he pulls the chair and gets up to help me climb up. I get comfortable and wait for him to sit down so he can start talking. He takes out his phone and turns the screen to me. I stare at the man I've never seen before.

“Who is this?” I ask because I don’t remember him at all.

“Okay, fine. Look at this” he swipes right and I see Ntethelelo’s photo he snapped earlier.

“And?” I really see nothing at all.

“He looks like Ntethelelo” he lowers his voice and I stare at him in shock. He swipes left and shows me the man again and then swipes right to show me Ntethelelo. Okay, the ears look similar.

“They both have bat ears” I tease.

“And they both have the same resting face. The eyebrows, the hairline and the eyes. They have the same eyes” he says and as he mentions these things I see the resemblance as well.

“So you found Ntethelelo’s father? You were looking for him?” does Phili even know this?

“We weren’t. We think he owns the company that is going to be in business with Phili’s company. She is yet to confirm, but Mluleki suspected and I made the connection. He looks like his father with a little

of Phili here and there, ”

I take the phone and look at the photo again.

“So he invited Phili just to worm his way back into her life?”

“Don’t get all worked up now. Let them sort this out themselves” he takes my hand. He told me this and now I’m not supposed to question it or get all worked up? How does that even work?

“He left her pregnant. There is no excuse for that”

“You are pregnant and your hypertension isn’t supposed to rise” he says and pushes my food towards me.

“I’m just annoyed that...” I don’t get to finish the sentence before Nqubeko puts an egg in my mouth.

“Just eat and think about moving in with me” that’s enough to shut me up. I chew and say nothing else. I can’t wait to tell Phili.

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Nqubeko

I start at the office first because it's been a while since I went there for longer than an hour. I'm hoping things will settle down soon, and since it's the festive season, everyone is tired and can't wait to go home for holidays. When the year starts, Thembeke will stay with me full time. I'll make sure she has full-time care and then I'll try to cover all angles at work so by the time the baby comes she can have all my attention. I make a mental note to look for a wonderful school for Amanda, even if it means bribing her way in.

The first face I see is my PA. she greets with a smile which means she was reading a book under her desk.

"Morning Mr Mbonambi" she greets and I nod because now I see Craig waiting in the waiting area.

"You didn't call to let me know he is here" what if I didn't come in?

“He asked me not to saying you were in the parking lot already” she sounds nervous. I really need to smile more in front of my stuff.

“Okay. Please get me some coffee. Powdered milk please” I request as Craig gets up.

“Yes Sir”

I walk to my office. Since Craig is now having me tailed, he might as well follow me now.

He follows me in and closes the door behind him. Craig is not a good sign, no matter the situation.

“What now?” I ask before he even sits down.

“I’m bringing you problems” he pulls out his phone and pushes it towards me.

“Regarding?” I take the phone and it comes to life. It’s Lindo. I look at him, waiting for an explanation.

“We’ve been chasing this guy for months already. He gets away every time, and he leads me to this. Lindokuhle Mbonambi”

“He is my son alright. What is he doing now?” it’s just a photo of Lindo looking bored.

“Swipe left” he orders.

I swipe left and the next photo is Lindo sitting on the couch with two packages in front of him. I swipe more and the next photo shows him opening the packages. It’s clear as daylight that he is pushing coke. I look at more photos until I’m done and hand the phone back to Craig.

“We want the big guy, not Lindo. But I can’t guarantee that Lindo won’t get caught in the crossfire” says Craig as if he feels sorry for me. I know he doesn’t give a damn about me. To Craig I’m just someone he has to harass because someone just involved what’s mine in some shit I have no business being in to.

“So Lindo is a pusher?”

“Yes. Many have identified him Nqubeko and we have someone in the group so you know that it’s only a matter of time before something goes down and Lindo will be there” he crosses his legs.

“Then take him in” he is a minor, but no crime deserves to go unpunished.

“Nqubeko” says Craig sounding disappointed.

“At some point he has to learn that all actions have consequences” it’s better he goes away because if I have to discipline him myself I’ll injure him.

“Even if it risks having him killed? We both know they don’t give a damn about him. They will cut him fast,” says Craig deciding he wants to be brutal about this.

“What do you want me to do?”

“We both know that you have people who can get Lindo out, and they can help us expose the whole thing. You are not a saint Nqubeko”

“I have a child on the way, Craig. Thembeke is finally settling and I can finally breathe. I can’t mess it up” she will never forgive me if anything happens.

“I’m not asking you to go undercover. I’m asking you to point me to the right direction. I need sniffers Nqubeko”

“And in return, Lindo gets out. You will personally make sure his name doesn’t come up?” I look at him

and he nods.

“I can even get him out of the country if needed, but it shouldn’t if Lindo plays away when the shit goes down”

I stand near the window and look down. Lindo is going to send me to an early grave.

“I’ll think about it and let you know”

He says nothing, but I hear him get up.

“Thanks Nqubeko”

I nod and wait until I hear the door close before punching the wall.

A knock follows and I tell them to come in. It’s my coffee and I have no desire for it anymore.

“Thanks” I continue looking down the streets while listening to the throbbing pain in my hand.

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Mluleki

Phili left the bed early and started banging everything in the name of cleaning. I stayed in bed for an hour before getting up because I feared for my pots and vases. She is very active when she is distracted. The breakfast is waiting for me in the microwave and she is now busy making dumplings.

“Are you okay?” I ask while taking a seat across her.

“I’m fine just trying to make something nice. You love dumplings” she smiles and I feel my heart flutter. I love this woman.

“I love loyalty more” I mumble and she heard me because she stops and looks at me.

“What do you mean?” she asks, and I look at her. She looks away first.

“You know what I mean, Phili. I saw his messages”

“Messages?”

“Yes. He sent you messages last night. I got pissed and deleted them”

“You went through my phone?”

“A man sent you messages asking if you are happy with me because you deserve the best. And you are only thinking about how I went through your phone?”

“I didn’t see messages, so how was I supposed to know what they said. You deleted them” she sounds annoyed.

“But that’s not important. We both know that you are worried about this. It bothers you so much you just cleaned the house in an hour. He bothers you”

“Because he left me pregnant and now, I see him again. You think something like that shouldn’t bother me?” now she is yelling.

“I expect you to be pissed and tell me about it. But you didn’t. instead you thought, why not seduce me and make me question us?”

“Question us?” she seems shocked.

“Yes, what am I supposed to say if I come to pick you up and there is man staring at you like that? Then you act all weird about it to a point of just fucking me to forget”

“I didn’t fuck you to forget” she screams and now I know that I’m right on cue.

“Don’t insult me, Phil. I love the sex but I never signed up for guilty sex and you can’t make me start doing that right now”

“I never said you were but I don’t get why you have to get all insecure about anything”

“Don’t make this be about my insecurities. We are not talking about my insecurities. We are talking about you seeing your ex yesterday and coming home a different person”

“You know?” her voice drops

“Of course I do. That’s why I’m asking why are you acting all guilty about it”

“And what makes you think I feel guilty?” her defences are going to pick up again and we are

going to move away from our point, but I can't let her do that.

“You still want that man?”

“How could you say something like that about a man that left me pregnant and never looked back?” her voice is thick with emotions.

“Because you are acting like there is something Phili. Where I am standing you are acting like, I should question this and you keep going around about it”

“It shocked me to see him. He was the last person I expected to see, and he was all cool about it. He even touched me and I hated it. I hate that I saw him and I don't know how to deal with it. But like everything else, you needed to make it about you” her eyes fill up with tears.

“It was never about me. It was about you. You see something that disturbs you and you act like you are feeling guilty and I don't get why. What was so hard about telling me who that man is last night? You knew I saw him and you knew I had questions

but instead you initiate sex and I'm supposed to fuck you and be happy that even when you are distracted you still want to shag me"

She doesn't reply, and I wait for her.

"I was going to tell you when I was ready to talk about it"

"So I'm supposed to watch you drown in this and wait for you to talk?"

She doesn't reply, so I continue.

"So this is what we do? When you have problems, I should stand aside until you are ready to talk about them? I shouldn't worry that you are not okay at all and just be happy that even when you are unhappy, but you still fuck me. Is that the kind of man I'm supposed to be to you?"

She shakes her head.

"What kind of man am I supposed to be to you?" I ask and she wiped the tears.

"Why are you treating me like a toy? Something that should be happy it got played with, but when it

comes to something serious, I should stand aside and watch. Am I not supposed to be your shoulder to lean on?" I question and she doesn't answer again.

"I'm sorry for deleting your messages. I shouldn't have done that. I just got pissed that he has some nerve to send a message asking if you are happy with me. How dare he? Who the fuck does he think he is to come and question our relationship?" she flinches when I smack the table.

"don't do that. I'm pissed at him, not you. Come here" I get off the chair and open my arms. She comes closer and I wrap my arms around her.

"I'm sorry for reacting badly" I whisper and squeeze her.

She says nothing, but she is holding on to me.

"So he touched you?" I ask

"I tripped, and he caught me" she pulls away and I smile at her. I know she is expecting me to get all worked up about it and I am, but I won't show her. Danisa needs to keep his hands away from my

woman.

