

CHAPTER ONE

Fireworks sounded all through Johannesburg, mocking her and taunting her pain. She could hear the sound of celebration even from high up in their master bedroom. All it served to do was make her even more miserable. Tears welled up in her big brown eyes and she forbade them to fall but the bloody traitorous tears fell regardless. Where had they gone wrong? What could she have done better? Why her? Why now? Why again? Had she really become this woman? The questions darted through her mind unanswered. One wayward tear splashed onto the glimmering rhinestone of her engagement ring sliding effortlessly past the simple gold band which was her wedding ring. Logically she knew that crying wouldn't solve anything that the tears would only cause her another migraine, somehow that seemed to open the floodgates even wider.

Rapid knocking broke through her misery, still the tears fell uncontrollably.

“Mpumi open this door right now.”

Still she rocked herself slowly tears coursing through her face collecting a debris of mascara forming streaks across her foundation tipping over the stubborn set of her full lips, paying no heed to the urgency in the crisp notes at the door. The commanding voice at the door took on a chillingly angry note as it continued, “People are beginning to wonder what has become of their hostess and I for one am not going to be made a fool. Now stop this nonsense before I break down this door.”

“Go away.”

There was no trace of tears or sorrow in her voice, it sounded hollow and lifeless to her ears.

“I'm not going to tolerate this bout of self-pity from you, as the minister's wife you have to act accordingly. If you are not down in ten minutes there will be hell to pay. Do I make myself clear?” Perfectly she thought, she was in no mood to play happy hostess but she had no choice, again logic settled on her like an old unwanted gauntlet. She felt more than heard his footsteps fade away. She looked around at the bedroom they seldom used, this was their 'Public house' where they usually hosted events or for hosting dignitaries. She wanted to be back in her own room but duty called and she wearily got off the carpeted floor. In the bathroom after washing her face she could barely recognize the puffy reflection that stared back at her, the reflection seemed crushed and pathetic. Resolutely

she set about restoring the damage of the aftermath of the storm that still raged within her. At least for now the floodgates seemed to have receded leaving her devoid of any emotion.

Thin arms enveloped her in a bear hug the moment she finished her descent down the stairway threatening to open the floodgates she had painstakingly built up only moments ago. She hugged back her daughter with equal force drawing some strength from her comfort. "Mama are you alright? You look so pale." The concern in Oyama's voice clogged her throat, the only response she could summon was to kiss her reassuringly.

"Your mother is fine, but I suspect she might be coming down with a bug of some sort." Nompumelelo shot Daniel a thunderous look, hating her husband for answering on her behalf wishing she could wipe off his pretentious devoted husband look. Daniel responded with an icy warning in his eyes yet his voice dripped of love and concern, "Feeling better my love?" Well two can play at this game she thought, grimacing inwardly as she noticed for the first time that they had a captive audience. She bitterly wondered if the whole room knew of her shame.

"No darling you are right, I think I might be coming down with a stomach bug. I'm going to call it a night." Wrong answer, Daniel's eyes flashed at her but she was past caring. Oyama feeling the tension between her parents took her mother's hand, "I'm coming with you mama" her chin thrust in a stubborn angle that her mother and father knew all too well. Conceding defeat Daniel escorted the willful women in his life out of the ballroom, Mpumi only stopped along the way to plant kisses on her mother's cheeks and her best friend's lips. Outside in the icy early morning some fireworks were still flashing randomly in the bright clear sky illuminating the otherwise starless sky. Daniel stood stoically next to his family while they waited for the driver to bring the car around. He wished he knew what was going on behind his wife's luminous brown eyes but a wall of indifference shut him out and his daughter's worried gaze kept darting from his wife to him made him feel like a jerk. "Mpumi..." he began to question why she looked so haggard, real concern finally niggling at his consciousness but then the car slid to a halt in front of them.

Ignoring the plea in Daniel's voice, Mpumi stepped into the cushy backseat of the car and stared the opposite direction shutting out the concern she felt from her husband. It was too little too late. Oyama slid into the seat next to her mother and as the car slid out of the driveway a comfortable silence settled over them. After passing a few miles Oyama broke the silence, "Did he hurt you again mama?" Mpumi's heart twisted painfully, she hated how her daughter who had only just stepped into teenage hood had to bear the role of being her constant comfort. She took her daughter's hand and kissed her palm and lied glibly, "No baby I just wasn't feeling up to the party so soon after...you know but it's nothing you should worry yourself about." Mention of her mother's recent miscarriage assuaged some of Oyama's curiosity but she still needed convincing so Mpumi rushed on to change the painful topic avoiding her daughter's intuitive gaze. "Are you ready for your retreat trip tomorrow?" Oyama's eyes lit up at the mention of her school trip, "I'm so excited mama, I haven't been to Capetown since our last family trip there and that's been ages ago."

"I know Yaya and Capetown is so pretty you get to go to the table mountain we never got time to go there. Have you packed everything? Last time when you went to Durban you forgot your toothbrush and all your panties" Mpumi teased her daughter's forgetfulness, Oyama was a very bright girl and loving to a fault but her mind was always preoccupied with one flight of fancy after another and she was always forgetting. Mpumi's mother always reprimanded Mpumi that she babied Oyama too much instead of treating her like the teenager that she was. "I forgot them because you were at a business conference and only aunt Nomusa was there to help me pack." Her best friend, and Oyama's godmother was an IT whizz but hopeless at packing, Mpumi smiled "What would you two do without me." Oyama snuggled on her mother's lap like a baby, half-lying on the car seat. She hadn't snuggled up to Mpumi in a long time and Mpumi welcomed the almost cuddle. "We are hopeless without you mama, I will miss you."

"All of five minutes then you and your girls will be tearing up Kapa and you will forget about your boring old mother." Oyama's voice carried a smile, "Ryan will also be there."

the goofy basketball hunk?"

"Ryan as in your crush Ryan

"Maaa..."

Oyama got off her mother's lap and Nompumelelo laughed. "Come on sweetie your face takes that dreamy look when you talk of Ryan." Oyama snuggled back and sighed wistfully "I do like Ryan but he never seems to notice me he treats me

like one of his homeboys.”

“Maybe it’s

because you act like one of his homeboys.”

“I don’t know how to act differently I’ve never liked a boy before and when I’m around him my tongue says the most stupid things like your basketball looks cute I mean who says that mom.” Mpumi laughed at the self-indignation in Oyama’s voice and she caressed her kinky hair kissing her forehead, “It’s normal Yaya when I first met your father I was tongue tied too, I came from a very strict family and dating was strictly forbidden my first taste of freedom was at university so you can imagine I wasn’t as polished as the other girls and I would stammer whenever he talked to me.” No matter how many times Oyama had heard this story it was hard to reconcile the sophisticated and poised woman that her mother had become with the stammering naïve young woman she had been when she first met her father. All too suddenly the door opened and they noticed that the car had come to a halt in front of their home. Oyama got off Mpumi’s lap and was helped out of the car by the driver, “Thank you Tom, happy New Year” Oyama gave the rather startled driver a brief hug and was rewarded with a wide grin. The driver also helped Mpumi out of the car. Arm in arm chatting happily mother and daughter stepped into the mansion, Mpumi’s inner turmoil abated in the meantime. After hugging and kissing mother and daughter headed to their rooms to retire for the night.

“Now remember to take as many pictures as possible and email them to me, ok? I charged the camera battery as well as the spare battery,” Mpumi hugged her daughter fiercely and kissed her on the lips. “Yes mom I will and you have to take care of yourself till I get back.”

“Don’t worry about me I’m fine, have a great time it’s your last trip before you start prepping for matric.”

“I know, I know even though my matric exams are ages away,” Oyama grumbled looking towards the school bus where her friends were already waiting for her.

“Fine I get the message off you go young lady love you” Mpumi settled for a last kiss and after a muttered “love you too mama” Oyama rushed to join her friends and they got on the bus laughing and screaming joyfully. As the bus pulled away the kids threw kisses at their parents leaving behind a lonely silence. Mpumi

walked slowly back to her car where Nomusa was waiting for her. Sadly her thoughts turned to her husband. He hadn't been there at the breakfast table. Their housekeeper had relayed the message that Daniel had gone out to look over some tenders which were meant to be given to people to mark the New Year. He hadn't bothered to say goodbye to their daughter and Mpumi suspected he had forgotten that her trip was today. Even though Oyama was hurt she tried to shield her pain from her mother and had been perky as they went through her luggage. They had picked up Nomusa on their way to the school and godmother and goddaughter had been chatting and laughing while Mpumi drove. She had given the staff the day off and was lucky that Nomusa was available to talk to. "Back to earth Mpumi," Nomusa gently broke into her thoughts, "where have you gone to boo you seem miles away." Mpumi smiled wanly at her best friend, she and Nomusa had been best friends since they were in diapers and she regarded the former as the only sister she had. "I'm right here girl, just wondering if Yaya forgot anything."

"Liar." Nomusa could easily read her friend and knew that something was up.

"Let's go to that cozy coffee shop down Kelvin Drive and you can tell me what the hell has been going on with you lately." Mpumi sighed knowing she couldn't shake off Nomusa as easily as she had shaken off Oyama, "Fine but you are paying."

The duo managed to find their favorite spot out on the patio of their getaway coffee shop. The sun danced beautifully across their tiny haven, warm but not intrusive. Nomusa looked at her best friend who had stuck around through all her bad relationships and her almost run-in with the altar. She saw a beautiful woman whose age at a glance was undiscernible but Nomusa knew it to be 38. She had flawless ebony skin, warm chocolate eyes speckled with gold highlights giving her face an exotic look. Her natural kinky hair was long, curly and at times unruly but currently was tamed in a turquoise shell-hairpin which matched her stiletto pumps managing to transform her casual denim and loose top into an alluring feminine look. Though her unmade-up baby face was almost angelic her voluptuous Xhosa body was undeniably all woman with curves in all the right places unlike the skinny trend that most of their peers fought to obtain. Nomusa noticed how drawn Mpumi looked and she put a hand over her tense fingers.

“Pum-pum what’s eating you up?” The use of her childhood nickname coaxed a smile from Mpumi and she sighed inwardly, Nomusa was like a dog with a bone and she wouldn’t let up till Mpumi came clean. Taking out a folded manila envelope from her purse, Mpumi quietly handed it over to her best friend. She looked at her friend as she poured through the glossy contents, Nomusa’s sharp intake of breath mirrored her own shock at the private investigator’s findings. The seconds trickled past as Nomusa looked through the damning evidence of her friend’s turmoil and she could only imagine the blow these pictures dealt on Nompumelelo. “How long have you had these?” Mpumi couldn’t quite meet Nomusa’s eyes afraid of the sympathy she might find there, how pathetic she must seem. “How long Mpumi,” Nomusa demanded insistently. “Since yesterday I met with the investigator just before the charity ball.”

“I thought after last time you terminated the investigator’s services, you said you and Daniel were on the mend that he agreed to go to marriage counselling and that he swore he would never cheat on you again.” The concern in her friend’s voice threatened to burst open the floodgates again and Mpumi struggled to bring her emotions in check, “I know what I said, I lied ok, I was tired of looking so pathetic in your eyes and I hoped that he would change but he didn’t it got to a point where we started sleeping in separate bedrooms then then..” this was the extremely difficult part, “...then I fell pregnant and he seemed remorseful he acted the part of a devoted husband when I found out it was all an act the same way he lures in his constituents, I freaked out so much I lost my baby.” Nomusa paled, “God, Mpumi why didn’t you say something?” Bitterly, Mpumi stared unseeingly at the scenic view, “because I’m a mess Nono, I didn’t want to become that woman who is always crying about her cheating husband. How I longed for that perfect life and I was tired of the pity that I saw in your eyes each time. I’m a fraud such a fraud.” Nomusa took her hands comfortingly and let her continue to rant. “You know stupidly I thought I could fix him, fix us but I was wrong. I even bought tickets for a romantic getaway for us since Oyama will be away at camp. I hoped that maybe when it’s just the two of us he would remember why he married me in the first place.” A painful silence settled over them shrouding them like a dark cloud in the sunny café and their coffees turned cold unnoticed. Nomusa felt a deep rage over that pretentious prick, Daniel could slither away from a lot of things and worm himself into people’s good grace but he had never been able to fool her. She and Mpumi had gone to different colleges and she

hadn't been there to warn her friend against Daniel and when they had been introduced it had been too late Mpumi had been infatuated and had thought that Nomusa's pleadings had been unfounded and once her best friend and lover got to know each other Nomusa would love Daniel. Nomusa knew that Mpumi could be pigheaded when she wanted to be and loyal to a fault and that if she were ever to leave Daniel it would have to come from her not anyone else even her lifelong best friend. After a while Mpumi continued in a dull voice pointing at the pictures, "But this, this is too much even for me, there is only so much I can take. I'm only human after all."

"Have you confronted him yet?"

"No, I couldn't bring myself to ask him yesterday, I don't think I have any fight left in me I feel so empty." Alarm bells flashed through Nomusa's whole body, yes Mpumi had been through more than most in her life but somehow her friend always persevered with quiet dignity underneath that sweet and at times fun-loving exterior was a layer of steel. And now looking at her sagging shoulders and the taut lines on her face, Nomusa had never seen her friend who was more like a sister, look so defeated and it scared her. She playfully lifted Mpumi's chin up and held it up between her hands schooling her expression into a playful one, "You said something about a romantic getaway, where were you planning to take him?" The response was indignant, "I'm not taking him anywhere anymore I'm going to cancel the whole thing."

"Who said anything about taking Daniel with you? I haven't been on holiday for so long especially an expensive one and we never go together anymore. So what say you my lady, you and me out there sipping margaritas in the Caribbean and checking out all those surfers?" Nomusa was relieved to be rewarded by a real smile, "Sorry to disappoint you but you and I, my friend are not going to Bahamas or Hawaii or anywhere that even requires our passports to be stamped." Nomusa feigned comical disappointment "So where are we going?"

"It sounds corny but it's an eleven day romantic safari by the Ultimate Africa Safaris called Wild at heart."

"Sounds erotic, I bet we are going to meet so many yummy men."

"On a honeymoon safari? I doubt that very much, the single men we are likely to meet there are either jilted or psycho."

"There you go being all realistic on me, that kind of negative aura should not be

coming with us on this trip. I can feel it in my bones I'm going to find my prince charming." Mpumi smiled at her friend's excitement and wished wholeheartedly that she found what she desired Nomusa deserved to be swept off her feet by a decent guy who wouldn't string her along. As for herself, she had had enough heartache to last her a lifetime, romance was off the cards for her and she said as much to Nomusa adding, "All I hope is that this trip will serve as a retreat of some kind and help me figure out the mess that is my life." Nomusa sobered at the abject misery that Mpumi had sunk back into and while she cradled her hands, vowed silently that she would look out for this woman who had given her so much. To distract Mpumi, she asked, "When are we leaving for the trip?" The trip was to commence the very next day, Nomusa suggested some last minute shopping hoping some retail therapy at her beastly husband's expense would help lift her friend from her funk. It was agreed that after shopping the ladies would pick up some of Nomusa's stuff and spend the night at Mpumi's house before their departure.

That is where they found Daniel waiting for them seemingly calmly in the leather recliner of their plush lounge. The interior décor had been done by one of the Top Billing designers. Though the earth colors were meant to warm the place up and present a cozy setting, the obvious costly antiques and portraits of Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko and Daniel's great-uncle Walter Sisulu gave the lounge and the rest of the mansion a stately and expensive presence. Nomusa could understand why her friend was smitten with the man lounging on the cream recliner, with his legs stretched out he seemed like a panther ready to spring on its prey. Daniel was classically handsome, with no scratch or scar or any common disfigurement that mere mortals usually have, yet underneath that porcelain perfection and calm exterior there was an edge, a hunger for power and an obvious ambition that made him an enigma. Nomusa knew that he was capable of turning his charm on and off like a state-of-the-art air conditioner with his whip lash wit, a master puppeteer who loved nothing more than pulling the strings and staying on top of every situation. Sardonicly he inclined his head at her, "Nomusa."