“He did good because if you fell and he was there but did nothing we were going to have a problem” I say it for her benefit but deep down I hate the thought of his hands on her. I never said I’m not insecure. I have a lot to be insecure about.

Chapter 101

Nqubeko

“So you have to go to Cape Town?” asks Thembeke, following me out of the house. I hate having to lie to her, but I can’t tell Thembeke the truth about this.

“Yes, I’ll try to finish quickly and come back” I take her hands in to mine. She has fat fingers and they are sweaty. It reminds me of our wedding day. She felt like this. But we are no longer those people now. We are a proper couple.

“That’s good” she smiles and I smile back. Why does Lindo have to drag me back to that world?

“I love you”

“I love you too” she laughs and I kiss her lips to shut her up.

“When I come back, we are going home. My mother wants to see you” plus they want to show some support regarding the Josiah issue. Too bad Josiah won’t live long enough to hear the outcome.

“As what? Your pregnant girlfriend?” she looks alarmed.

“Yes” I laugh at her reaction. “To remove the girlfriend title means you will need to marry me” I drop a hint and there is some hesitation in her eyes but I pretend like I don’t see it. To win Thembeke’s hand in marriage, I will need to allow her to process the idea and fall in love with it. I can’t ambush her with that part.

“Just go to Cape Town and hurry back home” she changes the topic and I let it go.

“I’ll text you when I get to the airport but I might need to see Lindo before I leave”

“Okay. Let me not keep you for too long” she lets go of my hand.

“Don’t forget to call Dr Ngcobo” I remind her before kissing her lips again. She nods and then watches me as I walk backwards to the car because I don’t want to turn around. She continues to smile until I bump to the car and then she laughs.

I blow her a kiss and then get in the car. She waves and I wave back before driving out.

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I make it to uLundi in one piece besides driving like a maniac because I’m pissed off. Nothile is home because she comes to stand outside when she sees me drive in. There is a glass in her hands and judging by the way she looks, I can tell she has been drinking since this morning.

“You are back to beat someone up? That’s all you do anyway” she screams before I even get out of

the car. I ignore her rants and walk past her to the house.

“Lindo!!” I yell on top of my voice while pushing closed door I come across. Nothile comes after me, also screaming insults towards me. I don’t have time for her, so I keep searching all rooms for Lindo until I find him hiding in Amanda’s room.

“Cocaine?” I ask while standing at the door. Luckily, Nothile had bars installed in all windows so he can’t escape.

He doesn’t reply, and I take my belt off. His eyes look ready to pop out and Nothile pushes me from behind.

“You are not beating up my son” she yells while trying to push her way inside.

“Cocaine? You are doing cocaine Lindo?” I ask again while calculating if I can grab him before he even thinks about ducking.

“He is not doing cocaine” says Nothile.

I move aside for a bit and she rushes in. I think in

her head she thinks if she offers herself as a shield I'll spare Lindo, but she is so wrong. The moment she is in and Lindo's shoulders drop, I rush around the bed and grab him as he tries to step over the bed to get to the door first. He lands on the bed and I deliver the beating as he tries to free himself from my grip. It's difficult hitting someone with one hand while they try to break free and then have someone else trying to grab the belt, which is what Nothile is doing. When she reaches the level, I'm willing to tolerate, I turn and push her back. She is drunk, so she lands on the floor and screams. I ignore her and focus on beating Lindo up. He resists at first, but when he realizes that I'm not letting up he cries, which is what I want to achieve, anyway.

"I'm sorry" he says in between the sobs and I continue until I feel it's enough for all his sins.

He sits up straight and continues sobbing while I put on my belt. Nothile is also on the floor sobbing while claiming she has sprained her elbow. She really needs to sleep it off.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" I ask and

wipe the sweat on my face.

He doesn't reply, and I don't care. He can hear me alright.

"Those thugs won't hesitate to cut your throat Lindo. They won't have a problem hurting Amanda when they want to get to you. Is that the life you want?"

He shakes his head and wipes his face.

"Why would you involve yourself with that Lindo? You are a kid" I want to slap him around just to make him feel my hands but I stop myself. If I start, I won't be able to stop.

He doesn't reply, and I look at Nothile.

"You are drowning in alcohol, your boyfriend is hitting your daughter and your son is doing drugs. Is this house hold you want to run?"

"Leave me alone. I'm going to call the police" she threatens

"Call them. They want to arrest him, anyway"

That seems to sober her up a bit. She frowns and looks at me. I guess she hasn't fully grasped the

drug issue.

“They have a footage of him with a shitload of drugs. If it gets out, they will probably silence him”

“I don’t do them. They forced me to take a line, and I didn’t” says Lindo as if that should mean something to me.

“It doesn’t matter. They have something on you”

“Can’t we fix it?” he asks and I look at him.

“You think this is something you can fix?”

“I’ll stop and confess to the police” he offers.

“You haven’t been hearing me, Lindo. These people will kill you like you are nothing” I look at the time and I need to leave now if I want to make it to the airport and catch my flight.

“We are leaving. Let’s go” I grab him and Nothile gets up as if she no longer has a sprained elbow.

“Don’t take him Nqubeko” she tries to fight me but I really don’t have the energy for this.

“I didn’t say I’ll kill him” I yell back at her and drag

him out of the bedroom. He resists at first, but when it's clear that I am taking him with me, he stops and allows me to continue.

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Chapter 102 Phili

I'm meeting Nonjabulo to get some feedback on my proposal and I'm feeling nervous about it because now I know that Sazi is her husband and he has sent me two more messages asking how I am and also complementing me on growth. I didn't reply in any of them as I didn't get why he has to send me such messages. He left me pregnant and now he is back acting like we were just fooling around when my life changed forever. "If you pull that skirt down one more time it will rip and then you will need to change it and we both know the skirt is not a problem. You rocked the presentation Phili. This is an easy part" says Mluleki standing behind me and looking at my reflection through the mirror. "I know I shouldn't let Sazi get to me. I mean he is part of the

company but I'll be dealing with Nonjabulo and I can ignore Sazi" I take deep breath and I can see the discomfort in Mluleki's eyes. The subject of Sazi bothers him but he promised to not let it come between us. "Yes, ignoring him should do him good because one wrong move from him and Mr Nice guy vanishes. I won't pretend not to want to smash his head in" he kisses my cheek before I could comment about that statement.

Mluleki is driving me and I'm happy to let him just so he can feel better about being included.

"Nqubeko went to Cape Town" I tell him and he nods but says nothing about the subject. Thembeke is suspecting something and I promised her that I'll ask this man of mine. "Thembeke was worried a bit" I add and that gets his attention. "Why? He is there on business" "What kind of business?" I ask and this time he looks at me. He should know I'm spying for Thembeke. She is pregnant and Nqubeko should know that a secret makes us restless. "Something to do with Lindo and drugs. That boy needs a good ass whipping and then a reality check. He is giving

us grey hair” he complains. “Lindo is into drugs now?” it worse than we assumed. “It’s a mess Phili and please don’t tell Thembeke. The world Lindo is dragging Nqubeko into is too dark and deep and she doesn’t need to think about that right now. We want her to have a healthy baby” he gives me the convincing look. “That’s an impossible situation Mluleki. She thinks he is out there having freaky sex with another woman. How do I sit there and let her continue thinking that?” Mluleki does the unthinkable. He laughs like it’s funny. He doesn’t stop even when I look at him. “What? It’s funny” he adds when I stare at him. “A very pregnant woman that isn’t supposed to be stressed is at home thinking about her husband and you are finding it funny” “Thembeke needs to trust Nqubeko. He wouldn’t cheat on her. Not after almost losing her” he looks serious now. “He did lose her. He is just lucky that he got her back” I add just for effect. “Yeah, He is lucky” he looks at me for a moment and focus back on the road.

We reach the offices and Mluleki doesn't offer to come with me. He prefers to wait with the security while smoking. I find that odd because when we left the house he was hell-bent on coming with me. I don't question it though. I'm nervous as it is already. The front lady greets me with a smile before ushering me to Nonjabulo's office. I find her with Sazi who makes a show to get up and smile when I walk in. I could be imagining it but Nonjabulo's greeting isn't warmly like the last time. She is all professional today and that takes me down a notch. I need her to be fully on my side if this partnership is meant to work. "Please get us some coffee" she orders to the lady before showing me the seat. "Yes Ma'am" she hurries out and I take a deep breath. "Gosh sorry about that. I just had a rough morning but it will clear off in a minute" she says before taking a seat across me. Sazi remains standing and his gaze shifting between us. "It's fine. As a mother I know all about rough mornings" I reply and she laughs. "How many kids do you have?" she asks and I can't help but look at Sazi. Didn't he tell her the truth? "Two but I've raised three" I reply and Sazi

smiles like an idiot. It pisses me off but I have to remain cool because this is business. “Wow that’s great” says Nonjabulo sounding rather emotional. “Celiwe must enjoy being a big sister” says Sazi and Nonjabulo also look at him in surprise. “Yes she does. She gets to bully them at will” I reply like a proud mother. “That’s nice” says Sazi and Nonjabulo clear her throat. “Anyway we should let you know the good news” she says and then smile. “They approve?” I ask unable to wait any longer. “Yes. Welcome on board Miss Khumalo” says Nonjabulo offering a hand. I shake her hand and shake Sazi’s hand as well. The lady walks in with coffee. I guess coffee will serve as a celebration drink for today. I thank her and she leaves us alone.

The awkward coffee celebration ends when Sazi finally leaves us alone. Nonjabulo excuse herself and leave me alone. I use that moment to share the good news with my cousins. “Sorry about that” says Nonjabulo walking in. “It’s fine” I put the phone away and she looks like she was just crying. “Are

you okay?" I ask. I'm a woman and if I were to start crying in a company of another woman I would expect her to offer me an ear even if she doesn't want to. It's the least you can do and of course people have a choice of saying "no thanks" I hope she does the same. "I won't beat around the bush Phili. Sazi told me about your history. It wasn't something I was expecting. I mean he did say you dated years ago but he didn't say everything and last night he finally told me" she says and blinks repeatedly to clear her filling up eyes. "It was a long time ago even though I was left with scars and a life time commitment but I don't want you to worry about me" She gives me a sad look before she takes a tissue from her handbag and wipes her eyes. "To be truly honest I'm even past the hating him stage" I lie so she can relax "I mean Ntethelelo is a gift that life gave me and I can't imagine life without him so for that I totally forgive Sazi for leaving me like that" She lets out a gasp and looks at me in surprise. "Who is Ntethelelo?" she asks with confusion in her face. "My son, I hope Sazi told you that he left me pregnant" I thought they talked.

Unless he told her lies? “But you miscarried and your family married you off to someone else. They didn’t even wait for Sazi to recover from stroke” she says while blowing her nose. “What stroke? What marriage? I’ve never been married and I didn’t miscarry. I have a son. His name is Ntethelelo” I say the words quickly because I’m starting to get confused myself. “Oh my God” she gets up and leave the office. I stand up and think about following her but stops. She will come back to me to clear the confusion. I sit down again but this time I make sure that I’m watching the door just in case they attack me or something. You can’t be sure when people start acting all weird. Time ticks by before I hear footsteps and they both appear. Sazi looks shocked and Nonjabulo is crying behind him. “Okay, what’s going on?” I demand while getting on my feet. “Please sit down?” says Sazi closing the door behind them. Nonjabulo sits down and I also sit but Sazi moves the stand behind her before he pulls out his cellphone. I wait as he dials the number and the phone starts ringing. He put the call on loud speaker. “Saziso” a woman answers. “Aunt

Betty. Is Aunt Gabisile there?” he asks. “Yes she is here. Hold on” she replies. We can hear the noise of the person moving around and doors opening and closing. After a moment a groggy asks who it is and the other person whispers that it’s Sazi. “Saziso. This is a surprise” she says. “Hi Aunt” says Sazi his voice dropping. “Yes. You don’t sound alright. What has that woman done now?” she asks and Nonjabulo flinches. I conclude that they don’t like her at all. “Did Philiswa lose the baby and her family married her to someone else because I had a stroke?” he asks and I look at him. He has a stroke? “Saziso, why the questions now?” she replies her voice no longer sounding groggy. “Because I have Phili with me right now and she has been raising my son all these years. She has never been married” The other end goes quiet. We all stare at the phone waiting for her reply. “Aunt. When I had a stroke did you even tell Phili that I was sick?” he asks and again there is no answer. “She had a son. She named him Ntethelelo” he adds and we can hear the breathing which means she is listening but not replying. “What did they tell you Phili?” he asks and I

jump a bit because I wasn't expecting that question. As far as I know I'm here to hear the truth and digest it because clearly there is a lot I don't know. "That you went to Gauteng to look for a job" I reply feeling my own voice tremble. "And never came back?" he asks and I nod. "Aunt. How could you let me go through all this? I mourned for the baby. You watched me drown in pain and moved me across the country saying it's for my own good" he yells and it makes Nonjabulo and I jump. "You all knew and let me suffer" he adds before his voice breaks. I look away when Nonjabulo gets up and comforts him. "I should go" I get up and grab my bag before walking out. It's a lot to process so I keep walking until I bump to a solid body. It's Mluleki and he pushes my head up. He can see the tears and I shake my head before he goes inside to beat up someone. "Let's go home" I take his hand and he follows but his face is still looking behind me.

Mluleki

Phili sat down and cried before she told me what happened. I held her in my arms and comforted her as she cried and cursed Saziso's family. I understand her anger. Beside that I'm insecure and jealous but what they did was cruel. Worse they knew she was just a young girl already taking care of home. When her crying finally stopped I gave her some painkillers for the headache and ordered her to bed. I make a call to Nqubeko as she sleeps. "So Thembeke thinks you are out screwing someone behind her back" I don't laugh this time. It was Phili's reaction that made me laugh. "I should have known" he sounds disappointed. "Well you did cheat before so it's perfectly normal for her not to trust you" I add. "Because you couldn't let me feel miserable without rubbing salt into the wound?" he clicks his tongue. "The pity party has to stop Nqubeko. Where is that boy?" "Sleeping. I'm taking him to see Sting later on. I keep thinking about this. Nothile's reaction to all this. She knows something Mluleki" of course she knows something but I

couldn't be the one saying it. He needs to see this one himself plus I never liked Nothile to begin with. "What are you going to do?" I ask. "Get myself hooked into a mess and pray I come out with something" he exhales. "And Thembeke?" Nqubeko stands to lose a lot if he loses Thembeke. "I'll call her tonight and assure her that I'm not cheating. She is the woman I want to fuck forever Mluleki. At this point no woman is worth losing that woman" I also exhale and sits down. "What's wrong with Phili?" he asks and I almost laugh because he knows me too well. "Turns out Saziso thought Phili miscarried and he had a stroke the last time they met. His family told him she miscarried and married someone else" the picture of him staring at Phili forms in my head. The way he looked at her was telling that he has some unresolved feeling but I can't raise that point because I can't afford to look like an insecure man that I am. I have to act like Sazi is not a threat in my life. "What?" "Yes. It's a mess" "So Sazi doesn't know that Phili is raising the kid alone these years?" asks Nqubeko "Yes, how could they be so cruel? Phili had only Dabula and they made her think it

was rejection. She was so crushed Nqubeko”
“That’s understandable. So where is she?” he
asks “Sleeping” I listen a bit just in case I hear any
movement in the bedroom. “She will bounce back.
Phili is strong Mluleki. Just give her some support
and by support I don’t mean watch Sazi like a hawk”
“He better stay away if he knows what’s good for
him. But I won’t put myself in dog house. I love
Philiswa Nqubeko. She makes me happy and I
won’t let anyone take her away from me.

Chapter 103

Nqubeko

I stare at Thembeke through the screen. Her face
looks fuller and her nose bigger but still she looks
cute.

“Have you had any kicks today?” I ask and
immediately her hand reaches to cuddle her tummy.
There is a smile on her face and I smile back.

“Yes. Stronger kicks” she replies and her eyes come
back to the screen.

“That’s good. I miss you”

“I miss you too”

“I’m not out here cheating MaKhumalo. I know I did it before but I’ve learnt my lesson. I would never do that to you ever again”

She looks down for a moment and then looks at me again.

“So you are not mad that I’m feeling weird about you traveling again?”

“No I’m not. It’s all my doing babe. You are allowed to question what you don’t trust and as a man I need to make you trust me. I’m here with Lindo. Turns out he is pushing drugs and Nothile knew. They have proof and I need to get involved before they silence him. These people will stop at nothing if they need to silence Lindo to stay out of jail” I explain and her eyes grow large with each word I say. This is why I didn’t want her to know. I didn’t want her to be scared.

“The Lindo that I know? Your kid?”

“Yes. That Lindo and Nothile knows. I just don’t get how she could let something like this happen. Lindo

is having sex and making babies, now he is pushing drugs and who knows what else is he doing behind her back?" I can feel my anger rising but I can't make her panic more than she is right now.

"How are you going to take care of it?"

"I know a cleaner and I need his help" I know she doesn't understand what it means and I cross my fingers that she doesn't ask me more questions.

"What's a cleaner?" she asks and I fail to hide the discomfort in my face.

"It's something I don't want you to worry about" I reply quickly and her face takes a stubborn shape. The Thembeka I know and sometimes love is here and she wants answers.

"I think I'll decide that part myself" she says

"Okay fine. Close the door because I don't want the kids to hear this conversation" I instruct and she moves very quickly to lock the door.

"Locked" she gets back to bed and place the laptop in front of her.

“Okay. What I’m about to tell you Thembeke should not be shared with anyone. Not even Phili and definitely not your therapist. Swear”

She looks taken back and I think I see fear a bit but stubborn is dominant so she raises a hand and swear to never tell. I can’t laugh right now, maybe someday I will.