“Daniel.” There was no love lost between those two, Mpumi sighed inwardly and asked Nomusa to give them a moment. After an aggressive stare down Nomusa took their purchases upstairs and Mpumi remained standing on one end of the room. “Aren’t you going to sit down and have a civil conversation with your husband?” Daniel queried softly, to avoid a confrontation Mpumi took the sofa opposite him and waited for him to continue. “Where have you been all day? I’ve been calling you since morning you didn’t pick up any of my calls.”

“My phone was on silent, I went to drop off Oyama for her trip then spent the afternoon with her godmother.”

“That trip was today? Why didn’t you remind me and why do you still hang around with that woman you know she is beneath you and...”

“Leave it Daniel, Nomusa is my friend not yours I will not allow you to talk about my only friend in that manner.” A silence ensued, Daniel was trying to gauge his wife’s mood and he failed. She had become a master at tucking away her thoughts and feelings behind an impeccable elegance. Daniel remembered a time when he could read all her emotions and thoughts, she had always been refreshingly an open book with a big heart. When the troubles in their marriage had begun she had withdrawn from him bit by bit and now Daniel honestly feared she had withdrawn from him completely. But his pride wouldn’t allow him to show how much he needed her to go back to trusting and loving him. Frustrated he paced the floor and she stared at him, waiting for him to continue. She wasn’t quite prepared for what came next, “Why do you always have to fight me? How many times do I have to try to make things right between us but you always have to go and make a scene?” She was incredulous and speechless at her husband’s self-righteousness but he wasn’t done yet with his reprimand, “You always have to make me look like the bad guy in front of your family and friends like your little show yesterday in front of my constituents. You forget your place woman, you are my wife and your place is beside me smiling and supporting my career. But no you always have to prance around with your single friend knowing that I forbade you to be with her.”

“Are you done?” Mpumi didn’t wait for him to answer and picked up her purse and made to exit the room, he blocked her exit. “And where do you think you are going? I’m trying to carry a civil conversation with you.”

“I’m going to pack upstairs, Nomusa and I are going on a safari tomorrow.”

“That won’t be possible, you have to plan for the Save the Children banquet we are hosting next week and I forbid you to go anywhere with that woman.”

“I wasn’t asking for permission Daniel.”

“What is the matter with you? The last two days you have been acting like a woman possessed with God knows what, defying me at every chance you get, making me look like a fool in front of my constituents.” Daniel angrily grabbed her arm his nails digging painfully into the soft flesh just above her elbow, she tried twisting away but he only dug deeper. Both of them had been so caught up in their fight they hadn’t noticed Nomusa come back into the room and they were startled by her voice, “Lay your hands on her one more time Daniel and I will make it my life’s mission to bury your political life.” “Butt out of this you witch, she is my wife and you will not tell me how to handle her.” The tension in the air was palpable and one could slice through it with a Swiss blade, Nomusa advanced threateningly towards Daniel and something in her eyes convinced him to let go of Mpumi’s arm in disgust. Pointing a finger menacingly at Nomusa, “I want you out of my house and you,” he turned to his wife, “if you go with her never come back and you will never see my daughter again.” A chill went up and down Mpumi’s spine yet a stubborn streak settled over her and she tilted her chin up, “We will be out of your hair come morning, now if you will excuse us, we have some packing to do.” Leaving a stunned husband behind she took Nomusa’s hand and they headed upstairs.

Up in the guest room that Oyama and Mpumi had fondly nicknamed Nomusa’s room, Mpumi sunk gratefully onto the armchair that was beside the huge four poster bed. The designer had aligned a European medieval décor in the bedrooms with deep sunk baths and silk quilts. Nomusa watched her friend shiver from the aftermath of the first active defiance against her husband with a mixture of awe and respect. But she was also worried about the side of Daniel she had never seen before and she had to know, “Has he ever hurt you before?” Mpumi’s only response was to rock herself much similarly to the night of the ball. Nomusa took both her hands into hers, Mpumi’s hands were icy cold, and stared into her troubled eyes, “You can tell me Mpumi, has he ever hurt you before tonight?” Nompumelelo shrugged her friend’s concern aside and walked over to take her phone saying over her shoulder, “I don’t want to talk about him anymore.” There were numerous missed calls on her phone most from Daniel and her mother,

sighing inwardly and knowing she was probably going to regret it she called her mother back. MaNtuli picked her call after the third ring, and she sounded peeved at her only child, “Nompumelelo where have you been all day, umkhwenyana has been looking for you we were all worried”

“Hello mother, I’m fine I had gone out with Nomusa.”

“You are a married woman Nompumelelo, you have to be with your husband. And what is this I hear...” Alarm bells started off in Mpumi’s mind, Daniel had gotten to her mother before her as he always did. “...you are taking Nomusa on a safari against your husband’s wishes.”

“Yes Ma, we are going on an eleven day trip just to get away from things.”

“That’s the problem with you modern women always running away from your problems, instead of sitting down and fixing your marriage you are off trotting the world with your single friend. I have set up a meeting with Reverend Mphahlele for a marriage counselling session and umkhwenyana has gracefully agreed to attend to help you come to your senses.”

“I’m not going to marriage counselling Ma I already told you and Daniel, I’m going on a safari with Nomusa. I paid a ridiculously large amount on this trip and it’s non-refundable.”

“Then why don’t you take your husband with you? That man has been nothing but patient with you all these years.”

“You mean through all the miscarriages and his cheating? He’s my husband Ma he is supposed to be patient and stand by me but no he was out there with every other women.”

“I am your mother and I would be letting you down if I didn’t tell you that every marriage has its setbacks and that men cheat my child that’s our reality you won’t find a man who doesn’t.”

“No Ma you are my mother your duty is to look out for me, make sure I don’t get hurt and hold me when I am hurt like during my last miscarriage when he sent his secretary to send me a condolence card and flowers. But all you do is stand up and make excuses for him, so forgive me but I have to pack and get away from all of you, if you are so concerned about umkhwenyana wakho, you can come and check up on him.” Frustrated, Mpumi hung up tears threatening to spill again, Nomusa saw the tears and felt pain for this woman who was always in other people’s corner but who had no one in her own corner. Knowing the only thing that would cheer her up, Nomusa suggested, “I’m sure that Oyama has settled in now why don’t we set up a skype call with her?” as she had predicted, Mpumi

smiled and went to take her laptop from her room across the hallway. Oyama was laughing when she answered the call her big eyes bright with laughter, “Hey pumpkin did you travel well?” “I did mama, the bus took us to the airport and the flight went off without a hitch.” Nomusa pitched in, “Who sat next to you on the plane kiddo” Oyama actually blushed, “No one aunty...Mama you won’t believe how gorgeous Cape Town is and the camp we are in is totally to die for.”

“I believe you sweetie and we have a surprise for you too, your aunt and I are coming to Cape Town tomorrow.” The teenager’s scream of joy was contagious and the older women smiled, Mpumi continued, “It’s the first leg of our safari, we are taking a trip. The first four days will be in Cape Town and if you want I will come up and see you at camp.”

“Are you kidding of course I want you to come I will be mad if you don’t, we have a hockey match in two days hope you will be there.”

“I will be there honey, I promise.”

“Aunt Nomusa?” Nomusa shrugged her shoulders elegantly, “I’m not promising anything kiddo I hope to catch myself a man in the Cape Town waters.” Amid laughter, Mpumi demanded for pictures and Oyama emailed them to her and when they signed off Mpumi felt a weight lifted off her shoulders. Nomusa was certain that Oyama was the only teenage girl she knew who was so into her mother. Staring at the happy carefree picture of Oyama, love welled up in her heart and that love gave her the courage to keep packing.

The next morning there was no sign of Daniel. The housekeeper reported that he had left for a conference a few moments before they came down for breakfast. Relief and regret niggled at the back of Mpumi’s mind, whatever differences she and her husband had she still held on to the notion that somehow he would change back into the tall lanky young man she had fallen for at varsity. It helped having Nomusa with her because Nomusa kept up a flowing chatter of office gossip and had her laughing along at her outrageous stories. The Uber that was taking them to the airport arrived and they packed their cases and after some last minute instructions to the housekeeper, Mpumi got in next to Nomusa. As the car pulled out of the driveway Mpumi looked back at her house, without Oyama she

wasn't particularly attached to the huge mansion and felt nothing at leaving it behind. Mistakenly Nomusa saw her look back and thought she had misgivings about their trip, holding her hand she promised solemnly that the trip would be one they would never forget. Neither of them could have foreseen just how much this safari would alter the course of their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

While Nomusa flirted shamelessly with the guy seated across them, Mpumi drifted in and out of a restless sleep. Mercifully the flight was short and uneventful and soon the plane was taxing into the airport. They found their escort easily enough and their bags were cleared, packed into their ride and made their way to the Twelve Apostles Hotel. Mpumi was preoccupied on their way to the airport, she did not revel in the beauty of Cape Town as she usually did and she kept on dwindling her rings. She remembered how she got engaged, it had taken place on their way to the airport. Nompumelelo had graduated on top of her class had won three book prizes and a scholarship to study her masters in Harvard. She and Daniel had been dating for a year, when he graduated second in their class his uncle had taken notice of him and wanted to take him under his political wing. Their futures seemed miles apart and though Daniel had been supportive Mpumi had expected him to break things off with her. On the bus ride to the airport, none of their families had owned a car back then and they could not afford a taxi, only Daniel accompanied her. He had gently taken her hand in his and looked her in the eye, "Promise me you will come back to me." Mpumi had been mesmerized by the way he earnestly looked into her soul and she had promised. "I know I don't have much now, I couldn't even buy you a ring but I promise when you come back I will send my uncles to pay lobola to your family and you will be my wife." Those words had carried her through that period of her MBA, she had had her doubts but Daniel had kept his word and she had felt she owed him her hand in marriage. Mpumi felt a light shake on her arm, it was Nomusa telling her they had arrived at their hotel.

The hotel was gorgeous as Oyama would say, the building was set against a mountainous background with lush vegetation which begged to be explored. There was a serenity to its seclusion and oneness with nature that was immediately soothing. The foyer was an even more pleasant setting, the high ceiling made it spacious and welcoming the chandelier and fresh flowers in antique vases gave the hotel an intimate and rustic feel. There weren't a lot of people in the foyer when they arrived and Mpumi was relieved to be away from the hubbub of Johannesburg and was doubly glad that Nomusa took over the checking in and chatting with the bubbly receptionist. Naturally Mpumi was a friendly person but the strain of the past few days was taking its toll on her and all she wanted was a warm bath and to dive into their renowned Spa. Their luggage was carried for them to their room by a chatty bellboy who was excited to let them know that their room was next to the presidential suite and he launched on to tell them of the famous people who had resided in said presidential suite. He let on that the chairperson of the hotel chain that owned this very hotel was currently residing at the presidential suite. Mpumi was happy to get into their room and to see the back of the chatty bellboy. Nomusa let out a whoop of joy, "Pum-pum look at our room! Its perfect I probably couldn't afford a room of this nature on my paycheck." Mpumi agreed wholeheartedly with her, the room was perfect the high ceiling and the floral wallpaper gave the room classical elegance. The four poster bed screamed poignant romance with minimalist throw pillows it held promises of perfect bliss. There was also a cozy sofa in the room as well as a walk in closet which Nomusa inspected with glee. Mpumi took off her shoes and curled her toes into the plush carpet feeling some of the tension seep away from her ankles. "So what are we going to do today? The tour only officially begins tomorrow. I was thinking of a massage at the spa and a walk to the beach just to get a feel of this place and maybe watch a movie in the private cinema at night." Nomusa squirmed uncomfortably at her friend's suggestion, "ummmh yeah that sounds nice"

"But?"

“It’s nothing just that Amo had asked if he could come pick me up for dinner tonight.” Nomusa was actually blushing and Mpumi’s curiosity got the better of her.

“Amo?”

“Amogalang. The guy I was talking to on the plane but its fine I will call him and cancel.”

“By talking you mean the guy you were heavily flirting with on the plane and no don’t cancel. Remember you swore you will find prince charming on this trip I don’t want to stand in the way of true love.”

“I can hear your sarcasm, he will understand right now you need me here.”

“I’m fine, I don’t need a babysitter and since you are going on a date you might as well join me for a massage and facial maybe squeeze in some waxing.”

“Nompumelelo Ndinisa-Sisulu your mind is filthy, on a first date wouldn’t that be too forward.” Mpumi laughed and she could sense uncertainty beneath her friend’s indignation and she assured her, “It wouldn’t hurt to be prepared either way if nothing happens he won’t be any the wiser.” Reluctantly Nomusa agreed to go on the date she felt as if she was abandoning her friend in her hour of need but Mpumi was adamant and Nomusa had to concede defeat.

The trip to the spa was a novelty and the ladies came out glowing and relaxed and headed back to their room. While Nomusa took a shower, Mpumi waddled in the bath feeling safe in the cocoon of the scented bath only leaving it to help Nomusa pick up an outfit for her date. "Where is he taking you?" Nomusa had no inkling as to how their date would fare so it was agreed on a casual chic look of a simple A-line dress with a plunging neckline and wedge pumps which could easily fit into any location without being overdressed or under dressed, Mpumi borrowed her a silver necklace and clutch to complete the look. Both ladies were satisfied with the look when there was a knock on the door, Amo had come to whisk his date away. Mpumi approved of him instantly, he was soft-spoken with an apparent Ubuntu, charming yet humble and she could see why Nomusa was so taken by him. When the couple left Mpumi felt deeply lonely and so she called Oyama to confirm where their hockey match was being held. Her daughter was happy and bubbly as usual and that lifted Mpumi's spirits considerably, the match was in the University of Cape Town which was a relief as that was close to the hotel. At ease, Mpumi changed into a skimpy swim suit which was really a bikini held together by thin straps which Nomusa had persuaded her to buy claiming that it was made for her body. She knew she was past her youth and felt that having gone through pregnancies her body had changed a lot. In a bout of self-consciousness she donned an over-sized linen shirt on top of the swimsuit which almost reached her knees and a pair of flip-flops and let herself out of the room. She was so focused on going to explore that she forgot her key-card and her phone inside their room.

In a lighter mood, Mpumi smiled at the receptionist as she exited the hotel and walked down the trek that seemed to lead to the beach. There were mountain terrains all around the hotel and Mpumi marveled at nature's grandeur. The grass felt cool as it brushed her ankles and she found herself humming, she didn't mind being alone. She remembered what a loner she had been in university. All her life her only friend had been Nomusa, their parents had been close and they had been closer. When they separated in tertiary instead of making new friends Mpumi had stuck it out alone. Her shabby but clean appearance had made her

stand out. Mpumi's father had died when she was in High School. Just thinking about her father made her so sad. He had always been her pillar. She had inherited his love for books and his intelligence and they would argue about Shakespeare, world politics often shutting her mother out. While her mother had wanted her to learn about sewing and cooking, Mpumi had been out being taught to ride a bicycle by her father. She smiled remembering how patient he had always been with her. He had owned a book shop and also helped people to type their CVs and made a comfortable living for his family. When he died suddenly of a heart attack, Mpumi's world had come crumbling down. His relatives had swooped down like vultures grabbing any asset they could lay their grubby hands on leaving MaNtuli and her daughter in abject misery and near poverty. The only thing they had not managed to rob them off was the school fees trust that Muziwoxolo Ndinisa had set up for his daughter and that had been Mpumi's lifeline. MaNtuli had been resentful that her husband even in death had somehow managed to exclude her and chosen his daughter's welfare, their mother-daughter relationship suffered further. While Mpumi continued her education MaNtuli had to become a domestic worker to put a roof over their heads. While the clothes MaNtuli bought for her were minimalistic they seemed shabby in comparison with other girls at tertiary and Mpumi found herself alone most of the time and used to her own company until Daniel had taken notice of her. Realizing that her thoughts were darkening her mood, Mpumi pulled herself from reminiscing and fully focused on her surroundings. She was now at the beach, it wasn't a huge beach just a small private stretch of sand and blue water. Looking around Mpumi thought she was alone, the beach seemed deserted so she was comfortable taking off her shirt. She ran into the water, it was freezing yet refreshing at the same time. She took confident laps even staying underneath water for a while enjoying the sensation of water flowing over her body. After some time she grew tired of swimming and went to lie down on the beach. It was so peaceful, Mpumi felt serenity creeping over her and she drifted off to a peaceful slumber.

Mpumi was woken up by a sharp sting on her calf and she felt the pain shoot through her whole leg. "Ouch!" she cried out and looked around for what had bitten her and she couldn't find anything amiss. She tried standing up but the pain shot through her leg again and she crumbled back to the ground. Panicking she started shouting, "Help! Somebody help me!" Desperation gripped her, she was certain the beach was deserted. She had to try to stop the poison or venom or whatever was injected into her blood by the sting from spreading. She tore her shirt frantically and tied the area on top of the sting tightly as well as underneath it. The skin there was already shiny and swollen, Mpumi started shivering uncontrollably yet she felt suffocated by the heat. Sweat beaded her lips and dripped down her back and she let out a silent prayer. She could die out here all alone. She saw her father walking towards her and she stretched out her hands to him, "Tata help me, please help me." She knew she had begun hallucinating and she felt convulsions and she tried holding onto consciousness but the darkness was winning. She kept thinking of Oyama, her daughter couldn't lose her mother, Oyama needed her. Her last conscious thought was of Oyama waiting for her and the hockey match and she slipped into oblivion.

Mpumi felt the heaviness of her head, her mouth felt dry like she had swallowed a whole handful of sand and she tried to open her eyes but they were heavy. Finally she managed to open her eyes and had to blink before she could get accustomed to the brightness in the room. She was in a hotel room but this one was different from the one she and Nomusa were sharing. This room was even more spacious than theirs and was all in white, she was lying in white Egyptian sheets and the bed was so soft. She tried moving her leg but it felt heavy. In fact there was a solid form pinning her down. However, the solid form was also warm and from the smooth and callous texture she hazarded that the solid form was a human. She tried remembering what had happened. Then she remembered the sting and her convulsions. Maybe she had died and gone to heaven. She tried moving her head but it was still too heavy. She closed her eyes and chided herself, breathe Mpumi and stop panicking she reprimanded herself. She opened her eyes

again and was able to shift her head slightly whoever was sleeping behind her was cradling her like a precious baby. Mpumi had to admit the sensation was heavenly and she was finding it calming. The person had a woody musky scent that tickled her sense of smell, she could feel her nipples hardening from the scent. Gosh she had been without sex for so long that she was now getting aroused by a mere scent. Whoever was holding her must have sensed her movement because their hold on her tightened slightly but was still gentle. "You are awake finally, I became so worried and so was the doctor," the solid form also had a deep baritone. Mpumi tried responding but her voice came out a croak. She felt the bed give way and the form left her side. In a way she couldn't explain, she felt alone and unsafe when the arms which were holding her left her side. She still couldn't lift her head and she felt the solid form lifting her head and bring a glass to her mouth and gently tilt the glass. She drank the water greedily and almost choked, "Easy easy, take small sips your throat must be constricted." The baritone again, funny for such a solid presence the baritone sounded extremely gentle and patient it reminded her of her father and a tear slid out of the corner of her eye. She drank the water more slowly until the glass was finished. "Thank you," she croaked out her voice was still dry. She tried sitting up but she was too weak. The solid form lifted her up from behind propping pillows behind her and making her sit up even fluffing her pillows. She looked down at herself she was wearing someone's pajama top, but it was so big it reached down her hips. There was no sign of her bath suit, she wondered who had undressed her and put her in this top. Judging from the musky scent the pajama top probably belonged to solid form. It was time to face her savior, he was crouching in front of her his chest broad and bare, and wearing the bottom of the pajama she had on. She stared at his eyes and felt a cold hand on her spine. No it couldn't be him maybe they were just similar. But those eyes! He had the same exact piercing blue eyes which had the color which was in between the sky and the ocean. It was like staring at a ghost from her past. The creepy part was that he was also staring at her as if he couldn't believe his eyes. "Lelo?" Oh God she groaned inwardly. This wasn't happening, but she immediately knew it was him. He was the only person who had ever called her Lelo and it seemed as if that had been in another lifetime. The coward in her wanted her to act as if she didn't know or remember him but that would be wrong, he probably saved her life just now. Drawing a deep breath she nodded slightly and said, "Yes Jarred it's me. But how did you find me?"

“I found you passed out by the beach last night. It seemed you had been out of it for a while. You were smart to tie your calf like that the poison hadn’t spread throughout your body.”

“What bit me?”

“We are not sure but the doctor thought it’s probably a scorpion and if the poison had reached your heart...” Mpumi felt a chill and he must have seen her shiver because he pulled the duvet cover around her. “Wait you are saying you found me yesterday? What time is it?”

“It’s a little after nine.”

“Crap, I have to go I have to be at my daughter’s hockey match at ten.”

“Lelo you can’t go anywhere in your condition. You could barely move your head a moment ago.”

“I’m better now and I will be fine after a shower. I just have to get to my room.”

“Which room are you in?”

“I don’t remember the number where is my key-card the number was on it.”

“There was nothing next to you when I picked you up just your flip flops”

“My phone?”

“Nothing Lelo just you in a pretty bad space.” Mpumi felt herself panicking again and Jarred sensed that and he quickly made a suggestion, she could shower in his room and he would go and buy her something to wear and he would take her to Oyama’s match. Mpumi was reluctant to impose on him more than she had already. But she admitted to herself she was still weak and sore from where the doctor had sucked out the poison and she still felt dizzy and a little nausea. It was a relief that he would be with her. She had so many questions and he probably had more but they could wait, Oyama always came first. Conceding to his plan, he made the bath for her and helped her to the bath, she was nervous about letting him undress her. “Come on Lelo I have seen you naked before I won’t look.” Mpumi blushed but she had no choice and she was grateful for his gentleness. As promised he left to go and get her something to wear. Wow things were moving so unexpectedly, Mpumi had never thought she would see Jarred again in this lifetime. She had met him in Harvard and she had more or less ran away from him when she left. Life really did move in mysterious ways. She bathed quickly careful not to injure herself even more. From the movements in the adjoining room she could hear that Jarred had come back and she was curious to see his purchases. Mpumi tied a huge fluffy hotel towel around herself because the robe smelt too much of Jarred all wooden masculinity. He had bought her a beautiful white summer dress with a wide skirt and a synched waist with a gold belt and gold Greek-style sandals which she had to tie all the way to just beneath her calves. The underwear he had bought for her made her shy, it was sexy yet comfortable panties and bra set, how he had guessed her exact cup size she didn’t want to know. He even bought her a wide brimmed hat and big sunglasses. Surprisingly the clothes fit her to perfection, “How did you know my size?” He grinned at her and just winked at her and she was reminded of the cheeky fresh faced near man she had known all those years ago. Feeling a pull in her heart she looked away from him and told him they had to go. He looked at her like he knew exactly what was going through her mind but he let her be and led her out of the room holding her like a fragile flower. He was driving a Jeep, Mpumi settled gratefully into the

front seat. After a few moments of silence she had to ask, "So did you know it was me last night?" He kept his gaze on the road ahead and answered after a heartbeat, "Not at first, you have changed from the waif of a girl I used to know."

"Oh you mean I've grown fat."

"No I mean there is more of you to hold." Mpumi blushed he was looking at her with so much intensity even though it was just for a moment. He noticed her blush and continued, "Actually I saw you when you were checking in yesterday and you were so quiet while your partner kept talking."

"Partner? Oh you mean Nomusa she's my best friend, wait did you think we were gay?"

"I was busy kicking myself for having the hots for the sexy lesbian, every man's worst nightmare." Mpumi found herself laughing, she couldn't help it, Jarred had always had an outrageous sense of humor and she knew he and Nomusa would get along.

Oyama was surprised to see her mother with a guy she didn't know but after the initial awkwardness, when Oyama asked Jarred if he was married and he looked at Mpumi while responding, "I came close to marrying this one lady but she left me." Oyama nodded understandingly while Mpumi looked away uncomfortably. After that initial hurdle they hit it off. Jarred had played hockey in his heydays and they were now chatting with Oyama as if they had known each other their whole lives. Mpumi was content to just sit back and watch them bond, she was still weak but was feeling much better. Jarred had offered to take them to lunch and after talking to Oyama's teacher they had all trooped into Jarred's Jeep and had gone

to a cozy little Italian place that Mpumi had never heard about. While they ate Jarred kept them in stitches with his outrageous stories and he had them hanging onto his every word. They called Nomusa on Oyama's phone and she had sounded frantic. "Mpumi where have you been? I've been looking for you, I almost opened a missing person file but the police said you had to be missing for 32 hours."

"I got bitten yesterday and someone helped me out."

"So you slept at her room? I swear when I came in this morning and found your key-card and phone I thought someone abducted you."

"Whoa so you slept out?"

"That's not the point, I was scared and they came to take us on the tour."

"Where are you now?"

"Desmond Tutu's church I don't even know why they included it on the tour, I mean can you handle friend." Mpumi had to laugh, Nomusa was so over the top she was saying it loudly probably even in front of Desmond Tutu himself, they agreed to meet at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens as Nomusa also wanted to see her goddaughter. Mpumi was willing to get an Uber to go and meet Nomusa but Jarred was having none of it and Oyama seemed attached to him already they were walking around holding hands both of them eating caramel fudge ice cream. Mpumi was outvoted and shut out and she watched in awe as her daughter fell under Jarred's spell. Nomusa rushed over to fuss over Mpumi and Oyama was the one now introducing Jarred. Oyama had lacked fatherly attention most of her life and Jarred's attention, him listening to her every story was making her shine brighter than she usually did. Nomusa raised an eyebrow and Mpumi had to

explain that Jarred found her near to death and he had looked out for her. Nomusa was not fully appeased by this explanation and Mpumi knew she was going to be drilled when they got back to the hotel. The penguins at Boulder's Beach were a hit with Oyama and she claimed that she wanted to be a Marine vet, Mpumi and Nomusa exchanged looks Oyama had changed professions more times than King Mswati took another wife. The tour ended on a perfect note with the picnic lunch and it was time to send Oyama back to camp, she seemed reluctant to leave Jarred and he promised her that they would meet again.

"So who is Mr. Hunk who can't keep his eyes off you?" They were back in their room, after spending the night in Jarred's room, theirs had lost the perfection she had felt when they first arrived. Mpumi ignored Nomusa's question and took off her hat and glasses sinking into the couch. She was still a bit weak from last night's ordeal. "I need water" Nomusa handed her water remembering that her friend had almost died the previous day. She also handed Mpumi her phone and she went through it. There were ten missed calls from Nomusa two from Oyama and a message from an unknown number, it simply said, "You are still the most beautiful woman in this world. Dinner?" Mpumi smiled, she had no idea how Jarred had gotten her number.

"Did he call?"

"He texted he wants us to have dinner."

"Huh? Daniel wants to have dinner with you?" Mpumi blushed when she realized that Nomusa had been asking about her husband. Now Nomusa's curiosity was really piqued and she came to sit next to Mpumi waiting for her to open up. She sensed that Jarred was more than just her friend's savior and she wasn't letting

this one slide. So she sat and waited for Mpumi to open up but she wasn't ready for what her friend said next. "Jarred is the first man I ever slept with, back when I was in Harvard."

CHAPTER THREE

"Harvard was a scary experience. I was young alone in a foreign land and I really stuck out. I remember the stares and the whispers in the corridors and me thinking they are probably wondering what this black monkey is doing here. You have to understand I was the one of two females doing my MBA and the only black in my class and a foreigner to boot. The people who actually did come up to me wanted to know which village I came from in Africa, one actually thought South Africa was a village in the South of Africa, none of them could pronounce my name. Most of the lecturers ignored me, I was depressed I was ready to quit and come back home. Then along came Jarred a drug like nothing I had ever known. I was in the cafeteria sitting alone as usual and he came and sat in front of me, I stopped eating and stared at him, he stared back. "God you are so beautiful." Those were the first words out of his mouth, I was taken aback by his random compliment all I could do was stare. "I'm Jarred by the way you can call me Red." You should have seen him Nono, he had his hair long and tied in a ponytail and he was skinny like he didn't eat much all features in his face were sharp, the most remarkable thing about him was his eyes and when he looked at me it was like he was piercing my soul. He also couldn't pronounce my name even Mpumi so he said he would call me Lelo because I was so exotic. He sat with me every day after that. At first I was awkward around him but he was good at putting me at ease till I began opening up to him. I ended up opening up to him about things I was even scared to think out loud and he always listened. I told him I was promised to be married back home and his response was, "I'm in love with you Lelo and I have a feeling I'm going to love you for eternity." I was committed to Daniel and I let him down every chance I got but he was persistent. In him I found a best friend which was weird because you know I don't open up to people. We did everything together from studying to shopping and sightseeing. I soon learnt that Jarred was from one of those elite families and he was considered a

catch. Consequently I became more ostracized than I had been before I started hanging out with him, the ladies there loathed me and the guys kept their distance. In a month I felt like I had known him my whole life. Coming from the movies one day he just drew me into his arms and he kissed me. I had been dating Daniel for a year so I knew kissing by then but it didn't prepare me for the onslaught of Jarred's lips. He didn't just kiss me he bared my soul there was so much depth so many emotions in one kiss. There was no getting back from that kiss. He was surprised when I told him I was still a virgin but in a typical Jarred fashion he said, "You know it's gotta go at some point." For all his jokes he still made me feel like a queen he went out of his way to make me happy. I had never felt so at peace with myself before and excited, you never knew what to expect with him. He could be so gentle like the first time we made love, he was patient and he put my comfort and pleasure first, he could be so passionate as well and possessive. He made me know that I was his world and it was scary too to have someone love you so fully. We fought as hard as we loved and our arguments ended as quickly as they started. I felt guilty about Daniel but somehow when Jarred was there he totally eclipsed him. We spent most of our breaks, holidays at his brother's house, the brother was a great guy. Time seemed to fly and we got serious, he asked me to marry him I told him I was confused. He took me to his home and introduced me to his mother. She hated me on sight. I could never be good enough for her son, I was too unrefined, too black, too shabby and too brainy. She made it obvious that I was unwanted there. In hindsight I guess she worked so hard to tear us apart and well in the end she won, I left Harvard in tears running from Jarred and he had no idea why or where I was going and to me that was the end of our romance." Nomusa had been sitting mesmerized throughout Mpumi's narration and there were tears in both their eyes when she finished. Nomusa suspected that her friend had always carried a torch for Jarred even when she was married to Daniel and whatever it is that had broken them up must have been huge. Nomusa had felt the change in her friend when she had come back from Harvard but hadn't known what was behind it, she had always assumed that Mpumi had only ever loved Daniel. Their room was now dark and they had barely noticed. Nomusa turned on the lights and asked, "Now what are you going to do?"

“I don’t know love, I never thought I would ever see him again.”

“He deserves answers Mpumi.” Mpumi sighed, even though Jarred hadn’t asked anything yet, she knew he would. “It all happened a lifetime away, I’ve changed so has he, and maybe we should just let bygones be bygones. I’m married now I can’t get into anything with Jarred now.”

“Do you still love him?” Mpumi blew out a breath and stared down for a minute when she looked up her eyes were full of tears and so much anguish but when she spoke her voice didn’t break, “I never stopped loving him, I just learnt to live without him.” Nomusa drew her into a hug and she sobbed her heart out for that young couple who hadn’t stood a chance, she cried for what could have been and she cried for what she wished could be. Nomusa let her cry, quietly soothing her back, this hadn’t been part of their holiday retreat plans but Nomusa felt that it was necessary.