“A cleaner is someone who fixes the mess like this one. Obviously Lindo is going to be a target. The cleaner will take the target off him and clean up should anyone try to come after him. We call him the cleaner because he does an excellent job and keep the person out of harm’s way” I explain and hope she doesn’t ask me anymore questions.

“So he will clean up Lindo?”

“No, he will expose the ring leader the cops are after and when those associated with him try to silence Lindo then he will start cleaning up” I swipe my finger under my neck so she knows what it means to silence someone.

“And Lindo?” she asks her eyes still all out.

“I have to leave him here in Cape Town. He is safer in here under his eye”

“And you? How is your safety guaranteed?” I want to smile at her concern for me but I don’t.

“I’ll need to tighten up security, get Nothile into a safe place. You and the kids will be with me. Dabula will also get some security but only for a short while. They won’t come after the whole family after the case is out in the open” I don’t even think about the fact that now I’ll be associated with this mess and probably for the rest of my life.

“Nqubeko, this is dangerous” her voice drops. I think the braveness is gone now.

“It is but we are going to be fine. I just need you to remain calm. If you panic the kids will panic too and that will be bad. We need to act like there is nothing going on my love” now I do wish I can wrap my arms around her.

“How long will that take?”

“Not long. I should be there in two days”

Her shoulders drop and I see the tears but she blinks until they clear.

“I’ll never let anything happen to you baby” I assure her and she smiles but I can still see the fear.

“I know but I didn’t picture us having such a Christmas. It’s our first Christmas as a family and I wanted to go all out. Make it extra special for all of us”

“We will have the best holidays my love. I’ll make sure of that. Lindo will stay hidden and if we all follow instructions we will be safe”

She nods and rub her chest.

“Heartburn?” I ask and she smiles before nodding “I bought the syrup you asked for. Check the cabinet in the bathroom”

“Thanks Mbonambi” she doesn’t move though, her eyes stay fixed on me. I can guess the next question but I wait for it.

“How do you know such people?” it’s the question I guessed in my head.

“Some connections I made those years ago plus Mluleki has worked as a cleaner before. He did the cleaning for high profile people. But I can’t involve him now. It’s close to home”

She nods but I don’t think she is buying it.

“We will talk about it later when you come home” she says before she gets off the bed and disappears in the view.

Now I just need Nothile tell me the truth about that man of hers.

Phili

I feel like Mluleki drugged me. I slept like I don’t have problems and woke up still sleepy even though it’s almost 8 in the evening. I want to go home but I can’t face the kids right now. I have so many questions and I do need answers but I’m pissed off at the same time. They ruined my life and kept Ntethelelo from his father. All these years I thought he rejected him and I thought I was cursed to have two kids with absent fathers.

“Please don’t break the glass” says Mluleki behind me.

I look at my hands and I’m holding the glass too tight in my hands. I put it down and look at him. He looks relaxed and when he kisses my lips I let him kiss me.

“How are you feeling?” he asks after moving away from my face.

“Tired and still sleepy. What are those pills you gave me?”

“Painkillers. I knew you will need to get enough rest” he raises his eyebrows.

“Thanks. I needed it”

he nods and then a moment of silence passes before we both start talking at once. I stop and allow him to go first.

“I was thinking we can invite Saziso and Nonjabulo over for dinner and talk about this. I know it’s a lot and you are still in shock but we can’t let the elephant get comfortable in the room” he says and I

know he means well but I was hoping that Mluleki can let me process this and let me make a choice without him being the fixer.

“You look like you want to disagree” he adds when I don’t reply.

“Not disagree but I was hoping I could get few days just to let it sink in. Get a chance to tell Ntethelelo that he has a father” I pull the chair and sit down.

He pulls another chair and sits down next to me.

“I see” he replies and starts popping his knuckles.

“But I do want you to be involved. I know that the road to familiarity with my kids was a bit rocky for you but they love you and I want them to know that Sazi is not here to replace you just like Nqubeko wasn’t replaced by you. So I want them to know that they have several places they can go to for comfort. Sazi was a great stepfather to Celiwe. Yes we were young but he wasn’t acting like she doesn’t exist. And she also loved him so I know she might still feel the same but I don’t want you to panic and think you are losing us because you are not. We

are....” he shut me up by pulling my head towards him and kiss my lips.

“I know and I understand” he says when he finally pulls away.

I nod and lay my head on his chest even though I’m afraid to fall of the chair. We sit quietly for a few minutes before Mluleki says he is ordering dinner and I get off him so I can shower quickly.

“Phili” he says as I start climbing the stairs.

“Yes” I turn and look at him.

“Thank you for the assurance. That’s all I need” he says and I nod. The look on his face is haunting. I understand what rejection does to a person but Mluleki seems deeper than that. Maybe we survived being outcasts and rejected because we didn’t care much. We already knew that we weren’t needed but it seems like Mluleki was rejected suddenly and never got a chance to heal.

I don’t say anything else as he starts making the call and I hurry upstairs.

I'm not surprised to find my phone with several missed calls from Thembeke and Nonjabulo as well as S'ngobile. I never called them back after the meeting. I also have several messages from Sazi and Nonjabulo. I don't open any of them instead I text Thembeke quickly saying we will talk in the morning before taking a bath.

The shower doesn't wash away the feelings inside me but it does leave me awake. I wear Mluleki's shorts and t-shirt before going downstairs. I find him sipping a glass of wine while the food sits in front of him. I didn't think I took that long in the shower but it seems like I did.

"I didn't know the food is here already" I say while taking a seat.

"Wine?" he asks and I nod.

He pours a glass for me.

"Thanks" I take a sip and it tastes better than the last bottle we drank. Wine does have a taste of laundry water but I don't normally say that out loud

just in case it offends people.

He doesn't say anything and I take that as my cue to dish up. He ordered a real meal of curry and rice. It smells really good and now I realize that I'm hungry for real. I dish a full plate for me and he asks for a small portion saying he doesn't want to eat too much.

We eat quietly until I'm done and he is not even halfway done.

"Something wrong?" I ask because now I can see that something is bothering him.

"When did you get your period after we bought the morning after pill?" he asks.

The question throws me off guard and it feels even worse because I don't even remember getting my period after all the unprotected sex we had.

"Didn't I get my period?" I look at him as if I expect him to know my cycle by head.

"I don't know Phili. The tampons and pads are in the drawer still sealed"

“It’s been hectic days and we’ve been so occupied by everything else. I don’t remember” I try to recall anything that might help jog my memory but nothing comes up.

“Shit” he curses and get up. I push the plate away and push the wine away as well. My memory doesn’t pick up any resent period day. It’s late I can’t even go buy the test and it’s going to be a long night if I don’t know.

Mluleki quietly leaves the dining room and I hear the front door open and close. I guess he needs some air. I also need some air as it feels like I can’t breathe but I don’t follow him. I clean up and go back upstairs. I decide to listen to some voice messages left by people who tried to reach me. Nonjabulo asks to speak to me and begs that I return her call. I’ll do that tomorrow. I also read Saziso’s message. He is apologising and asking if we can meet just to talk because he doesn’t know how to deal with this. I don’t reply. He will get an answer from Nonjabulo when I call her back.

I send few more messages to Thembeke and

S'ngobile before putting the phone away. Mluleki walks in just as I get under the covers. He takes his clothes off and get under the covers as well.

“Can we go see a doctor tomorrow?” he asks and I nod. He looks like he wants to say something else but stops himself.

“What?” I ask because I've never been good with unsaid words.

“If you are pregnant would you consider having an abortion?” he asks and I'm left speechless.

Chapter 104

I'm exhausted but I can't sleep and I know that Mluleki is awake because he keeps turning and turning the pillow. I should speak but I don't know what to say. How do you answer when someone says something like this to you? I didn't have an answer then and I still don't have it right now and that's why we are both awake but not talking.

I turn and face the wall. He does the same but

before I feel his hand on my waistline. I don't want to be held so I shrug it off but he resists before I feel him breathing in my ear.

"Please let me touch you" he whispers

"Why? Offering a little comfort before you send me to have an abortion if I am pregnant?" I yell and feel him flinch.

"It's not like that Phili" he lets go and turns to face the other way. I want to resist but the nagging woman in me wants answers so I sit up and turn on the light.

"Then it's like what?" I demand.

He doesn't turn to face him at first but I wait. A minute passes before he turns and looks at me. It could be the light but it seems like he is crying or his eyes are filled with tears.

"You never wanted kids Phili. You are the one who was all freaked out about us having unprotected sex when we began"

"Oh please don't use me as an excuse" I poke his

chest and he grabs my hand.

“Stop that”

“How could you suggest something like this Mluleki?” I lay my head back down and he takes that as an invitation for him to do the same.

“I didn’t mean for it to hurt you”

“But you did”

“And I didn’t mean to. Forgive me for saying it. Please get some sleep” that feels like a dismissal so I don’t move. I thought by now he will know that I am stubborn by nature.

“Not before you tell me why?” I demand.

He doesn’t reply instead he gets up and leaves the bedroom. I get up and follow him as he heads down the stairs.

“Not now Phili,” he says without turning around.

“When?” I stop following.

“Just go back to bed and forget I said anything about the termination. I’ll be back in a minute”

I turn back and quietly go back to bed. I'm not even sure how I feel right now. I want to break something but at the same time, I want to cry until I fall asleep. I shouldn't have allowed Mluleki to be this part of my life. I should have stayed away from him before all this.

Nqubeko

I stop the car and take a deep breath before getting out. Derrick's dog approaches and I raise both hands to show them I'm not armed.

"Mbonambi," says Steve showing his chipped tooth. We fought and he got a permanent mark from it. I don't know about him but I'm over that now.

"Steve. Derrick is waiting for me" I lift my jacket so he can search me. He does a quick sweep over before he nods me forward.

"Please don't touch the car. J ust has the painting

redone” I tease as the security gate opens. Two large dogs stare at me lazily as I walk past.

Derrick meets me at the door.

“Nqubeko” he nods before we shake hands.

“Derrick” I walk in and spot the difference. The last time I was here it wasn’t this glamorous. I guess now Derrick has found himself a domesticated lady who loves decorating the house.

“A drink?” he offers.

“Not yet” I take a seat and he follows.

“You do look like you are carrying the world on your shoulders. Miss Khumalo still giving you sleepless nights?” I pretend not to care that he is bringing Thembeke into this.

“You know about my son being a runner. I need him out of it” there is no need to go around the issue.

“I heard and I know I’ll help you but the real question is what’s in it for me?” he raises his glass. Finally, Derrick has me where he can squeeze anything out of me.

“You can have the truck,” I say without hesitation.

“You must be desperate to give it up so easily,” he says with a mocking tone and I don’t laugh.

“Lindo is only 16 and I just found him so yes I’m desperate” I reply and try not to show the anger I feel inside. Lindo has no idea what I’m doing for him.

“Fine, I want that bastard gone anyway so it’s sort of a win for me as well. So what else do you need?” he asks and I relax my shoulders. The hard part is done.

“I need Jerome back to watching Thembeke. I’ll need a few more men looking out for the rest of the family just in case. Please no loud noise about it. I don’t want the kids being freaked out by anything”

He nods and gets up to refill his drink.

“Sure. And in the meantime what about your baby mama’s boyfriend? We both know he has a hand in this”

“I don’t care. Whatever that will make your job easier” in truth, I’m telling him to get rid of him but I

don't want to be the one saying the word.

“No problem. What about Sdumo? I've been waiting for the final results. Is Mluleki losing his touch?”

“Mluleki left this world D. we can't bring him back. He has a family now and I can't disrupt that” I can see the surprise in derrick's face when I say Mluleki is a family man now. Many did think he will end up just being a rich uncle to his stepsisters' kids and not have his own family.

“So someone tamed Mluleki? I owe her a diamond necklace” he raises his glass and I laugh.

“And he will kill you for it” I warn. He might be a family man but he is still the same Mluleki who kills with a smile on his face if the need arrives.

“I guess a family man or not he is still the same man”

“As overprotective as all of us when it comes to the family”

“True. So I'll take care of the little problem and have my man on the ground. Congratulations on the

pregnancy by the way. It suits Thembeke”

“It came on the right time” I reply calmly.

“I guess so. Plus she was growing. Soon she would have realized that she can do a lot better you know” he raises his eyebrows.

“But she did me so that’s all that matters” I return a cocky smile.

“I guess so but I was going after her if you had messed up” he raises his hands when he sees my face.

“Don’t even go that way, Derrick. You know that when it comes to Thembeke I draw the line”

“I know and I’m just saying. I respect you and yes I did think that she doesn’t suit you but I have to respect you for pulling it off. At some point, I thought you wouldn’t” I guess now that he owns my truck he thinks he can finally lay it think for me.

“I did and now respect my family”

“Will do but hurry up with Sdumo. If you wait too long someone might beat you to it. The man has

enemies all over” he warns and I nod.

“Leave Sdumo to me. So the boyfriend?”

“How about we call Mluleki and have him join this meeting,” he says as he pulls out the phone. I open my mouth to argue but it’s already ringing in the other end. Derrick has Mluleki on speed dial.

“Derrick. It better be good” he says sounding like he is annoyed.

“It is good. I have something interesting for you. I have Nqubeko here with me”

“Mluleki” I speak.

“Nqubeko” he replies and we all wait for Derrick to speak.

“The word out there is that Nothile’s boyfriend called and threatened your niece when she resisted having an abortion. Her phone records show that she received several calls from the man himself. In the end she too an easy way out. Now we both know that she wouldn’t have done it without a little push from someone and that someone is fucking

Nqubeko's baby mama”

“Thanks, Derrick,” says Mluleki before the line goes dead.

“And now?” I look at Derrick who is grinning like a cat seeing a cup of milk.

“Mluleki might be a family man but he is still a killer Nqubeko. He is going to kill that man and I'll frame the leader before exposing him. If you want something done to perfection just send Mluleki” he raises his glass and I stare at him.

Chapter 105

Nqubeko

I try Mluleki for the second time after he didn't answer my first call. This time it rings once and he cancels the call. He leaves me with no choice but to call Phili so I direct my call to Phili who answers immediately.

“Nqubeko” it sounds like she is not sleeping.

“Hi, sorry to call this late. I'm trying to get hold of

Mluleki but he is not picking up”

“He just took a gun and stormed out of the house Nqubeko” now I understand why she is speaking like she hasn’t slept tonight.

“Dammit” I curse and get in the car.

“What’s going on Nqubeko?” great now I’ve made her panic as well.

“I need you to call him. Try to get him to come home. He is pissed off but he is about to make a mistake out of anger Phili. Please call him and beg him to come home” I beg as well as I start the car but that isn’t going to help me because I’m miles away. Right now Phili is my best shot at stopping Mlu from making the biggest mistake of his life.

She doesn’t say anything but the line goes dead and I say a silent prayer that she calls him and he listens. I think about trying Thembeke but Thembeke is probably sleeping and a call from me might scare her. We don’t want any of that happening.

I try Vusi next and he takes forever to answer. He

was sleeping.

“Something wrong?” he asks

“Can’t a friend....” he cuts me off.

“It’s the middle of the night Nqubeko and you haven’t called me in days already. Out with it”

“I’m in Cape Town and I need someone to stop Mluleki from killing that lowlife. Are you in Durban?”

“What lowlife?” he asks sounding like he is getting dressed. I take that means he is in Durban.

I narrate the story the best way I can in less than a minute and Vusi tells someone to drive him to Kloof.

“Thanks, Vusi. I appreciate it”

“Sure and if he shoots me Nqubeko I’ll come back to haunt you” the line goes dead after. I want to laugh but I don’t. I am praying that he doesn’t fight Vusi because that will mean something else.

I try Thuba next but he doesn’t answer I don’t bother to leave a message. I hope between Phili and Vusi someone wins in stopping Mluleki from going through all this.

Phili

“I know you are angry but killing him won’t help now. Please my love” I beg as Mluleki remains quiet at the end of the line. I know he is no longer driving because I asked him to stop before he gets into an accident.

“We have a family. If you go to jail what will happen to us?” I wipe the tears in my eyes.

“Yes we lost a child due to their actions but rather let the law deal with them for everything else and knowing how life works, they will probably piss someone else off in prison and they will teach him a lesson. Just don’t let that be you. I’m begging you my love” I beg.

I wait a moment and then he breathes. He is still here with me.

“They pushed her to suicide Phili. She was just a child” his voice is low and I think he is crying.

“I know but it’s not for us to punish them. Let

someone else do that”

“And if they let him get away with it?” he asks and I get off the bed. I have no idea what to say now but I know that I don’t want him to go ahead with this.

“If you are pregnant Phili and we have a girl and then someone does something like this to her would you still feel this way?” he asks when I don’t answer fast enough.

“I would be hurt but I wouldn’t want you to go to jail for life” I try my best not to imagine Celiwe dead by her own hands and someone else’s influence.

“You are going to turn me into a soft man Philiswa,” I think I hear a hint of a laugh but I can’t be sure.

“I’d rather have you soft at home than hard in prison”

There is silence on the other end before he exhales.

“I’m coming home,” he says before he ends the call. I also take a deep breath before sitting down on the floor and lean against the floor.

I call Nqubeko next and he answers before it even

rings.

“And?” he asks sounding like he is running.

“He is coming home” I reply.

“Thank you, Phili. You just saved all of us. I want the man dead but not by Mluleki’s hand” he also sounds relieved.

“He is heartbroken Nqubeko”

“I know and I’m pissed off too but Mluleki is not that guy anymore. We can’t have him dipping in and out at someone else’s will. Derrick shouldn’t have treated him like a dog that you only have to set off” says Nqubeko exhaling loud.

“Who is Derrick and why does he have Mluleki on his speed dial when it comes to killing people?” I ask and Nqubeko doesn’t reply right away. I think he wasn’t expecting this question.

“I think Mluleki should be the one explaining this to you” he replies.

“I guess so. Bye,” I end the call and put the phone down. I sit quietly and wait for Mluleki to arrive. He

does so after almost an hour and he is not alone judging by the voices I hear when he walks in. I should be getting up and turning the lights on but I don't. They will find me sitting in a dim light passage.