The light streaming in through a space in the curtains woke Mpumi up from a deep sleep. She and Nomusa had slept late last night, they had gone to the private cinema in the hotel and had watched an old romantic movie while stuffing themselves with frozen yoghurt. Apart from a slight brain freeze they had a great time, Mpumi had ignored Jarred’s invitation to dinner. Nomusa was still fast asleep, that one loved her sleep and Mpumi let her be. They had also talked about Nomusa’s date with Amo, he had taken her to some jazzy spot where there were poem recitals. It had been a unique night and yes Mpumi had been right the waxing had come in pretty handy. No wonder the poor thing was sleeping like the dead, she probably didn’t get much sleep. 5.30am the clock flashed at her, if she made it in time she could catch the last moments of the sunrise. Wrapping an oversized robe over her Sleeping Beauty pajamas, a mother’s day gift from Oyama, she left the room quietly making it a point to take her keycard. There was

no one around as she slipped out of the hotel, this time she took another route and sat on a boulder staring out at the ocean. The sunrise was spectacular, it was reflected on the water and it was so perfect she took out her phone and took pictures. She didn't hear him coming, she only felt him wrap his arms around her from behind and she could smell his woody-musky scent. She tried resisting but he held her steadily, "Come now Lelo don't spoil our sunrise moment, we haven't had one of these in over a decade." She sighed and settled into his arms, watching the sunrise, sunset and stars had been their thing when they had been an item and he always had her wrapped in his arms. Somehow this felt different, Jarred was no longer a skinny starved looking young man, it seemed like he was working out a lot. His now broad shoulders and stocky arms were solid and she found herself laying her head on his chest and they watched the sunrise in silence. After a while, he turned her around and stared at her. She felt self-conscious, her face was unwashed and bare of any make up, and luckily she had very clear skin, one of the perks of being dark-skinned. "You stood me up last night."

"I didn't agree to have dinner with you, in fact I ignored you."

"Nc nc nc such attitude to someone who saved your life in this very beach. But since I'm such a benevolent savior I will allow you to redeem yourself. Let's have breakfast."

"Ok let me go and shower and change out of my pajamas."

"No, I'm not letting you run away again, we are having breakfast right now it's already set up." He grabbed her hand and was leading her to the other side of the beach. Curiosity got the better of her and she followed him with a bemused expression on her face. And right there next to the sea there was a table set next to a boulder, there were two white chairs, a blue table cloth, two picnic baskets, and a blue vase with fresh daffodils. While she was still admiring his ingenuity, he pulled out a chair for her and she sat down feeling pampered. "You didn't have to

go to so much trouble.” “Are you kidding me, I know this was the only way to get you to eat with me.” He was already taking out food from the basket, ham, croissants, toast, strawberry jam, fresh apricots, bacon and orange juice, a meal fit for a small army. Mpumi was on a diet and she saw all her effort go flying out of the window, “Jarred you do know that all of these carbs are going straight to my hips, you want me to look like a hippo.” He frowned angrily as if she had said something disgusting, “Why do you have to keep putting yourself down? So what if you are fat you are so sexy, more so now as a woman than when you were younger.” Mpumi was short of words and she let him pile up her plate, the sparks between them often led to small fires. As quickly as he had become intense he changed back to his easygoing self, “Your daughter is a delight, and she stole my heart.” Like any proud parent Mpumi preened at the compliment, “She’s the one constant joy in my life, she’s writing her matric at the end of the year but she isn’t taking it seriously.” He frowned slightly, “Isn’t she a bit young to be matriculating?”

“Actually she is turning 15 in December. Oyama is what they call a gifted child. Once when she was two I left her in my study to get her a snack, when I came back I noticed that the study was too quiet. I was expecting the worst, imagine my surprise when I found her reading my David Copperfield. There was so much intensity in her little face. They made her skip grades but I made sure they didn’t put her too far ahead.” Jarred seemed suitably impressed by this story and said as much to her. “She looks nothing like you though.” Mpumi smiled other people would probably notice that and say nothing at least to her face but Jarred wasn’t most people, he was Jarred. She took a gulp of her juice and he asked, “What about our child?” Mpumi choked on her juice and he had to get up and rub her back while she coughed and spluttered. When her coughing fit lapsed she looked at him and he seemed nonplussed waiting patiently for her response, she could only say “She told you.”

“Yes she did, she told me that when you left you were carrying my child.” Suddenly she lost all appetite and she pushed her plate away and stood up, she sat on the boulder knees to her chest and began rocking. Jarred followed her

every move with his eyes then he went to stand beside her but made no move to comfort her, he wanted answers. He had wanted answers ever since he had come back home with his brother only to be told by his mother that his Lelo had left him with no explanation not even a bloody letter and just like that she vanished from his life. He had only gotten some explanation when his mother died a few years back leaving him with a letter apologizing for chasing Mpumi away especially when she had been carrying his child and she pleaded with him to find that child. Mpumi started speaking in such a low voice he had to bend to hear what she was saying. "I didn't know I was pregnant, I only found out when I fainted while shopping with your mother. When the doctor told me I was pregnant she had been so kind and she told me that she hadn't wanted it to come this far. I didn't know what she was talking about. She said you had sent her to break up with me since you were marrying your fiancé and if I didn't believe her I should call you and ask you. You never picked up any of my calls, I kept calling and calling and I started panicking. She wanted to take me to a doctor who would do an abortion, I refused so she gave me money for my flight back home and made me promise that I wouldn't try to contact you again." The letter had more or less said the same things and his mother had even told him that she had offered Mpumi more money to take care of the baby but she had refused and only accepted the flight money. He let her continue, "I came back home alone pregnant and scared. I told Daniel I couldn't marry him anymore that I was pregnant, I was prepared to raise the baby alone but he stuck by me. Then one night I woke up and there was a sharp pain on my abdomen I couldn't move my lower body. My nightdress was sticky and wet I screamed and my mother came rushing into the room when she switched on the lights there was blood everywhere. I think she knew immediately what had happened but I was frantic I wanted them to save my baby. We went to the hospital but it was too late I had miscarried my baby and the doctors didn't know what brought on the miscarriage." She looked at him and he saw the anguish in the depths of her eyes, "You wanted to know about our child, our child died in my womb." He felt a stabbing pain in his heart and he lashed out at her, "Did our child die in your womb or did you kill our child?" The slap was instant and left an imprint on his cheek while he was still reeling she got off the boulder and ran off towards the hotel. He didn't run after her, he grabbed a glass full of juice and smashed it on

the boulder. He mourned their unborn baby and he cried deep, heart-wrenching sobs there beside the sea, Jarred cried for what could have been.

Mpumi ran all the way to the hotel and she was relieved that Nomusa was still asleep, she didn't have the energy to tell her what had just taken place. She felt emotionally drained, of all her miscarriages her first one was the one she had moaned the most, she had been devastated. But it was all in the past and though it was a fresh wound for Jarred she had lived with it for close to sixteen years now. She shrugged out of her pajamas and went to run water in the bath, she poured all the hotel bath oils and she sunk gratefully into the water and she wallowed in the bath. Nomusa came to stand by the bathroom door while she stretched herself. "What time is it? Why did you wake up in the middle of the night?" Mpumi smiled, her friend loved her sleep, "I'm not sure I went out to look at the sunrise, then uhm I went for a jog." Nomusa was still too fuzzy from sleep to notice that her friend was hiding something from her, she went to take a shower while Mpumi finished her bath. Both ladies decided to skip the buffet breakfast and had fruit then they were on their way to take a cable ride up the Table Mountain, Nomusa was chatting about their childhood keeping Mpumi distracted. Every time they came to Cape Town it was the same, they got homesick and they reminisced about their childhood. The cable ride was over shortly and Amo had joined them to go to the wine testing. Amo was easy to talk to and he included Mpumi in their conversation so she didn't feel too much of a third wheel. The wine was heavenly and Mpumi downed glass after glass. Daniel hated her drinking, the model 'Minister's Wife' wasn't some sloppy alcohol loving bimbo in his words so she rarely drank. But this was Kapa and what happened in Kapa stayed in Kapa she was having more fun than she had had in a long time. She saw Nomusa staring behind her shoulder and when she looked around there he was carrying a 1941 bottle of Inglenook Cabernet Sauvignon and that goofy smile of his. He offered the bottle to her and she heard Amo gulp, "Truce?" She couldn't really say no to a ridiculously expensive bottle of wine so she pulled a chair out for him. After a momentary tension broken by Nomusa's chirpy, "Open the damn

wine Mpumi!" the drinking spree continued. They were laughing so hard, Mpumi felt sad when the wine tasting session came to an end. She tried standing up but she felt woozy so she sat down, Amo and Nomusa wanted to take her back to the hotel before proceeding with their plans but Jarred insisted that he would take her, they could go. He pulled her up and casually put his arm around her waist, to any onlooker they seemed like a touchy-feely couple but in actual fact he was guiding her towards his Jeep. She smiled lamely up at him and kept giggling when he caught her smiling, she couldn't remember the last time she had been so sloshed. He got her into the Jeep without incident and started the car. On their way back, his phone rang and he smiled when he checked the caller ID then he answered, "Baby..." "Yes baby I miss you too, no I can't come back yet my work isn't done this side....no you can't come this side we talked about this..... I promise to be back before Valentine's Day... Of course I haven't forgotten...Anything for my baby.....Ok I've got to go now, take care I love you...Always and to infinity." Mpumi sat through the whole conversation and she felt a cold hand go up and down her spine seeping away her drunken happiness. Oh God this can't be happening! She thought desperately. She remembered their morning almost date, she had almost become the dreaded other woman. Because she knew in her heart of hearts if Jarred had made a move on her that morning before all that soul searching talk she would have given herself to him fully no questions asked. That's how desperately horny she was for him. And he had the nerve to take the call in front of her! It stung, she felt embarrassment and anger stirring up in her, he thought so little of her. She feigned sleep so that she wouldn't look at him, she couldn't face him. He must have known she was faking because she heard his low sexy chuckle and that infuriated her even more. The nerve of this man! She continued feigning sleep all the way to the hotel. When he came over her side of the door and tried to help her out she hissed in a low voice, "Let go of me, I can manage quite well on my own." He raised his hands up in mock surrender and she tried to walk straight away from him as fast as she could but she was still drunk and he caught up with her easily enough and got into the elevator. It must have moved only one floor up when he jammed it and he forced her to look at him by tilting her chin up. "Why are you mad at me? What did I do this time?" she refused to answer him and she stared him straight in the eye. "Are you jealous Lelo?" She looked away and he took that as a yes, "But why would you be jealous you are the one married and with a daughter." She looked at him

again with murder in her eyes, “At least I told you upfront. When were you going to tell me about your wife? Before or after you seduced me?”

“Whoa hold on no one has seduced anyone here or do you want me to seduce you?”

“That’s not the point Jarred I deserved to know!”

“You so sexy when you are mad, my little fire spitting vixen. Even more so when you are jealous.” While he was talking he started rubbing her chin and the back of her neck, she could feel the tingling sensation all the way to her toes. She opened her mouth to utter another biting retort and before she knew it she had her back pressed against the elevator wall, one leg arched around him and he was feasting on her lips like there was no tomorrow, she wanted to slap him but her traitorous body was yielding to his touch and responding to his kiss stroke for stroke. She heard a moan from a voice that oddly sounded like her own, she moved to be closer to him feeling like their clothes were standing in her way. Somehow he had pushed her panties to one side and was rubbing her clit aggressively, every movement was like a lick of flames and she purred at this torture. She felt his manhood throbbing and pushing against her stomach even through his pants and all she wanted was to take his pants off and hold the throbbing shaft in her hands. As if he could read her mind he let her go slight and let down his pant to his knees and without warning he pushed into her pressing her against the cold glass wall. She wasn’t accustomed to his size anymore but when he started grinding into her she felt the flames almost consuming her. The suddenness and urgency of her orgasm surprised her but seemed to spur him on, she had to wrap her legs around him to stop herself from falling. While she was still floating from the throes of her first come he kept ramming into her and she felt the build up for a second one she held on for dear life trying to hold it in but her body betrayed her again. This time they came together so explosively she could feel his seed shooting into her body and she dug her nails deeply into his back but he seemed oblivious to everything. Even when they had both finished getting their fulfilment

he still cradled her against the wall. She caught a sight of them on the opposite wall, him with his pants half-way down still attached to her and her with the skirt of her dress open, her legs twined around him and her eyes still puffy from her orgasm. This was insanity! What had gotten into her to have sex in an elevator with another woman's husband? Without any protection at that. Reality began to sink in, they were in a public elevator probably with CCTV footage, if anyone leaked this out to the press, it would be the end of her and she had a daughter to protect. Scrambling down from him she tried to put down her dress and right her panties. He took his time dressing up then he unjammed the lift and they were soon in her floor. She opened the door and wanted to quickly shut him out but he was bigger and quicker than her, he was soon in their room and he made himself comfortable on their couch picking some grapes from the stand next to the couch. She folded her arms on her chest and stood looking at him, he was acting like nothing had just happened when they committed adultery in a freaking elevator just moments ago. "Aren't you going to say something about what just happened?"

"That was the best bloody making out session I have ever had in my life and I'm not going to diminish it with words." Making out session? She gave up on him and sat sullenly at the edge of the bed, he had just touched her soul and he called it a making out session wow, but why did it have to hurt so much. "She's not my wife you know," when she looked at him blankly he rectified, "on the phone that wasn't my wife." Oh so now she should feel better because he had cheated with her on his girlfriend, she kept her silence and let him talk. "It's Joseph's daughter Lola." Joseph was the brother they sometimes went to visit when they were still in Harvard. She felt a little relieved, but she still had cheated on her husband. Running away from that train of thought she asked, "How is Joe?"

"He's dead. Car crash. Both him and his wife. Lola only has me now." He said it so calmly but she knew how deeply it must have hurt him and still hurt him, he and his brother had been very close. She went to sit next to him on the couch and rested her head on his shoulder, he rubbed her arm comfortingly but it was he who needed the touch more. "She's lucky to have you." He didn't respond just

continued cradling her and they sat side by side quietly for a while. “Does he make you happy?” Mpumi contemplated the question and after a while she said, “He’s a good provider, he protects us from everything.” She looked into his eyes and they compelled her to go on, “He’s also a controlling serial cheat and he is abusive at times.” A sharp intake of breath was his only reaction. “Does he hit you?” She looked away suddenly ashamed. He forced her to look at him, “No he’s very careful not to assault me, he manhandles me sometimes.” When she saw his anger she rushed on in her husband’s defense, “But he hasn’t in a long time, the last time was when I was threatening to leave him so he...he threw me on the bed and said he would show me who wore the pants in this marriage. He...he ripped my clothes apart like I was some slave I kept telling him no Daniel stop...but he was too strong.” She hadn’t meant to blurt that out. She had never told anyone of this incident which had left her with her last pregnancy. She still remembered her screams and the look on his face, he had turned into a savage beast, he had forced her thighs open and when she continued struggling he had smacked her hard on the ribs and she had felt the air leaving her lungs. Then she stopped struggling and cowered tears streaming down her face till he stopped and got off her. There had been murder in his eyes and she had been so scared, he grabbed her arms and came close to her face, “You are not going anywhere, I’m not done with you.” Mpumi hadn’t realized that she had become lost in her thoughts and that she was shivering till she felt Jarred touch her arm and she jumped fear stamped all over her face. “Hey, hey, it’s me Lelo. Look at me darling, you’re ok, he won’t hurt you again, I promise. You’re safe now, come here.” She resisted going into his arms but he held on anywhere, funny she couldn’t cry anymore but she was shivering uncontrollably. He held her till the shivering stopped and still he held her stroking her hair in much the same way she comforted Oyama. She was grateful for his comfort.

“The CCTV footage from the elevator...”

“Don’t worry I’ll take care of it Lelo, no one will ever know.” His word was enough, she trusted him.

Nomusa came in late, way after Jarred had reluctantly left but Mpumi had wanted to be alone so he left. Nomusa was in high spirits and she dished all the details of her date with Amo punctuated by gushing “wuuuuu chomma!” her happiness was contagious and Mpumi was also smiling along with her. She would have talked all night but Mpumi insisted on sleep, the next morning they were travelling to Sabi Sands. Just as she was snuggling in her blankets a text came in from Jarred. “I’m sorry.”

“For?” she texted back. He responded, “For calling what we had earlier a bloody make-out session. It just shook me to the core. It was explosive. Didn’t mean for it to happen in the elevator. Had planned out a whole night of seduction. Sorry I lost control. You deserve better.” She smiled Jarred was so comfortable talking about sex, in fact he was the first person who had ever talked to her openly about sex. She texted back “It was explosive for me too” and added a smiley face. She had forgotten that being with Jarred was like being on a rollacoster, she had gone from bitch-slapping him to getting drunk with him, getting insanely jealous which had led to the explosive sex, then she had poured out her secrets to him and now here she was blushing over his texts. She wasn’t as comfortable talking about sex, it must be a black person thing. Her mother had never talked to her about sex, all she had been told was that she should save herself for her husband. And on her wedding night the aunts had told her that she must never deny a man his cookie jar else he would stray. No one had ever told her what to expect, even Daniel never talked about sex whether he enjoyed it with her or not. She had wanted Oyama’s experience to be different so when her daughter had turned 13 she had done her research, even compiled a placard, and had sat Oyama down to give her ‘The Talk’. Oyama had surprised her by stating after she had just got started that she had googled all about sex. So Mpumi had put her research aside and had held her daughter’s hands, “What you might not have found on the internet is that sex

is a sacred act between two people. And the first time is scary and painful so you need to have it with someone who cares about you, who will be gentle and who will appreciate the gift you are bestowing him. You should be comfortable in your sexuality and don't settle for anything less. Now no mother wants to acknowledge that her baby will ever have sex, but when you do baby promise me I won't have to see it on the internet." Oyama had been grossed out by even the thought of it, she was still in her 'boys are gross stage' that was before Ryan had turned into a dreamy-eyed hunk. Just thinking about the incident made Mpumi smile and she took out her phone from under her pillow and texted Oyama, "I love you nunu kamaa wakhe." Oyama was probably asleep by then so she put her phone back under her pillow and drifted to sleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mpumi was woken up by her phone buzzing insistently under her pillow. It was still dark outside, she groaned. If it was Jarred, he was going to know her skanky side, but maybe something had happened to Oyama. She took the phone from under her pillow and checked the caller ID. Whoa there was no way in hell she was taking Phindiwe's call. She was going to let it go to voicemail. "Why aren't you picking that call?" Nomusa groaned and snatched the phone from her, but when she saw who it was she put the phone on silent. Phindiwe was Daniel's elder sister. She was the career aunty type who lived to micromanage her brother's marriage. She had never been married herself, had seven children with different fathers but she would always tell you were to get off when it came to treating your husband. They had nicknamed her Rabheka, she had the same loud hoarse voice as Rebecca Malope only there was nothing musical about Phindiwe's voice. She had left a voice message. "Hee wena mfazi ndini we Harvard (you little Harvard wife). You think your two little degrees are going to keep your man happy?" It's three actually but they continued listening to the message, "That's the problem with you educated women, your husbands always come second. You are out there in God knows where, while your husband suffers alone. This is not what we paid lobolo for. You are a wife start acting like one what example are you setting for my brother's daughter mxm mindless heifer. You can't even give him another child but you can spend his money on holidays with your floozy friend. I

bet wherever you are, you are busy spreading those fat thighs, safari my foot. When you come back you will know me nxaax.” Her voice was even louder on the phone, Mpumi rolled her eyes, she should get married first then come and tell her what married women should do. All her seven children were supported by Daniel so she always thought Mpumi was wasting money that should rightfully go to raising her brats, never mind that Mpumi earned a six-figure salary herself. She was like that demanding baby-mama always calling to say the boys needed this and that, forget that Daniel wasn't her children's father. After deleting the message they started packing, they wouldn't let meddling Rabheka spoil their trip.

They were on the first class coach on their flight to Mpumalanga with those fancy little nuts and champagne, Nomusa settled in to enjoy how the other half live. First class wasn't bad for two Khayelitsha homegirls. She looked over at Mpumi, she was reclining on the flight chair a glass of Mojito on one hand, while thumbing the pages of a novel called Hlomu or some such thing, Nomusa had never been a reader. Something had changed about Mpumi in the past two days, she was smiling as she read and even laughing at whatever outrageous thing was in that novel. Even after that dreadful call in the morning she had gone to bath singing, “Even though I have fat thighs, flabby arms a potbelly still gives good lovin’”, in the shower. And she had even been dancing to Meghan Trainor's “All about the Bass”, when she was waiting for Nomusa to finish dressing. Nomusa hated to admit it but the bitch had moves. Nomusa remembered the first time she had seen Mpumi dance, it had been their Matric dance and everyone had been mind-blown. Mpumi had always had her nose behind a book, the serious scholar who knew more than their Sangweni High teachers, so she wasn't even a teacher's pet. The other children thought she was a snob, her only friend was Nomusa and even Nomusa struggled to get her out of her books. One of the boys, Mbulelo was his name, made them drink alcohol. Mpumi went wild. She was even puffing on some weed and getting high. Next thing Brenda Fassie's Weekend Special had come on and she started dancing the 90s version of a twerk. If Nomusa had not been there she would never have believed it, stuck up Mpumi was a freak when she let go. Mpumi hadn't let go in years but the previous day Nomusa had seen her let go and that side of Mpumi was always fun. It must be

the work of the blue-eyed god but Mpumi was tight lipped about what happened when he brought her back to the hotel after the wine tasting. She had changed. She didn't look defeated anymore. She had that spring on her step and that sway to her hips. Blue-eyed god must stay, Nomusa decided as the plane taxied its landing. After a short chopper ride, they finally arrived at Sabi Sands. How can one even begin to describe Sabi Sands? It had a majestic feel to it that could not be crafted by man. There was a stillness that you could just slice with a knife. The trees. The birds. The grass. Even the air was perfect. Mpumi had her camera out and she was taking pictures. Nomusa's squeals were even louder when they got to the Lion Sands Ivory lodge. It comprised of six spacious and far apart private villas. Their villa was a modern building with a round and thatched roof. The walls were cream, a tiered bedroom with a huge bed with white linen and black throw pillows, the windows were three quarters of the room it was like sleeping outside. Between the lounge and the bedroom there was a heated rim flow plunge pool, how awesome is that, Nomusa was already uploading pictures on Instagram and Snapchat, eat your heart out bitches. Their whole villa overlooked the Sabi River and Kruger National Park, Nomusa had died and gone to heaven. She just felt it in her bones that this had been the original Garden of Eden. After unpacking Mpumi wanted them to explore on a foot safari, Nomusa would rather have wallowed in the plunge pool but her bully of a friend was having none of it.

Nomusa looked like a teenager in those tiny shorts, Mpumi thought and she laughed within at the way their guide was trying to look everywhere except Nomusa's thighs. Oblivious to the poor man's plight Nomusa kept asking questions about every animal they came across. Mpumi was content to let her friend talk while she continued taking pictures. Photography was her second passion after children, one director at her company had seen some of the pictures she had taken and urged her to become a professional photographer. She had been flattered but hadn't taken the compliment to heart. She had a knack of capturing things in mid-action, the gazelle as it galloped to join its herd, the eagle in mid-flight, she had a keen eye and she loved the click click sound of the camera. Jarred hadn't called or texted her today and for some weird reason that bothered her. Snap out of it, she chided herself, he didn't owe her any calls or texts but still it stung. She had thought they had something going but she had to

come to terms with that it was just a holiday fling, she was after all the married mother of a teenager. Nomusa was still talking off the ear of the guide and Mpumi took another shot of the African sky. She had no idea why Aristotle had thought this to be a dark and cursed continent, when it was so obvious that God had taken his time in creating this place, no money could buy such majesty. But why hadn't he called! That guy was seriously messing with her head, she shrugged thoughts of him furiously to a small box in her mind and shut the lid tightly. Just as she was enjoying nature, Nomusa decided to leave the guide in peace and turn to her. "So?" Mpumi had a feeling she wasn't going to love this conversation, "So ntoni?" she hadn't meant to snap like that but Nomusa wasn't easily deterred. "So what's happening between you and the blue-eyed Adonis?" Sigh.

"Nothing is happening, we talked a lot yesterday"

"And I must look like an idiot to you, ooh wow is that a blush?"

"I'm too dark skinned to blush idiot."

"You are detracting, what happened?"

"Fine, if you must know, we shagged in the elevator."

"Whaaaaaaaaaaaaat?" The shock on Nomusa's face was comical and Mpumi felt smug. She ignored Nomusa and went back to taking snaps. Nomusa was having none of that and she grabbed her camera, Mpumi sighed. "It wasn't planned it just happened, one moment we were having a heated argument the next moment he had my back against the wall and my knickers around my ankles."

"Mpumi that is so dirty and so unlike you, I love it! I just knew something had happened. I mean you were singing in the shower. Shaking that thing I just knew it."

"Don't get too excited it's just a fling. I'm still married, remember?" The way Nomusa brushed off her marriage wasn't even funny, "If you were happy in your marriage you wouldn't have slept with Adonis and Daniel would be with you on this Safari, the Universe is telling you something." Mpumi laughed Nomusa had no morals whatsoever and had few scruples. "Sorry to disappoint the Universe but I needed to blow off steam and I committed adultery, it was a fling

and that's all it was. Now let it go and let's enjoy the beautiful safari." Nomusa did not agree but Mpumi had had enough and she wanted to continue taking her pictures.

Mpumi just kept calmly dropping bombs on her and Nomusa was left reeling. They were back in their villa and Mpumi had promptly undressed and gotten into the pool. She wasn't going to talk about Jarred anymore. Contrary to what most people had thought, Mpumi had always been the daring one and Nomusa had followed her. This one time she had talked Nomusa into climbing over their neighbor's gate. The owner of the house had been a motherly lady whom they had all called mother, she had a huge iNgobamakhosi tree (hard pear tree), it had berry like fruits which turned from coral pink to bright red when ripe. Usually the woman would allow them to climb the tree and feast on the fruit. But the woman's mother had passed away and she had gone to Kimberly for the burial. Two weeks had seemed like eternity to the children and Mpumi had come up with the brilliant idea that they should jump the gate 'mother' would understand. The others hadn't been totally convinced but Mpumi was hardcore and she was quickly over the gate and she dared them to follow. By the time they had all jumped the gate she was already on top of the tree stuffing her little face with the berries. She was careful to spit out the hard, woody centre, they joined her. Being children they forgot they were perpetuating a crime and they were shouting and screaming on top of the tree and that was how Mpumi's mother had found them. She had called them to follow her and stupidly they had followed. That woman's hand was wicked, she had thrashed the naughtiness out of them and their little behinds had suffered. Nomusa felt that the daring side in Mpumi was showing itself, it had been dominant for too long. With Daniel, Mpumi was the perfect wife, the perfect hostess who probably never went down on her husband. This American brought out the reckless Mpumi, all that sex in the elevator was freak on another level. Nomusa knew that Mpumi would feel guilty but she thought that guilt would be misplaced, Daniel had done nothing to inspire Mpumi's loyalty. Amogalang was calling her, Nomusa felt warmth on her face, that Tswana boy was driving her mad. For the first time in her life, Nomusa was falling head over heels-teenage dream-talk on the phone all night-kind of love. But she was also scared. She didn't really have a record of happy relationships.

Being single at her age she got prayers from her mother and her father saying she needed a cleansing. She wasn't going to bank much into this thing she had going with Amo, she would just enjoy the moment.

Two days in the wilderness passed so fast, they went on safaris took so many pictures and even rode on the back of an elephant. There was still no communication from Jarred and Daniel hadn't contacted her too. At first she had been furious with Jarred then she had begun panicking. What if he had left her like she had left him all those years ago? She couldn't blame him if he had. She tried calling him but his number was unavailable, then she got worried maybe he had been involved in a hijacking. Get it together Mpumi, she chided herself, she was acting like a love-struck teenager. Speaking of love-struck teenager, Mpumi had never seen Nomusa so deeply in love. She talked to all hours of the night on her phone with Amo. They texted like teenagers, that idiot was even blushing at those texts. She was happy for her. Nomusa deserved a decent guy who was crazy about her. Funny when they were younger, Nomusa had never had any trouble snagging guys. She had been the lighter skinned prettier friend. She was also bubbly and easy to talk to. Mpumi had made a small fortune from guys who wanted her to hook them up with her bestie. An insensitive aunt had raised the issue during Mpumi's lobola negotiations, "We always assumed that we would be negotiating lobolo for your pretty friend and that you would die an old maid alone with your books." Nx! Mpumi hadn't wanted to go back home and to give those people anything more than they already looted from them at her father's funeral. But Daniel had insisted that they had to have a proper traditional wedding. The aunt hadn't known of course that Nomusa had almost been married two months prior to Mpumi's lobola negotiations. The man had been a Zulu, Nhlalolenhle Ndaba, he had swept her off her feet and proposed. It was on the day of the wedding, Nomusa had looked so beautiful and so in love walking down the aisle. Mpumi of course was her best girl she had been holding her veil. It was when the priest was asking if there were any objections to that union that all hell had broken loose. A very pregnant woman had stood up with a small child on her hips and holding a not much older one by hand. The groom had looked like a deer caught by the headlights of an oncoming car. The woman was the bitter wife of Nhlalo, after the screeching and tugging match which was broken up by elders she

then told them who she was. Her husband worked in Joburg while she had stayed KwaMlalazi looking after his children and his sickly mother. He had started coming less and less home, she heard about the upcoming nuptials from a gossiping relative. She had packed her children to come and see for herself. She couldn't believe that her husband was living it up while she struggled to feed his family. The stupid fool had claimed that he loved them both and wanted Nomusa to be his second wife. Nomusa had been devastated and humiliated in front of all her family and friends. Mpumi had helped her pick up the pieces but she suspected that from that day onwards Nomusa had shied away from any guy who even smelt of commitment. She had jumped from one playboy to another. Mpumi had a feeling that Amo was different and Nomusa was in denial. Since Nomusa was mooning over her phone, she probably wouldn't agree to go explore and meet more animals. Mpumi decided she had to do something about her hair. Her mother had taught her how to plait it and she could plait herself. She sat in front of the mirror and took up her combs and clips. It was hard opening lines, her hair was coarse and crowded, and so when she opened one line if she didn't clip the hair quickly the line would disappear. She decided to plait cornrows just four rows would do the trick. Nomusa came to take a sit on the chair behind her and watched her, she didn't even offer to help. But Mpumi had a feeling she was about to say something stupid. "You have millions to your name, not to mention that your husband is the freaking Minister, but you are too stingy to even go to a proper saloon." Where would she find a saloon in the middle of Kruger National Park? Thankfully Mpumi had a comb on her mouth but she let her eyes glare her response. "I mean a Brazilian weave wouldn't hurt either, you didn't even grow up in the rural areas but your arse screams farm girl." Ok she was much more fun when her nose had been stuck behind her phone. Ping! Pheeew Mpumi had been saved by a text, Nomusa went back to her love world.

It was their last night at the Ivory Sands and Mpumi had fallen in love with the place. There had a dumbwaiter system which was no doubt ideal for those famous married men who wanted to spoil their mistresses to a safari. This was probably an ideal place for Daniel to take one of his floozies but thinking about it didn't hurt her anymore. There was a note left by the dumbwaiter and a single rose addressed to her and the note simply said, 'Meet me at the Kingston

Treehouse'. Mpumi felt excited, she was sure it was Jarred, then she remembered that he hadn't called her or texted her since they had left Cape Town. Nomusa was wrapped up in her phone so Mpumi slid out of their room unnoticed and made her way to the treehouse. It wasn't a traditional treehouse, it wasn't even on a tree. It was made of glass with a thatched roof, it was suspended on wooden beams and there were lamps on the ramp leading to the treehouse. The lamps cast a beautiful glow on the whole place. There he was standing just inside the doorway. He was so tall and solid. His face in the lamplight made her catch her breath, she understood why Nomusa had nicknamed him Adonis. He was chiseled perfection. Mpumi had to remind herself firmly that she was angry at him. So she stood in front of him legs slightly apart and her arms folded and a no-nonsense look on her face. "You look like a goddess with those plaits on your head." The man thought he was God's gift to women, the epitome of charm. "They are cornrows," she snapped at him, "and all goddesses were Greek there wasn't a black goddess."

"Are you sure? I think I read about a black goddess once. She was the hottest. Actually Sir Godfrey Higgins asserted that all the gods and goddesses of Greece were black."