They continue to argue before Vusi says goodnight and then the door closes. I hear the car starts and then drive off before Mluleki whistles downstairs. He appears on the stairs after a few minutes and stops when he finds me sitting. Thank God for the little light because I can see his face and I see the plaster on his hand. He notices my eyes looking at it.

“Had to punch the wall after deciding to come home” he says and then walks closer. I nod and say nothing as he sits next to me.

“If the test says I'm pregnant I'll keep the baby. Not to trap you or to be careless but because I take responsibility for my actions Mluleki. I never pick an easy way out” I say without looking at him but I can feel his eyes on me.

“Even though you are heading somewhere, and you

are about to be extremely busy?” he asks and I nod.

“I can multitask. It’s hard but I’ve been raising my kids since I’ve had them. I can’t fail one baby just because something else has pooped up. I’ll manage just fine” he doesn’t reply instead he takes my hand to his.

“I was rejected as a child Phili. People who were supposed to love me rejected me and from time to time I remember the pain so I try by all means to never have to face that again. So I stayed childless because my fear was dying and leaving a child that will have to suffer in my absence” he chuckles and squeezes my hand “It sounds silly but after watching Thembeke suffer from the effects of her childhood and remembering mine I get this tight feeling in my chest. I try not to acknowledge fear because it can be crippling but I can’t ignore this one. I guess inside me there is a coward”

It’s my turn to squeeze his hand back. I do so and move closer to him.

“Sometimes I do wake up in the middle of the night

and pray to God that he grants me few more years just so I don't leave my kids in this world with nothing. That I don't leave them while they are still this young. My prayer is that at least Ntethelelo turns 25 because at 25 he can build a shark and work someone's garden if that's what he needs to survive. That's my biggest fear and if I'm pregnant it means I'm adding more years in my plea to God"

"So you do believe in God even though I've never heard you mention church?" he lets go of my hand and lifts it so he can put it around me.

"I do believe in God. I just don't go to church because I was judged in church. I'd rather pray behind closed doors in my own home. But we can go to church. You and me and the kids" I suggest and he laughs a bit.

"You can talk me out of killing a man Phili but you can't talk me into going to church my love. Rather teach me how to pray"

"Okay fine. We are going to pray together from now on" I look at him and he nods before he pulls me

closer.

“I heard this song a few days ago and the lyrics stayed with me. You want me to sing it for you?” he asks

“You can sing?” yes I’ve heard him hum some songs but I’ve never heard him sing a full song.

“Yes I can sing” he laughs

“Please do” I try to get off his arm but he doesn’t let me. I think he doesn’t want me to look at his face when he sings. I sit still and wait.

“I found love in you

And I've learned to love me too

Never have I felt that I could be all that you see

It's like our hearts have intertwined into the perfect harmony

This is why I love you

Ooh this is why I love you

Because you love me

You love me

This is why I love you

Ooh this is why I love you

Because you love me

You love me

I found love in you

And no other love will do

Every moment that you smile chases all of the pain
away

Forever and a while in my heart is where you'll
stay.....

Thembeke

I'm up early because I didn't sleep well. I'm worried
about Nqubeko and I'm feeling alone even though

the house is full of people.

“A cup of tea before I go,” says Dabula appearing from the kitchen. He is already dressed for work and I must say the working life loves him; he looks like a handsome family man even though he is just a young man.

“Thanks” I stop hugging the cushion and look at my phone. No missed call from Nqubeko and it’s still early but I can’t relax after what he told me.

Dabula returns quickly with the tea and he added some muffins on the tray. I am hungry after all.

“Thank you so much” I sit up and take the muffin.

“Have a good day and I’ll call you from the office” he grabs his bag and I wave at him my mouth full of the chocolate tasting treat.

Amanda is the first kid to wake up. She greets and goes to the kitchen to get her cup of hot water before she comes back to sit. We sit silently before she turns on the TV and the morning news is on. I expect her to change the channel but she sits back and watches. She is Nqubeko’s daughter after all.

We watch the headlines and I choke on the tea when I see Nombuso's photo on the news.

“Please turn the volume up”

She does that as the newsreader explains that one lady was struck by a stray bullet after there was a police shoot out against a group of men that were suspected to have been smuggling drugs in a quantum in Vryheid. She goes further to explain that the video of the shootout was posted on Facebook and warns against sensitive viewers.

I take my phone and try to dial her number but I don't remember it that well. I try Phumelele and I don't remember hers as well. I try Nqubeko because he hired them so he should have their contact details.

“My love” he answers.

“Nombuso is dead. I'm watching the news and she was shot in a shootout in Vryheid”

“What?” he sounds shocked. I guess he didn't watch the news this morning.

“I’m seeing it on the news Nqubeko. Do you still have her numbers? Maybe it’s a mistake”

“I don’t have her numbers. I’ll call you back just now” the line goes dead.

I turn my attention back to the TV still in disbelief. She can’t be dead, yes I hated them for treating me bad but I never wished them death.

Nqubeko doesn’t get back at me in a minute as he promised. I call Phili and she doesn’t answer. I try Pretty’s number. We haven’t talked in months now but she was friends with Nombuso so she would know something. Her phone rings for a long time before the call gets cut. Now I have no one to call and Nqubeko isn’t answering his phone as well. I check the internet and the video is trending but I don’t have the heart to see dead people and blood so I read the comments and try to read the story. It says a taxi that was traveling to Vryheid was stopped by the police demanding to search it after receiving a tip-off from someone about the driver being a drug pusher. The driver refused and a group of men that was inside the taxi at the time

also got involved and started shooting the police. That's how the thing got out of control and the driver died at the scene.

My phone rings and it's not Nqubeko. It's Dabula so I answer quickly just in case there is a problem.

“Cuz”

“Hey Cuz, I just saw a video. Sdumo is dead. He was shot in Vryheid last night. There is a video of him dead on the street” he sounds shocked.

“Sdumo is dead?”

“Yes. They say he was a drug dealer”

“A drug dealer!?”

“That's what the story says. I have to go Cuz. We will talk when I get home” he says bye and ends the call. I'm not sure why but I have a bad feeling about Sdumo being a drug dealer. I know he was cruel and he abused my cousins with his family but doing drugs? That sounds off somewhere. I send a text to Nqubeko and he doesn't reply at all. I don't want to panic just yet but I'm worried because he told me

why he is in Cape Town. Right now I don't want to connect Lindo to Sdumo and drugs and Nqubeko and his Cleaner.

Nqubeko

“What the fuck did you do?” I yell at Pretty as she continues to sob on the other end.

“I didn't know she will come to Vryheid. We were supposed to meet in Melmoth and she decided to come to Vryheid”

“And didn't I tell you to lay low? How are you going to explain her being in that taxi when you weren't even there? Dammit, Pretty. All you had to do was to plant those things and get the fuck out and not invite your friends there. Fuck” I curse and kick the empty coke can as if it's the source of my problems.

“I'm sorry”

“Sorry won't save your ass. You better keep your mouth shut. if you breathe this to anyone I'll see to it that you don't speak ever again. Someone will

come to get you there and if the police come to you, you stick to the story” I end the call and look at Thembeke’s text message. I need to call her back before she panics. Now I have to pretend to be heartbroken about Sdumo even though I’m not. He wasn’t supposed to die. He was supposed to get caught and go to jail for drugs he knows nothing about so I can rub it on his face every day while he rots in there. Now he is dead and I gained nothing from it. Dammit.

“MaKhumalo” I return Thembeke’s call.

“Are you okay? I’m worried”

“You have nothing to worry about. I’m fine just got tied up. I saw the news and please don’t watch that video. It’s too much my love”

"I know my love. I just can't believe she is gone" it sounds like she is about to start crying.

"I'm coming home earlier than expected," I say it quickly so she doesn't focus on Nombuso. She was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It's not my fault.

Chapter 106

Nqubeko

I didn't want to do this but Thembeke couldn't be talked out of it so we are all in Ulundi where the sentencing of Josiah is taking place. The case is being listened in front of the local chief since Josiah can't be sentenced in jail because it was a long time ago and two people who could help are gone, so they left everything to the chief. Thembeke was called to speak on her side of the story and they gave her an option to send a video, but MaKhumalo couldn't be talked out of driving here for a face-to-face confrontation. She is heavily pregnant and everyone is holding their breath as she takes a seat on the chair after struggling to sit on the grass mat. Across from me there is Mluleki, who is sitting forward on his chair so he can stop me from jumping to Josiah and wringing his neck. He keeps looking at me and then back at Thembeke.

Phili couldn't come because she needed to complete some details for her first take off. They have opened the centre in Danny Dalton and she needed to be there to make sure there are no glitches. S'ngobile came with us though and I didn't want to press, but I know she isn't ready to face her life back there. Dabula needed to go support Phili on our behalf and they took the kids with them because we all didn't want to leave them unsupervised in Durban even though Amanda was so sure she can watch the house, but we all knew better. Snothile's boyfriend was gunned down in a robbery gone wrong and I know it was Derrick's dealings but it's Craig's problem now and Lindo is in hiding just until the whole thing dies down and he also decides what exactly he wants to do with his life since he wants to roll with the thugs. They suspended Nothile at work after they found out she has strings of complaints about her from colleagues and patients. I said at least they didn't fire her and she has a chance to fix her attitude. I don't know if she will do that but it's her problem not mine.