"I don't care if there was, you can't just go AWOL then come back thinking you can charm your way into my panties." He was amused by her outburst and that made her angrier. "I just love how your mind always runs to that dirty place. Missed me much?" Arrogant fool! She walked past him and went to stand at the railing looking up at the clear night sky. He stood behind her imprisoning her by placing each hand on the railing next to hers, his chin was resting on her cornrows. "Have you ever noticed how perfectly we fit?" she had noticed but she didn't feel like talking to him. He sighed, he knew how she got when she was giving him the cold shoulder. "I'm sorry I didn't contact you." He was going to have to do better than that and he knew it. She wanted an explanation even if she didn't ask for one. "Lola had pneumonia so I had to drop everything and go back to her."

"Is she better now?" the concern was immediate.

"She is fine, the doctor thought a change of climate would do her a world of good so I came back with her."

“Oh.” She wanted to know where she was. He could read her easily, “She is in my villa, fast asleep. The journey was tiring to her.” She had finally relaxed in his arms, he was partly forgiven. “I missed you Lelo, since I came across you I’m alive again. Every moment apart from you was hell” ok he was overselling himself now but his words warmed her heart, she felt the exact same. “I missed you too.”

“Hallelujah I thought you were going to stomp out of here with your delicious cookie.” She had forgotten that naturally he was an idiot. He turned her around to face him and then he was kissing her. Tiny butterfly kisses all over her face then he dipped to her neck. The kisses were getting more heated as they moved to her cleavage. He buried his face in her bust and she was squirming from the electricity he was generating with his kisses. “I want to get drunk on you. I want to feast on your body,” he was talking against her skin sending tingles all over her body. This must be the seduction he had promised her. It was torture, she wanted him inside her but he was in no rush. He led her inside the treehouse. It was like being outside in the wilderness and she was shivering from need. “Please.” He knew what she wanted but he was determined to take his sweet time with her. He laid her gently on the cushions which were laid out on the floor. He was taking off her top. She felt self-conscious, this was different from the elevator. He had last seen her body when she had a flat tummy and now her stomach was slightly rounded and it had stretch marks. She put her hand over his to stop him but he brushed her hand away. “Let me see how beautiful you are.” She looked deeply into his eyes and she saw that he meant it, she relaxed and let him continue. The way he was staring at her made her hot with longing. “You’re beautiful...” kiss, “Breathtaking...” kiss, “Perfect...” kiss “Voluptuous...” the longest kiss. With each kiss he was sliding down closer and closer to her cookie jar. She felt him slide the zip on her jeans open and he slid them down slowly yet so easily like he was peeling her open. This seduction thing was killing her softly. She wanted him. He knew she wanted him. But he wanted to explore all of her. Jehovah! He was sucking on her labia. He was really taking his time licking and sucking so thoroughly she felt her insides quiver. He remembered all her weak points, his stub of a beard was brushing against the insides of her thighs. She tried closing her legs when she couldn’t take it anymore but he held them apart and he drank from her cookie jar. She felt the orgasm coming and she tried to move aside but he kept sucking and teasing until she couldn’t hold back anymore. She came

in his mouth, shuddering and groaning. He didn't stop sucking till the last of her orgasm shivers stopped. Then he looked her straight in the eye. His eyes had changed to a stormy grey and she knew he wanted her. To hell with this, she wasn't going to be subjected to this torture anymore. She shoved him on the cushions and ripped off his clothes with an urgency he found exciting if the bulging in his underwear was any testimony. She removed that too and his manhood was pulsing and ready as steel for her. She didn't have the time for pleasantries so she straddled him and his groans said he loved her aggression. She was in control now. She rode him increasing her tempo and he was grunting like an animal. He was grabbing her arse like it was his lifeline and his breathing was much noisier. He was closing his eyes but she wanted him looking at her, seeing him tortured as much as he had tortured her. But he wasn't taking it lying down. The next moment she was lying on her back, her legs on his shoulders and he was pumping into her. He came in three strokes and she came with him. She had never had an orgasm that long in her life and it left her shaking. He was cradling her on his chest and she was trying to catch her breath. His heartbeat was also erratic. Talk about working out. He kissed the top of her head. It was a long time before she could talk, "You never told me what you were doing in Cape Town." He laughed that low sexy laugh only Jarred could pull off. "Not quite the raving review I was hoping for." He drew her even closer to him, "I was there on business. I want to expand the hotel chain and I had to come personally to see the deal through."

"Wait so you are the chairperson of the Twelve Apostle chain?"

"How did you know?"

"A nosy bell-boy. Don't ask. So what's the deal you want to see through?"

"Building another Twelve Apostle hotel, maybe in Durban this time."

"That could take years..."

"Actually I'm going to be done in three months." He said it with such arrogant confidence, Mpumi cringed. This was a new side of Jarred she didn't know, a ruthless side she wasn't sure she liked. She had known him before he had taken over the reins of the family business. Joe was always going to be in charge so Jarred had been the easy going charmer that he had been since he had saved

her life in Cape Town. Getting a tender to open a hotel as huge or upmarket as the Twelve Apostles usually took a lot of negotiating through red-tape but there was nothing like the stamp of Foreign Investor to cut through that red-tape. Apartheid and slavery had never ended they had gone to private school and come back in the form of Capitalism. If it had been a black Nigerian it would have taken years but as a white investor it didn't matter even if you were from the mafia family the tender would be yours. It must be nice being a foreign investor, Mpumi thought scathingly. "Why?" he asked, oops she had thought out loud. "All you have to say is jump and all we ask is how high." She said.

"Surely you can't blame me for your own system?" They were getting into a fight, Jarred noted that not wanting to cork block himself he changed tact. "Business talk is tedious, and I need a huge favor from you." Her silence meant he should go on, "I will be tied up in meetings for the next four days so I won't have time to look after Lola. Can you please look after her?"

"But she doesn't even know me! And we are going to Mozambique for the last leg of our safari."

"I've already arranged for her to go with you." The arrogant certainty in his voice!

"Without even asking me first, really Jarred?" Whenever she said his name in that particular tone it never ended well, "Look I know it was presumptuous of me Lelo but I can't leave her alone or entrust her on a stranger. I really need you on this one babe." His forehead was pressed against hers and he was looking at her with sad puppy eyes, "Please?" She sighed, he knew how to tick all her boxes. He was already kissing his way down her body.

"You're not playing fair here. You are not going to bribe me with sex..." her voice was already taking on a hoarse fiber. He looked at her with a mischievous glint in his eye and she knew she had lost to him. He kissed the sensitive area just behind her ear and she was moaning, "Yeeeeees."

"Thanks babe I knew I could count on you," he grinned wickedly. She hadn't been agreeing to anything, he had tricked her and she didn't care she wanted him. So she kissed him and shut him up. He was the one groaning as she lengthened the kiss. He was her weakness and he knew it.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Tell me again why we are stuck being babysitters on my dream vacation?” Mpumi rolled her eyes, she wasn’t going to hear the end of this. They were waiting for Jarred and Lola to come so that they would be on their way. Nomusa had been whining ever since she told her that Lola would be joining them. Never mind that Mpumi had paid for the whole trip, the drama queen here would just have to be strong. “He must be more amazing in the sack than I thought.” Mpumi wasn’t going to dignify that comment with any response. She knew Nomusa was fishing but she wasn’t in the mood to kiss and tell. She was nervous. Besides Oyama she didn’t really have much experience when it came to teenagers. When Oyama’s friends were sleeping over she generally avoided them. Yes she loved Oyama to destruction but she wasn’t a very maternal person or an outgoing one at that. She had overheard some junior staff calling her an uptight snob and she owned up to it. Yes she was ruthless when it came to negotiating multi-billion dollar contracts, she could stare down any man or woman for that matter. But she was shit scared of a teenage girl. So what happened if Lola didn’t like her and they had to spend the next four days together? She felt like a new makoti trying to impress in-laws on the first meeting. Only she already had in-laws and they hated her. They called her The Harvard wife because according to them she acted like she was too good for their family because she had an Ivy League degree. There was a knock on the door. Pheeew it was time to go. Mpumi picked up her case and went to open the door. He had that mischievous gleam to his eye and even when he was greeting Nomusa he kept his eyes on her. She was blushing so she turned her focus to Lola. The girl was not at all what Mpumi had expected. “You’re so beautiful.” She hadn’t meant to say that out loud but the girl took her breath away. Lola dimpled at her compliment, “And you are the woman in the picture.” Picture? Mpumi turned a puzzled look to Jarred who was suddenly avoiding her eye. The girl went on, “The picture daddy keeps in his wallet. Show her daddy.” Was that a blush she spotted on his cheeks? Mpumi was intrigued so was Nomusa and they all waited for him to produce the picture. Looking uncomfortable, Jarred took out his wallet and handed Mpumi the picture. Nomusa was also all eyes. The picture had been taken at the beach it was a face portrait she had been laughing at something and she seemed so pretty and

carefree. She had had braids on, it had been summer vacation and they had been tearing the beach up. She hadn't known that such a picture existed. Jarred snatched the picture from her and put it back in his wallet. He still wouldn't meet her eye and that wasn't like him at all. "It's time for you ladies to go, I have back to back meetings," he said kissing Lola on the forehead, "and you young lady behave for your mother here, ok?" While Mpumi was still shocked by what he had just said he kissed her smack on the lips and just like that he was gone leaving an awkward silence behind. Nomusa's eyes said she had a lot of questions and Mpumi was glad that Lola was there with them. The flight to Mozambique was just an hour from there and they would take a short chopper ride to Benguerra Island.

On their flight, Mpumi couldn't help looking at Lola. She had expected a blue-eyed blonde girl but Lola was far from that. She was a Latino with long curly honey brown hair, strangely her eyes were a sparkling green almost emerald in color. She had the longest lashes and they framed her big cat eyes. She had dimples and full pink lips which formed a perfect pout. Though her body was still that of a teenage girl you could just tell that she was going to have a killer body with a perfect Kardashian butt. She caught Mpumi looking at her and she smiled, her smile was easy and warm. She wasn't bubbly and loud like Oyama but she was also easy to love in her own down to earth way. "You must look like your mother because you look nothing like your father." The dimples again, "Daddy Jarred says so, I never knew her or my father. They were involved in a car accident while my mother was pregnant with me. My father died on the spot but my mother held on even though she was in a coma. They took me out through C-section. Daddy said she held on till she heard my first cry then she let go. I was premature I had to stay in the hospital for two months." Mpumi was shocked, Jarred had told her about the accident but she had assumed it had happened recently. That meant that Jarred had raised this girl from birth. Knowing him he had been with her even in the intensive care unit. Her heart went out to him, it couldn't have been easy after losing his brother. Then having to step in and father the girl while taking over the family company. "How old are you Lola?"

“I’m turning 15 on October the 15th” Wow, she was almost the same age as Oyama. “I have a daughter about your age her name is Oyama.”

“Daddy told me about her, he said she is a beautiful Frankenstein.” Mpumi couldn’t help but smile that sounded like something Jarred would say. “I think the two of you will get along just fine.” Mpumi was loving talking to this soft-spoken girl. Nomusa wasn’t butting into their conversation but Mpumi knew she was filing away comments for later. “I can’t wait to meet her, besides daddy there really haven’t been a lot of people in my life. I struggle to make friends.” Mpumi felt they had that in common, “What about your grandmother?” she asked. Lola shrugged her elegant shoulders, “Mima never liked me much. She said it was a pity I looked nothing like her son. I also think she hated my name. I was named after you, you know.” Why hadn’t Mpumi figured it out? Lelo. Lola. Nomusa had that look on her face like she was hearing local umgosi, she was finding all this fascinating. Mpumi was grateful for her silence, she loved her friend but Nomusa suffered from Foot in Mouth disease. She had a talent of saying the most outrageous things. “Yeah she never liked me too, pumpkin.” Lola looked tired and Mpumi remembered that she was in recovery from pneumonia. She reached over and reclined her seat till the girl was sleeping comfortably. She took a small wrap and covered her with it. “Do you need to take any medication?” “I already took it.” She yawned and her voice sounded sleepy, Mpumi let her rest only brushing her lips on Lola’s forehead. Nomusa had that look on her face that said she was thinking really hard and Mpumi ignored her. “Why did you tell her I’m her mother?” she texted Jarred. “Because you are going to be her mother.” Response. He was really frustrating at times. “I’m married to someone else Jarred, you shouldn’t confuse a child like that.” She had to remind him. “In a meeting now, talk later.” Coward. Another text came in, “I love you Lelo.” She was just going to ignore him.

“Chomma you are in too deep.” Mpumi sighed she knew that but hearing Nomusa say it made her worry more. They had arrived at Benguerra Island Lodge, Lola had still been groggy so she was sleeping and Nomusa had taken the chance to pounce at her. Mpumi had had to upgrade their room to the family villa because they just couldn’t share a single bed anymore. That had been done

quickly and discreetly and they had settled Lola in then taken off to talk. They were walking on the beach, there were palm trees along the beach and it was breath taking. Mpumi wasn't paying much attention to the scenic view she was worried about what Nomusa had pointed out. "I know you thought this was a holiday fling but blue-eyed Adonis isn't on the same page with you. To think he kept your picture all these years, in his wallet chomma no less. And to name his daughter after you! It's like something from the script of a telenovela you know those ones on Telemundo." Only this wasn't some cheesy sitcom, it was her life. It had been easier thinking that she was the only one who still carried a torch for him and that he was only acting on the passion that was between them. Knowing that he had loved her over the years too changed everything, it made her heart break. Nomusa was comfortable to do all the talking, "And that child of his is too beautiful, she looks like a doll with those witch eyes. And that figure, she even has a butt!" According to Nomusa all white women had no butts either they were totally flat or they had butt implants. "She isn't totally white Nono, she is also half-Latino."

"So Donald Trump is going to be deporting her soon, is that why she is here? She's been deported?" Sigh.

"No, she is Latino not a Mexican immigrant. She's an American citizen, she could be of Spanish descent or Latin or Greek. And she is here because her doctor said she needs to breath in a different climate"

"Well she looks like a Mexican to me. And that hair! I could ask her to cut it then I have it custom made into my own Brazilian wig." That Foot in Mouth disease was out in full force. "But seriously Mpumi, what are you going to do? Adonis loves you and you love him but then there's Daniel and Oyama. It's a true Romeo and Juliet story." Nomusa had to start reading these books if she was hell-bent on making comparisons. But she had a point, Mpumi had found herself in a love triangle. On the one hand though Daniel had hurt her deeply, she did care about him and their family. On the other she had come to realize and accept that Jarred was the love of her life and being with him felt like the right thing. If only it were so simple. Nothing was ever easy for her. "I don't know Nono, I don't know."

"I like Jarred," Big surprise there, Mpumi rolled her eyes. "No hear me out Mpumi. I like him because of who you become when you are with him. You smile

a lot. You laugh. You drink wine and you are like a carefree young woman. I haven't heard you once complain about carbs or your diet. You should see yourself you are literally shining from within. Now you know me and Daniel don't get along. I think he's your safe bet, even though he cheats it doesn't shatter you as it would if it was Jarred cheating. Daniel is the sensible choice, you have a family together it's logical that you keep your family together. But Jarred is risky because he's the one person who has the power to hurt you. You should have seen yourself when he didn't call or text, you were a wreck, you went from worrying to angry to scared." Mpumi sighed it didn't help much when Nomusa was making sense and being very observant. Jarred was a risk she was scared to take. Nomusa was also right, Jarred alone had the power to crush her. There was something all-consuming about their love. "Let's go back, Lelo might wake up and think we have deserted her."

They found Lola still fast asleep. She only woke up around midday complaining of hunger. That was a sign of recovery. After bathing and eating she joined them on the beach bed just outside their villa. She was looking around like she couldn't believe her eyes. "This is like a little piece of paradise. It's not exactly how I pictured Africa."

"How did you picture Africa?" Nomusa asked. Lola suddenly looked embarrassed, "I don't know but I watched The Good Lie." Mpumi and Nomusa laughed, this kid was cute. "That movie was unfortunate, it does show a side of Africa but not the whole picture and I think they exaggerated for effect."-Mpumi

"What she means is that The Good Lie is a lie, we are not some uncivilized people who don't know how to turn on a light switch."-Nomusa

"I also didn't understand why the other guy was wearing the Just Do It t-shirt he was given at the refugee camp when they were kids when he was now a doctor"-Lola. Nomusa seemed to love this comment and just like that Lola had been accepted by Nomusa.

"What do you do for a living?"-Lola

"I design websites at an IT company in Parktown."-Nomusa

“And I am the Company Secretary of an Investment group in Randburg. I also lecture Corporate Law part-time at Wits University.”-Mpumi

“But daddy said you studied for your MBA with him.”-Lola seemed puzzled.

“Yes I did. But the Company Secretary isn’t really anyone’s secretary in the traditional sense. I am also a shareholder. I notify board members of incoming board meetings. Help in the drafting of the yearly budget. I largely deal with the legal issues in the group among other things.”-Mpumi Lola nodded her understanding. The kid seemed fascinated by Mpumi’s cornrows, “Who did your hair?” Nomusa was smirking and Mpumi ignored her, “I did.” Lola also wanted her hair to be plaited so Mpumi fetched her combs and started plaiting her. She had only ever plaited her own hair and Oyama’s hair, Lola’s hair was softer and silky but it tangled easily. “Before I went to saloons my dad used to do my hair.” Mpumi was surprised she couldn’t imagine Jarred combing this unruly mass of hair. “But surely you had some female or another around from time to time?” Mpumi was fishing, she couldn’t explain why she wanted to know and why a picture of another woman playing mother with Jarred’s daughter made her feel so jealous. “No actually, mostly it’s just been me and daddy. Mima didn’t come around much and he never introduced me to any of his girlfriends. I never had a governess.” That somehow made Mpumi feel warm inside, gosh she needed to get a grip. At least Nomusa was engrossed in her phone, she would have made some snide remark.

Their days at the beach flew as fast as those days when everything is perfect and you don’t want it to end. Mpumi and Lola went snorkeling, Nomusa was not stepping anywhere near the ocean where there might be sharks lurking around. But she did agree to go horseback riding on the beach the pictures just blew up her Instagram. Mpumi had a gift when it came to taking pictures. Suddenly people who hadn’t been talking to her in ages were talking to her, “Girl is that you?” that seemed to be the question on their minds. It was amazing what one could achieve with filter these days. Mpumi thought she was too old for these social media platforms but Mpumi had always been stuck up. Amo had also been bugging her about social media, why was she on snap chat, why were most of her

followers male, why did she post pictures of herself in a bikini like she would wear a maxi dress to the beach. That Lola girl was adorable and she had shown her how to take selfies that were the 'bomb'. Now that Tswana man was all up in her business acting like he owned her. He wanted to know what she was doing at every point of the day. If she didn't text him back quickly enough he became whiny and insecure. Why were men so sensitive and clingy nowadays? They acted like it was them who had the hormones and menstruation. She wasn't used to a man who paid her that much attention. Most of the guys she dated forgot about her until when they wanted to fuck her. Why couldn't he be like most men, he was too interested in her web designs, in her family life, he wanted pictures of where she was, video calls and voice calls. He wanted to be her profile picture as she was his. If there was any such thing he loved her too much. Nomusa felt too loved and she was panicking, she kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. Jarred's Mexican girl seemed interested in web designs and Nomusa could just feel Mpumi's mind locking that information away. Her friend had fallen in love with that green-eyed girl and Nomusa was dreading the end of their safari. Mpumi was glowing. There was no better word to describe her. She was eating chocolate cake on their picnics and swallowing it down with wine. Nomusa always wondered why Mpumi had weight issues. True she wasn't tiny but she wasn't exactly a big girl either. She was curvy, attractively so. Like at that moment Mpumi was in a skimpy peach bikini, her curves were on fire and instead of darkening her it became her. She hadn't wanted to buy it but Nomusa had insisted. The cornrows Nomusa had been laughing at made her look ten years younger and she was laughing as she was having a water fight with Lola. Nomusa watched them from the comfort of the beach bed. African air was doing a world of good to Lola her skin had a golden glow to it and those plaits made her look like a doll. She still couldn't understand how the child had such a perfect butt. The two of them were cute out there in the ocean, Nomusa decided to take pictures of them without them knowing. Ping! "When am I seeing you again?" Ping! "I miss you so much, I want to be with you every day." Ping! "Are you ignoring me?" Ping! "Are you mad at me baby?" Ping! "Baby buwa lena tlhee." Sigh, now she couldn't even enjoy sleeping on the beach in peace. She wasn't going to respond to any of his messages, Amo just had to give her some air to breathe. She had just put the phone down when it started ringing. It was him. She put it on silent and let it go to voicemail. "I love Africa!"

the Mexican was shouting at the ocean, shame man let her get mugged at Bree Taxi rank or hustled at Hilbrow she would be screaming a different tune.

Too soon it was their last night in Mozambique. Mpumi had loved every minute of it. She went to check on Lola when she came from her bath. The little angel was resting peacefully her long lashes resting on her chin. Funny even when she was sleeping the dimples were there. Mpumi had expected her to be a spoilt brat but though Lola clearly had Jarred under her little finger, she was well-mannered and kind. She also loved the water and the camera just loved her. Mpumi tiptoed out of Lola's room to her own. Oyama would be home the next morning and Mpumi would only be home in the evening. Daniel would just have to deal with buying her school things, she was after all his daughter. Funny how eleven breath-taking days could change one's outlook. She hadn't opened a single email since she had been on holiday. Whatever crisis was there at work she was sure they would survive it without her. Mpumi still had problems but she was calm now. She didn't feel like bursting into tears every time she thought of Daniel and his silence didn't even bother her. She wasn't looking forward to going back to reality. After switching off the lights Mpumi took off her night gown and settled under covers. She was glad she didn't have to share the bed with Nomusa. She always ended up squashed on one side of the bed while Nomusa terrorized the rest of the bed. It was peaceful here, she would bring Oyama here next holidays. She felt someone slide into the bed and cover her mouth with a hand. God! She couldn't be abducted now! Then she could smell his woody-musky scent and she relaxed in his arms. He turned her around and kissed her deeply. When he finally let her come up for air, she punched him lightly on the chest. "Don't ever scare me like that again!" he flashed his teeth at her in the darkness, "I see I was deeply missed by my beautiful muse."

"You aren't even an artist...No Jarred we can't have sex in here they will hear us. Come on lets go outside." He moved reluctantly from sucking her breast and quickly rushed her outside and laid her down on the beach bed. "How did you even get...?" He shut her up with a kiss old school style. She only got to talk when he was satiated. "We really should stop doing this."

“Why? You don’t enjoy making love to me mi amour?” Mpumi laughed, his French impression was really bad. “I do enjoy it but we have to stop jumping on each other the moment we are left alone. Like two mature adults.”

“I can’t promise that. You are too irresistible. Especially here under the stars. Your eyes are shining.” How is it that he said the corniest shit with such sincerity and it spoke to her soul? Never in her wildest dreams had she ever thought she would be making love on a beach bed out in the open where anyone could just walk across them. If only her mother could see her now. He shifted and sat up facing her. She could feel that he had suddenly become serious. “Lelo you have to leave him.” Here we go, she sighed.

“I can’t just leave him Jarred, he’s my husband I promised to stick by him till death do us part. We have a daughter.”

“Dammit Lelo, the man raped you for Christ sake!”

“He is my husband he can sleep with me whenever and however he wants.”

“Stop defending him. You of all people know the law, marital rape is...”

“Whose law? The Roman-Dutch law? My culture states that a woman should never deprive her husband his conjugal rights he is entitled to this vagina. So don’t tell me what the law say.”

“I don’t give a flying fuck what your culture says. He...”

“Wow. There it is finally. Now listen to me Jarred, just because you have been fucking me all of five minutes doesn’t give you the right to bully me culturally. Daniel is my husband and this is my life so butt the fuck out of it!” They were both shouting now, he ran a hand through his hair, the way he did every time he got frustrated. He looked like he was holding back the urge to shake her. “No Lelo, you listen to me and don’t interrupt me. I don’t care what your culture or what the law say. He hurt you. And I will never forgive myself for not being there to protect you. I should have come after you but I let my stupid pride get in the way. Now you are stuck in a marriage where your husband has treated you in the most degrading manner. He violated you and yet you are still defending him. How do you think that makes me feel? Should I wave you goodbye to suffer more

pain? Tell me what do you expect me to do when you are ripping my heart into shreds!" his voice was raw with emotion and when he got to the last syllable it cracked. Mpumi couldn't stand his pain, she drew him into her embrace. At first he was cold and unreceptive. She rubbed his back then he finally broke down. He was crying. This man who loved her so dearly was crying and it was her fault. She held him and they cried together. She held him till his tears had dried. Sometime during their fight they had stood up. Now she led him back to the beach bed and they lay there cuddling. "We just had a naked screaming match on the beach. We can tick that off our bucket list." She was talking softly now almost in a whisper. The beginning of a smile touched his lips. He was still feeling low. "I know it doesn't make sense to you Jarred but I need to go back to him. I need to face him and work out things my way. God knows I want to stay with you here in the beach making love, running around, fighting with you. But I need to do this." She was pleading with him to understand and he looked her straight in the eye. "I've waited for you for sixteen years Lelo and I can wait for you a little longer. Please don't make me wait forever." There wasn't any anger in his voice or pain, his voice only held promise. Then why did she feel as if someone had stabbed her straight in the heart?

Nomusa had been surprised to wake up and find blue-eyed Adonis in their midst but she had learnt not to ask. Something was going on with those two. They were very clingy today yet Mpumi couldn't look him in the eye. Lola was plying her dad about all the adventures they had and he laughed and smiled but he didn't seem like his ordinary self. Again Nomusa wasn't going to ask. She had problems of her own. Amogalang wanted her to move to Cape Town. Now he was sulking because she had refused flatly to do so. She had a career! It might not be as lucrative as his but she was not about to become that woman who let her dreams go to sit and hold her man's hand. If he wanted to be so close to her, he should move to Jozi. But he was hearing none of that. Men! Zizinja shame, it was always their way or the high way. She was a grown arse woman if he didn't like it he could go to hell for all she cared. But there lay her problem. She cared. A lot. He treated her like a Tswana queen ought to be treated. Even Instagram wasn't cheering her up today. They were going on a last picnic but the vibe up in that place you would swear it was the last supper. Jarred held the picnic basket in one

hand and he had his other hand wrapped around Mpumi. Those two should seriously get a room and they seemed to be forgetting that she and Lola were with them. Lola fell in step with her and Nomusa was surprised how easy it was to talk to her. She had a maturity which Oyama lacked. Both of them were spoiled brats but Lola was street smart where Oyama was book smart. The picnic was in some remote island and Nomusa had a feeling that they should have just let the lovebirds come out here alone. Thankfully they didn't stay there long. They had to go back and pack. Their flight was at 4pm. When they were saying their goodbyes Jarred held Mpumi for the longest time like he didn't want to let her go. There were tears in Mpumi's eyes even when she was kissing Lola goodbye. Nomusa looked away. It felt like she was watching a break-up, the sad type where there was no anger just tears. She had known their parting was going to be painful but this felt like a funeral of a favorite aunt. They were taking separate flights. Mpumi and Nomusa were headed to Joburg while Jarred and Lola were going to Cape Town. On their flight Mpumi wasn't even reading a book this time and she turned down the hostess's offer of wine. Nomusa knew she didn't want to talk about what had gone down between her and Jarred. Nomusa was fine with that, she wanted to talk about the Amo situation, Mpumi was the most independent career oriented woman she knew, surely she would understand. Mpumi listened as she told her what Amo wanted and what she wanted. Mpumi had that you won't like what I'm about to tell you but I'm going to tell you anyway look on her face. "You can easily apply for another job in Cape Town, you would actually be closer to your family. But you can't expect him to uproot his whole Haulage truck business to Joburg. He has a client base and employees to consider."

"But I'm in line for a promotion at my current company! Relocating will set back my career. What if I don't find a job there?"

"With your qualifications and experience you will easily find another job maybe one that even pays better. What's your real reason for not wanting to move to Cape Town?"

"I can't just up and leave because a man likes me now, what happens when he jilts me all the way there in Cape Town and you are in Joburg? You and Oyama are the closest family I have."

"That's still not completely it I can just tell. Talk to me Nomusa."

“There’s also the thing about him not having even a Matric certificate. You know men are easily intimidated by women who are smarter than them. What if he feels threatened and it doesn’t work out?” Mpumi sighed in a way that Nomusa was accustomed to. It meant that she was about to get deep. “First of all just because you have a degree and he doesn’t, it doesn’t mean you are smarter than him. Secondly as long as you respect and love him he will never have to feel intimidated or threatened by you. Nono not every guy is out there to jilt you. Amogalang is not Nhlalo. He is not a phuthu eating Zulu. That Tswana guy loves you. I know you love your career but is that enough? I know you put the gloss on single life but is it what you really want? You are turning thirty nine this year and I know you act like you don’t like them, but I know you want children. Now you have found a decent guy who is crazy about you that he wants you with him all the time. I’m not promising that he won’t hurt you or that it will always be smooth but you owe it to yourself to see where this goes. I know you are scared, making a commitment with a person especially one who could potentially break your heart is scary. But right now you need to stop running. That man won’t be waiting for you forever.” Nomusa sighed, she hated it when Mpumi was right. She took her hand and kissed it, “Thank you chomma. I think you should take your own advice with Jarred.” Mpumi didn’t acknowledge her advice, she looked out the window like she was fighting back tears. It was going to be a long flight.

CHAPTER SIX

Oyama had come back in the morning. There was still no sign of Mpumi. Daniel didn’t know what to make of his wife’s behavior anymore. When he had made her an ultimatum and she had calmly walked out, he had been floored. Yes she was stubborn and independent but his wife had never openly defied him before. The house had been empty without Mpumi and Oyama. He had had to cancel the Save the Children event. He had expected her to call and apologize for walking out on him. But there had been no call and no text. In politics one had to know their opponent’s strategy and that was how Daniel had always stayed ahead of his competition. But this wasn’t politics. This was his marriage. And he had no idea what Mpumi’s strategy was. Something must have happened before the New

Year's Ball Gala. Something so bad that Mpumi had locked herself in their bedroom. He had tried going back to the events of that day, tried to think of what he could have said or done wrong. He had come to a blank. Women should just be made with a how to handle manual, that would make our lives so much easier black Jesus. He was the first to admit that he wasn't the world's greatest husband. But dammit he was trying his darn best. Why couldn't she appreciate that? Mpumi was so fixated on his mistakes. He wasn't proud of sleeping with those other women. They meant nothing to him why couldn't she see that? He was a man. Yes he was weak however he loved his wife and respected her, he always made sure he covered his tracks. And he always came home to her. But that wasn't enough for her, she had to go digging and throwing a fit when she found something she didn't like. She had wanted them to go to see a marriage counsellor or a therapist. That shit was for white people, if they had problems she should talk to him. God knows he had tried talking to her but she shut him out. Now their daughter needed stuff for school and she was out there prancing around with that loud mouth friend of hers acting like a single woman. Oyama was looking at him like he should know what to do. Mpumi always took care of these things what was he supposed to do. Sigh. He might as well go buy the stuff. "Where is your list of school things?" The girl looked frightened of him, "I don't know Tata, and mama always keeps the list." He wasn't about to call Mpumi and ask for her help, he would rather look through her stuff. Mpumi's study was simplistic and organized like its owner. There wasn't a pen out of place and the papers were organized in alphabetical order. There were those little stickers she put around the house, reminders, duties, motivational quotes and to-do lists. She even organized his underwear and ties for each suit. He missed his wife but he didn't know what to do to make things right. The miscarriages hadn't made things any easier. He felt guilty that he saw her in pain yet there was nothing he could do. Daniel wasn't a very demonstrative person, he didn't know how to comfort her. There was a picture of their wedding day on her desk. She had been looking up at him with such a big smile. There was another one of him holding Oyama, it had been taken in front of their first house in Mondeo. She had been so excited when they bought that house. Those had been simple times. Happy times. But Daniel had always felt like he came second to her. Like he was her rebound guy and that hurt. Oyama was standing at the door staring at him. He realized that he was still holding their wedding photo and he put it down. "Mama e-mailed me the

list Tata.” His little girl was grown up, around him she was a bit reserved but with Mpumi she was bubbly and childish. Mpumi had always been pressuring him to spend more time with her. He couldn’t make up for the missed hockey tournaments or ballet rehearsals and those swimming galas. But he could be here for her today. “Grab your things Oyama, we’re going shopping.”