I shift my attention back to Thembeke, who is wiping the tears in her eyes. She looks at me and I nod for her to continue.

“My uncles sold me to Nqubeko after he offered them a lot of money for my hand in marriage” she says and I hear people whisper to each other, some looking at me. I don’t care, so I let them look and judge.

“I was 18, and he was years older. It wasn’t enough for them, I was violated and they benefited. They just wanted more and more, and in return I was the one suffering. I’ve been scared and wounded, but most of my wounds are now turning into scars. I have support and I am getting therapy, but that’s not my biggest concern. I’m going to be okay. What I fear is that out there in this very same community a child could go through the same abuse I went through and she might not be so lucky to have

people to help her heal. She might not be married off to someone who will actually treat her better and heal her wounds like Nqubeko did to mine. As a community it our job to raise the kids in a safe environment, we owe them a safe place. Don't tell me about the school because sometimes the school is where the victims get more abused. Everyone knew I was a child and Nqubeko was old enough to be my father, but no one asked anything about this. We should do better. Stand up for the kids and protect them." She wipes the tears and looks at me. I nod again and she smiles.

"Do I want Josiah to rot in jail? Yes, but he can't because the law doesn't work like that. Law work with proof and without proof there is no case. But if the community stands up, we can always stop these things from happening. We can protect our kids from having the face this like we did and if we do we will face fewer chances of such happening. If a neighbour rapes your child don't sweep it under the carpet. Get out there and tell the police. Tell the

community and show your kid that you are on their side. Keep them safe and encourage the youth to talk if someone is making them feel uncomfortable. Don't neglect boys. They can be victims too. We should protect all children at all times." She finishes.

The Chief nods and Thembeke smiles. I think it's going well. Josiah is sitting there looking like he wishes the ground could open up and bury him. I wish the same, but I can't touch him. The case of drugs against Sdumo is still open and by the look of things I need Pretty to remain the poor girlfriend who lost a lover and Nombuso to be an innocent victim. I know Thembeke suspects me for the whole drug case but she has no proof and until she forces the truth out of me I'd never admit it.

"So my cousin has opened a safe place for all girls and boys if they feel they are not being protected at home. For now, she is in Danny Dalton, but the centre will reach all corners of the District. You can

even send them a please call me and they will come immediately. Help will be provided and we are planning to do amazing things, but I don't want to get carried away about that. Next week Phili and her team will come see the community and tell you everything they will be offering." She finishes and someone is brave enough to clap. I stand up and Mluleki also stands up, I think he thinks I'm about to jump Josiah.

When the clapping stops, Thembeke looks at the Chief and says that she wishes that Josiah's punishment can be a lesson to all the abusers out there. She asks him not to feel sorry for him at all as he felt nothing for her when she was just a child trying to have a good time with all the other kids.

Most men nod in agreement and I see my father also nodding. I think the family ties will never be repaired now. There is no loss on my side. If I never see the family, I'll be fine.

Thembeke asks to be excused before the Chief could speak, and He allows her. I walk her back to the car with Mluleki following several steps behind us.

“You were amazing. I’m so proud of you,” I place my hand on her lower back.

“Thanks Mbonambi, but now I could do with some sleep. I think I’m tired.”

We had a late night last night, and she was up early this morning, so I understand.

“I’m taking her home” I tell Mluleki before getting Thembeke in the car.

“No problem. I’m going to wait here for the ultimate

word.” he replies and I nod as I walk to my side.

Mluleki

I watch Nqubeko’s car as they drive away. The Chief is speaking, but I don’t care for now. I make a call to Phili. I wanted to be there with her but she wanted me to come here and babysit Nqubeko because they fear Nqubeko might murder his own uncle out of anger. I didn’t fear that; I feared me murdering him myself when all this is over.

“My love” She answers.

“Are you guys done?” I lean against my car, my eyes focused on Josiah as he looks down.

“Almost done. It was amazing.” She sounds cheerful and I smile.

“So people came in numbers?”

“And they want to be involved, Mluleki. We are already signing up groups. It’s going to be great.” I hear people talking around her and is sound like there is cheering as well.

“That’s amazing, my love. So you are about to be busier than before?” we barely had a good Festive season because the ladies were always busy with this and that and offering to help them wasn’t welcome as Phili grew even more worried about us messing their working system. In the end, it was just us and the kids.

“Yes, but you know that I always make time for everything.”

“Yes, I know, baby. Is Nonjabulo there?” the question is to check that Saziso isn’t smiling broadly next to my woman. We held a meeting and discussed a way forward after his family confessed lying about the pregnancy and making Phili raise the kid alone. The decision was that we share the boy. Well, it was Nqubeko’s decision really, because I was ready to tell them to forget us. I am very much capable of loving the kids as my own without Saziso being the parent too, but in the end Nqubeko said it wasn’t about my feeling but the boy’s. Now we are all parenting and trying not to outdo each other. The genuine surprise was Nonjabulo. She didn’t show any resentment towards Phili and so far she seems to love the kid. I think the fact that they can’t have their own kid makes her love the kids because she even loves Celiwe. The kids on the other hand, they seem pretty happy to have visits and being spoilt in all angles. We all do the spoiling, but Nqubeko is far worse and I think he is compensating that these kids suffered before they

moved in with Thembeke. He can't undo the past so he is trying to make the present comfortable to a point that we all fear they might grow up thinking life is one big fantasy.

“Yes, she is here. Sazi is gone, though. He needed to go back to Durban for some office emergency.” She explains.

“That's okay. They almost done here us, so we will see you guys later. To catch the celebration.”

“That's great because I was thinking we can have dinner, Just us to celebrate the success.” Someone calls her.

“Yes, and I'll take care of it”

“Thanks my love, see you soon.” She ends the call

and I smile to myself. I was glad when the pregnancy scare turned out to be a real scare. We weren't ready for a baby and I want us to get married first before I focus on learning to changing diapers.

I put the phone away when I hear people make the noise. I have to hear the Chief clearly when he decides on the issue.

He is talking about how Josiah has sons and a large family so they can't take away their livestock and banish the family in the area so instead Josiah will have to leave with his wife and leave his family behind because sons shouldn't be punished for his crimes. There is some cheering, but most men don't look happy with this decision. They are like me; they wish we could kill Josiah on the spot, but we can't. at least not on the spot where everyone is watching.....

To be continued

Final Chapter.

Thembeke.

I get a little frightened when I open my eyes and find Ngubeko's mother looking at me with a frown on her face. She also jumps a bit before she laughs.

"I was just checking on you. You've been sleeping for hours already," she smiles and she moves closer.

I yawn and sit up. The light is on so it's night time and I'm starving but I need to pee first.

"I was tired. People can be exhausting. Is Phili back?" I pull the blanket back and the cold greets me. I'm so warm in these blankets.

"They arrived over an hour ago. The noise in the kitchen," she laughs and shakes her head.

"It was supposed to be a short nap. I missed dinner." The baby kicks hard the movement even

show on my pyjama and I find Nqubeko's mother looking at it as well.

"Yes you did but we saved some for you." She says kindly and I find myself smiling. I've always loved Nqubeko's mother. She never treated me bad even when I was just a kid married to her son she was always so kind.

"Thank you. I need to pee first," I get off the bed and she doesn't indicate that she is leaving so grab a bucket and pee in her presence.

"Nqubeko mentioned that you are afraid of giving birth," she is not asking and I find the topic surprising and I highly doubt that she has discovered a miracle for me to have this baby without having it come out there.

"Yes but he promised me really strong painkillers" I wait for the pee to finish slowly coming out. This is starting to be awkward and I don't get why the baby thinks blocking the pee passage is a good thing. I really need to finish today.

"And he has a bag full of all painkillers he could find

but that's not important." She reaches for the glass on the pedestal and grabs a jug of water.

"What's important?"

She smiles and starts pouring the water on the glass and then pours it back on the jug. She does this repeatedly until I feel my own bodily fluid exit faster. When I'm done she puts the glass down and looks away. I use this chance to wipe and get dressed. We really do need inside toilets in this place.

"What's important is the person you get to meet after the pain. As soon as they arrive the pain will vanish. The waiting can be scary but you've gone through the worst Thembeka and you are still standing strong. This time the pain is going to bring you joy in the end." She turns and looks at me. I nod and sit down on the bed.

"What if the baby is too big and it can't come out?" I know they will cut me and that on it's own scares me as well.

"If the baby was too big to be born naturally they

would have said so already. They would have suggested an operation. They know the baby will come out just fine. You just have to go through this pain and then you get to meet him or her." Her voice sounds really proud.

"I can't wait to meet her. It's a girl I can feel it." we wanted a surprise but I can tell it's a she.

"Me too and I was starting to worry that you are almost overdue. We were expecting the news last week."

"The doctor said it's still fine." We did go see him after his dates passed and the baby isn't here yet. Not that I was really in a rush. Between scared and tired I try to enjoy the feeling.

"And it is but you have to be ready for her to arrive. Don't get me wrong I'm not accusing you of purposely delaying the birth of the baby. You are just scared and I think she is also scared and waiting on you to be ready for her."

It takes me a moment to grasp what she is saying because I'm still stuck on me not being accused of

delaying the birth. Am I supposed to push the baby before time?

"You and the baby are connected and what you fear she probably senses and she could be waiting on you to say 'Come baby, I'm ready to meet you' just look beyond the labor ward."

"You think I can tell the baby to come out now?" She has had kids before so she must know what she is talking about even though none of the pregnancy magazines have said something like this.

"Not tell but allow the feeling to sink in. Feel ready on the inside and that will tell the baby that you are ready."

"Not today though. Maybe I can start tomorrow."

She laughs and holds my hand to hers.

"Whenever you are ready, I also can't wait to meet her. I was starting to fear that I'll die before seeing Nqubeko's kids. Well the twins were a real surprise and I love them but I'd like to change a diaper too."

"I'm ready to meet her as well but I need some food

first,” I smile and get up. “Come let’s get you fed” she gets up and we both head to the kitchen.

**** * * * * *

Nqubeko

Josiah’s gets in the car and slam the door shut. He is alone; I expected one of his kids to be with him but I guess they thought otherwise.

“Can we go?” he barks and I nod without raising my head. Clearly Josiah was never smart because if he was he would have noticed that I’m wearing a cap and that I’m wearing gloves and the obvious action is me not looking at him. Anyone smart knows that you look at the driver before getting in the car especially if you are running away like he is doing.

I start the car and drive off. The area is dark, there are no streets lights and the house are far from the road so it’s just us. I drive for over 15 minutes before seeing Mluleki’s car on the side of the road.

“Who is that?” he asks when he sees me slow down.

“My friend” I turn the lights on and turn to look at him. He is shocked but unable to do anything. People like Josiah are cowards by nature so I’m not surprised.

“Nqubeko” that’s all he manages to say and I flash a smile.

“Surely you didn’t think you will get away with it so easily” I undo my seatbelt and get out. Mluleki approaches the car with a petrol can.

“Get out,” I knock on the window when he grabs his bag. He ignores me and continues to search the bag. His hand pulls out the package and I can see the puzzled look on his face. I go the back and pull out his bag before waving it on the window.

“Yes we switched the bags earlier. Your son should really buy a stronger door and some burglary guards; they won’t keep a master away but can make him sweat a little. It took him two minutes to break in and cost me a R100.” Mluleki smiles and starts pouring the petrol on to the car.

“You are not forced to get out but I’ll light this car up

so think very carefully about your next move” he warns as he takes out a cigarette and the lighter. Josiah gets out fast and attempts to run but he trips and fall flat in the middle of the road.

I move quickly and pull him up.

“Don’t make me chase you in the dark. The last thing I want to do is to shoot you right here right now,” I warn and push him back near the car.

Mluleki lights his cigarette and moves away before he sets us all alight. I love the confidence but I have a pregnant woman at home so I’m not into risky acts.

“Must you smoke near petrol?” complains Josiah.

“What? You are afraid of a little smoke,” he teases.

Josiah doesn’t reply and Mluleki continues to smoke.

“Nqubeko, the Chief already banished me in the area. I’m walking away already,” he sounds really arrogant for someone with limited choices.

“And you think that’s fine? What about the child you

violated? You raped my wife J osiah and offered cows for it,” I remind him and he remains quiet.

“It was a long time ago Nqubeko. I’ve paid for it and Thembeka is fine. J ust let me go and I promise to never show my face around.” He begs and Mluleki laughs.

“Because it’s that easy? Give me the gun Nqubeko.” says Mluleki walking closer to us.

J osiah makes a sound and tries to move. He is scared of Mluleki. To be honest I also fear for him against Mluleki.

“Give me the gun Nqubeko” he demands again.

“We want him to pay Mluleki. We can link him to Sdumo and have him rot in jail for something he knows nothing about. If we kill him he will die, that’s easy and we don’t want that” I try to convince him.

“Then hurry because he is pissing me off big time”

I move away from J osiah’s side and pull out the bag in Mluleki’s car.

“Please don’t do anything stupid, I can break your

neck with my hands and everything you attempt will push me to doing just that” says Mluleki in a cold tone. I don’t even stop what I’m doing. We’ve been standing here for too long already. It might be far from any house but people can see lights on the road.

“I’m sure we can talk and come into some sort of an agreement. Please boys” begs Josiah.

“Please remain quiet before you piss me off” warns Mluleki.

“She is alive, Nqubeko. She is going to make a great mother. Shouldn’t you celebrate that and let this poor old man leave? Please” he sounds like he is going to start crying.

“Did you think about that when you pushed her down?” asks Mluleki his voice sounding even colder than before.

“I was drunk. I wasn’t thinking clearly. It was a long time ago” says Josiah.

“Her screams didn’t sober you up?” asks Mluleki. I hold my breath and hope Josiah doesn’t answer

him. He needs to stop talking.

“I wasn’t thinking straight. I was drunk and it was a mistake and...” I raise my head just in time to see a blade in Mluleki’s hand and then see Josiah’s hand fly to his neck. There is shock in Josiah’s face but it’s only brief before he falls.

“And you couldn’t wait for me to finish?” I ask dropping the phone on my hand.

He doesn’t reply and his phone starts ringing.

“It’s Phili, I think Thembeke is in labour” he says as he answers the call. I wait for him to confirm.

“We will be there now,” he replies and that confirms it for me.

We both quickly put Josiah’s body in the car along with his bags and the drugs since the plan now didn’t work.

“All hard work for nothing” I complain and he says nothing.

It’s amazing how we don’t say it out loud but we are both thinking the same thing as we set Josiah’s car

alight and watch as the fire take before we both drive away leaving it burn behind us.

“We have kids, we can’t have abusers roaming the streets” says Mluleki quietly.

I nod in agreement.

“You still have that knife”

He nods and says nothing. Maybe Derrick was right, Mluleki will always be a killer like me.

** **

Thembeke

I keep expecting this excruciating pain in my lower body but so far I only feel pressure. It’s like there is something pushing below my stomach and each time it does I just keep breathing bracing myself for the real pain that I’m told it’s coming.

“Still okay?” asks the nurse looking at me.

“Yes I’m okay. I’m not there yet” I smile at her.

“That’s good. I’ll be back just now” she smiles and

leave.

I turn to Phili and she is biting her nails. She is nervous and I don't like seeing a nervous Phili.

“You have to relax. You are making me worry and I am still waiting for the real labor pains” I tell her and she stops biting her nails and looks at me.

“Sorry, are you feeling anything yet?” she takes my hand to hers.

“Still pressure every now and then but nothing else” I squeeze her hand.

“What did Nqubeko's mother say?” she gives me this curious look.

“She said I need to stop worrying about the pain and focus on meeting my daughter. That the pain will be nothing compared to the joy I'll get when I meet my baby so here I am” her talk helped even though at the time I thought she was accusing me of delaying the birth on purpose.

“Thembeke” I hear Nqubeko's voice before the curtain opens and he rushes in. Mluleki is following

him and he smiles at me. At least they didn't find me naked like that lady I saw in the passage.

"Men are not allowed in gentlemen" says the nurse walking in.

"I'm staying. I'm the husband" protests Nqubeko.

"We are leaving" says Mluleki taking Phili's hand
"You will be great" he adds before he leans over and kiss my cheek. He smells like fire but he smokes a lot sometimes.

"Thanks" I smile at them and then look at the stubborn next to me. "You are not seeing the baby comes out"

"But I'm not leaving you alone" his face is set so I hold his hand and look at the nurse with an apologetic face. She shrugs and leaves.

** **

Three hours later I feel different as I stare at the baby in my arms. She is sleeping and Nqubeko is standing next to me his hands stretched towards my arms just in case I drop the baby. I won't drop

her, she is too small to drop and I just want to stare at her like this forever.

There is pain but not excruciating like I thought. It's just pain after receiving a stitch down there but beyond that I feel fine.

“She looks like you” says Nqubeko quietly.

I can't tell yet, she is just a small baby wrapped in a blanket and she opened her eyes twice since she arrived.

“I hope she is strong as you” I tell Nqubeko and he leans over to kiss my lips.

“She is going to be strong as you” his hand touches her cheek.

“Mum and Dad we do need a name, we can't call her She and Her” says the nurse looking at us. I totally forgot about the nurse being here with us.

“Her name is Magic” I reply.

“Why?” asks Nqubeko failing to hide the surprise in his tone.

“Because she is perfect even though she came

from me, as broken as I am I still gave birth to someone so perfect. She healed me without saying anything. She has magic Nqubeko. She is my Magic”

I expect an argument from Nqubeko but it doesn't come.

“She is our Magic then” he says and I see the nurse looking at us like we are crazy before she smiles.