Daniel had taken out his latest baby for a joyride. It was a Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4 it was part of the Lamborghini Exclusive Series and he was smitten. It felt great to be behind the wheel and feel the car purr softly as he drove out of his gate. He hated being chauffeur driven but it was more practical as often times he had to be briefed just before he made a speech or he had to go through what he had written. There was also the occasional car sex, fortunately once he shut the panel his driver could see or hear nothing. Not that his wife would ever agree to have car sex, she was the uptight kind so he got kinky with other women. He loved the finer things in life, like the R250 000 Gucci watch he had on his wrist. Daniel had never really been a sports kind of guy but he watched sports to get something to talk about with other men besides politics. He did love cars especially the sleek and powerful sports cars. Mpumi hadn’t been too impressed when he had come home in the red Lamborghini, she said he was a Minister not a flashy football player. She didn’t understand his need to get the best and latest of everything. To say that growing up money had been tight in his family was an understatement. His father had come from a powerful family but they disowned him the moment he had chosen his mother to be his wife. His mother had been a Shangaan from Maputo and the family had expected a Xhosa wife who would be advantageous to their political lives so they washed their hands on Daniel’s family. His father hadn’t been used to the low income lifestyle so he had turned to alcohol. He had been a raging alcoholic who had spent every weekly wage on the white beer that he bought illegally. To this day Daniel hated alcohol and he never touched it. His mother had been the hardworking type, so she had had to take on two to three jobs to keep their family afloat. The raising of them had been left to his older sister Phindiwe. She had always pushed him more than the other children, she spurred him to do his schoolwork. She always said he was their ticket out of that life. Her efforts had paid off when his uncle had taken him under his wing when he had graduated from university with a law degree and

another degree in Political Science. Thankfully back then tertiary education had been free, they were actually paid to go to university. He had sent money home to get them out of that hell-hole in Alexander. Remembering the dingy shack they had called home for so many years still gave him nightmares. But Phindiwe had made it all bearable, yes she was a bully but she had made him into the man he was. So even when she called demanding this and that for those bastard nephews of his, he never complained. He gave her everything and anything she wanted. The ride was too quiet, Oyama kept looking at him as if he was going to bite. "What do you think of my new ride?" he asked to break the awkward silence. "It's impressive Tata. I can't make up my mind on a favorite between the Hurican and the Aventador." Daniel was pleasantly surprised. The child knew her Lamborghinis, she was definitely his daughter. He had thought she had inherited nothing from him. Oyama looked like her. Her mannerisms were mostly from Mpumi and she was the booky type always with her nose behind a book. He was happy that she had taken something from him, "I can't wait for the Super Trofeo Asia Series Season to start. My PA got me two tickets, would you like to go with your old man Oyama?" The look on her face! She looked so happy her whole face lit up. Then she seemed to remember something and her face fell. "What's the matter?"

"It's just that I don't want to be too excited then when something comes up Tata like it always does I'm going to be disappointed." He really had messed up as a father. He had been so focused on not being a man like his father that he had ended up neglecting his child like his father had neglected them. He had worked hard to put Oyama in the school she was in and to make sure she had all she could ever need financially. In the process he had deprived her of a father-daughter relationship. He held her hand and she looked at his hand over hers in surprise. "I promise we will go together this time nana. You're going to have a date with your father. I promise." This was one promise he intended to keep. She looked him in the eyes looking for assurance and she seemed to believe him. Then she relaxed and her face became animated again. She began asking him questions about cars. Her knowledge was deeper than he would expect for a fourteen year old. He had to lie here and there so he wouldn't lose face in front of his daughter. She hung to his every word. Daniel was glad he had taken the time to come and shop with her. Father and daughter were finally bonding.

Daniel wasn't a fan of shopping. If Mpumi had been with them she would have wanted to go store by store comparing prices and quality. She was careful about money. You could just see the wheels turning in her head calculating every cost. He had been surprised that she had even gone on a safari and when he looked at their financial records it hadn't come from his bank account or their joint account. She must have paid for it from her own account. He appreciated that she knew the value of money, she had forced him into almost all his investments and though he hated to admit it they had turned out to be very lucrative investments. She was controlling but he trusted her with his money. Oyama didn't seem to be too keen on shopping either. To make both their lives easier Daniel asked for the manager in the very first store they entered into. The man magically appeared as if he had been lingering quite close to them. To this man he was a Minister and the manager seemed hell bent to impress him. He handed over the list to the manager, "Please get us everything on that list. Make sure everything is from the top brands. I want only the best of everything." The man scurried along to do his bidding. There seemed to be a host of shop workers at their attendance. One showed Daniel where to sit while the others fussed over Oyama. Luckily their school uniforms were sold exclusively at their school. So they only had to buy school shoes and Alice bands and other ridiculous things on that list. Daniel sat back and watched his daughter being fitted for shoes. One sales rep was busy taking down notes on Oyama's favorite colors and one seemed to be trying to gauge if parsley went well with her complexion. Daniel could just feel Oyama's irritation from where he sat. Mpumi had done a good job raising his daughter. Although she babied her a lot, she had taught her to say please and thank you. She wasn't too self-absorbed. In record time the things on the list had been packed and he had produced his black card. He asked for the things to be delivered to their house and they left the shop. The things power gave to one. Next they had to go to Oyama's stylist for her hair and manicure. These BEE children of theirs. But Daniel was happy that she seemed so happy.

They were now at the stylist, Daniel had expected a woman but it was a man. He didn't want any man touching his precious princess. Then he noticed that

the stylist was gay so he relaxed. Oyama wanted a weave but that wasn't what was on her list. She was supposed to plait braids. Feeling benevolent and wanting to get back at Mpumi he told the stylist to use the best weave they had. He sat down to wait for her. He had never gone with a woman to do her hair, it took up too much of his valuable time but taking Oyama felt right. He had a lot of time to kill and nothing to do. All the magazines there were fashion magazines. People kept giving him judgmental looks and he felt like explaining that Oyama was his daughter not his mistress. He remembered the day he had first met Nompumelelo Ndinisa as she had introduced herself to him. The one word which had fully described her was regal. Even in her shabby clothes with no make-up, Mpumi had held herself as if she were the Queen of England. She wasn't very welcoming and had an invisible sign written Keep Out. He had been intrigued. Mpumi wasn't like most of the girls who kept the clothes they came with from home locked in their suitcases while they paraded around in clothes bought for them by their sugar daddies. They now called them Blessers but the concept was the same. And those college girls were easily persuaded to open their legs. In one of his not so proud moments Daniel had also dated a college girl. She saw the car and he took her to a costly bar by her standards but which was a tiny drop which barely left a dent on his bank account. Within two days he had slept with her, when he thought about it now it actually made him sad. One day that could be his Oyama. But Mpumi had been that girl that you just knew you wouldn't mess around with. The kind of girl you introduced to your family. The girl you kissed and held hands with while you secretly nursed your blue balls or fucked a whore on the side. Daniel had been tempted to take her virginity many a time but something about her made him hold back. Then she had gone to Harvard. When she came back sobbing that she couldn't marry him anymore because a white asshole had gotten her pregnant, he felt disillusioned. She didn't want to talk about him so he had deduced that the white pig had done a hit and run stint on his girl. He had never felt a bigger fool. He had respected her wish to wait till marriage and yet she had opened her legs to the first white guy who had shown her any slight interest. The Mpumi he had put on a pedestal, his Mpumi didn't exist, she was just like every other girl. He had been hurt. A male ego doesn't heal from that. Its one thing for your girl to cheat but for her to lose her virginity to the other guy and come back carrying his brat was devastating. There was no way he could pass off the bastard as his. That had been his dilemma, Mpumi had

betrayed him in the worst possible way but he loved her still. Then his problem had disappeared and he got to hold her while she cried and she finally gave herself to him. In the throes of his passion, while he was grunting and huffing on top of her, he had heard her call out the pig's name. He had pretended that he hadn't heard her. Oyama was done with her hair and nails. She twirled around for her dad to see. Mpumi had been right to forbid the weaves, it made her look older and mature. The damage was already done. All he could say was, "You look beautiful my princess." Firmly refusing the stylist's offer to give him a haircut on the house, Daniel led Oyama out of the saloon. Not wanting their quality time to come to an end, Daniel suggested they go for lunch at the family favorite restaurant Mimo's.

Daniel had settled for Buffalo wings in barbeque sauce with fries while Oyama had chosen Chicken mayo pizza. He had to order more wings because his daughter kept eating his portion as well. Daniel couldn't remember the last time she had been so comfortable around him. Guess it was true that a girl always looked up to her father as her model of an ideal man. But Daniel knew that the number of women sexually abused by their fathers kept rising. No wonder so many women hated men. How could you begin to love any man when your ideal man was an incestuous rapist? Daniel had done a lot of things he wasn't proud about but the thing he could never forgive himself for was when he had forced himself on Mpumi. She had wanted to leave him and he had panicked, if she ever left him he would probably kill himself. She had looked at him with that frightened look that he had seen on his mother countless times when his father had come home drunk and beat her at the slightest provocation. He had always felt helpless, he couldn't protect her. But then one day the old man fell on his way home from the beerhall, he hit his head on a rock and he died. His body had been found the next day by a vendor who had come back from stocking his products. Daniel hadn't felt sorry that his father was dead. When he had seen that look on Mpumi's face he had wanted to wrap himself around her and say, "I'm sorry I will protect you." But how could he protect her from his own demons. Since that incident he hadn't been able to bring himself to touch her again. He couldn't trust himself. They slept in separate bedrooms now. "Tata what's wrong?" She must have seen the self-loathing on his face. "Nothing my princess, let's go and grab

some ice-cream before going home.” Leaving a couple of notes on the table, he took her hand and they left. He shouldn’t be thinking of the past when he was with her. He lay awake being tormented by his demons every day. Now being with Oyama made him want to make amends with his wife. He would apologize, beg if he had to and probably take her to Dubai or anywhere she wanted to go. He had a lot to make up for. He wanted to be a better husband and a better father moving forward. Today he would focus on his daughter. She was talking of her camp. “It was so much fun Tata wish you had been there. Mama came to see my hockey tournament.” She had? Daniel had no idea where Mpumi’s safari was and he was ashamed to admit that. “When was that Oyama?”

“The day after she left home. She came with her friend Jarred. He knows a lot about hockey. I liked him Tata, he took us out to lunch. Then we met up with aunt Nomusa. I was sad when I had to go back to camp.”

Daniel didn’t hear a single word she said after Jarred. What the hell? So not only was Mpumi cheating on him with the pig who had abandoned her when she was pregnant, she was blatantly going on trips with him under his very nose. No wonder she hadn’t paid from their accounts probably that pig was funding the whole shagging spree. Eleven days, she had been gone eleven freaking days! But to bring him to meet his daughter? Daniel was seeing red. Oyama looked worried like she sensed she had said something she shouldn’t have which had annoyed her father. Daniel had to calm himself down so that he wouldn’t ruin his perfect day with his daughter. They would have their ice-cream. He would deal with her whore mother later.

Oyama had seemed content and Daniel had felt proud of himself maybe he didn’t totally suck as a father. She had gone upstairs to prepare for her first day back at school and probably an early night. She had hugged him and kissed him before leaving him. That had made him feel warm inside. He loved his little girl. The moment she left he had headed to the lounge and switched off the lights and sat there waiting for his whoring wife in the dark. Mpumi had crossed the line and for the first time in his life Daniel needed a drink. A stiff one. Maybe it would numb his rage. Buried deep in the rage was hurt as well. How could Mpumi do this to him? He had given her everything he had. Had trusted her with his

daughter, his money. She was probably scheming to take his money with that no good boyfriend of hers. So all these years he had felt like shit for cheating on her while she had calmly been seeing that pig behind his back. Well it ended today. He wouldn't be played the fool anymore. He heard the key turning on the door, he looked at his phone it was 8.15pm. She switched on the light in the living room and she was surprised to find him sitting there in the dark. He noticed that she had changed. She was wearing a bloody jumpsuit, it was loose and short made of that material which normally made sarongs. Her curves were on display, must have been for her boyfriend's benefit. Her hair was done farm girl style and it made her look ten years younger. She had that glow of a woman who had been deeply fucked and was satiated. "Daniel what are you doing sitting in the darkness?" Her calmness fueled his rage. "How was your trip Mpumi?"

"It was... fine. We need to talk Daniel."

"Oh did you have fun?"

"Yes it was fun. I need to talk to you."

"About what? About how you were busy fucking that pig Jarred?" she looked shocked and scared and she began walking backwards. No bitch you don't get to slither away so easily, I haven't even started with you, he thought grimly. "Talk to me Mpumi I'm listening." He was blocking her exit.

"I can't talk to you when you are like this." Her voice was shaking ever so slightly.

"When I'm like what? Do you expect me to be serenading you right now? Applauding you for best whore award?"

"It's not like that..."

"What is it like Nompumelelo? Was he good? Did he fuck you till you were trembling in his arms? Did he screw you till your knees were weak? What is it about this guy that you can't keep your panties on when he's around? Does his penis have something that mine lacks? Did you call my name when he was about to orgasm or is that treatment only specially for me?"

"Daniel please..."

“Please what Mpumi?”

“Please don’t be like this. Hear me out.”

“You want me to hear more lies Mpumi. You said you were done with that man when you came here carrying his bastard piglet. I forgave you Mpumi. You were promised to me yet you gave your virginity to another man. I forgave you. Damaged goods that you were I still married you. I gave you my name, I gave you my heart, I gave you my child, and I gave you my home. I gave you everything Mpumi. That wasn’t enough for you, I was never good enough even when I gave you my all. And this is the thanks I get?!”

“Daniel you’re hurting me!” He let go of her arms instantly and pointed her to the couch. She sat down at the edge of the couch but she looked shit-scared. Good. He went to the hidden compartment next to the couch she was sitting on and took out a gun. She looked like she was staring at death but there were no tears. He put the gun next to her and sat on the coffee table facing her. Both his legs were locking her in, she had nowhere to go, she couldn’t flee. He looked her straight in the eye. “You wanted to talk to me Nompumelelo. Talk.” She was a tough girl. She drew in a deep breath and started talking. She said she hadn’t known she would meet Jarred in Cape Town. It had been a chance meeting he had saved her when she was bitten by a scorpion. And dancing unicorns also existed. He must look like a fool to her. It was too much of a coincidence to be true. She said meeting Jarred like that had made her realize that their marriage was a farce. Just like that, one chance meeting and eleven days of fucking she decided that sixteen years of marriage were a farce. They couldn’t keep hurting each other like that, she wanted out of their marriage. “Jonga I am not an imbecile. You expect me to believe that you were drawing unicorns down there in Cape Town? I can smell that white pig all over you. So you think I’m going to let you walk away in the sunset with your pretty boy. This isn’t a bloody Mills and Boon woman.”

“Daniel I know that she’s pregnant.” She said it so calmly. Who? She was trying to trick him now. “Who is pregnant?” Mpumi took out a manila envelope from her handbag and handed it to him. It was him and Candice. He had his arm draped around her and he was kissing her. She was evidently pregnant. She was seven months along now. How had she gotten hold of these pictures? He

remembered that day the pictures were taken just a day before the Ball. He looked at his wife, she still looked scared. "So you are having me followed now Mpumi? What are these for? You want to blackmail me?" She took a deep breath, "No Daniel. At first when I saw those pictures it felt like my whole world had come crushing down. I had booked that Safari to go with you to try to fix our marriage, to fix us. Then the private detective gave me those pictures. I just needed to get away. I've realized that neither of us can fix each other. We aren't broken Daniel, we are just not meant for each other. We've tried to force things but we keep hurting each other and now we have gone back to the people we have been hurting each other with. How do you think I felt when I saw her pregnant? I failed to give you a child Daniel but she does it so easily." There were tears sliding silently down her face. Daniel felt a panic attack starting and he had to control himself. He had to hurt her as badly as she was hurting him. "So that's it? He comes back into the picture and just like that you are leaving me for him. I killed that pig's baby in your womb so that you would never go back to him." He felt a weight lift off his shoulders when he blurted that out, one good hurt deserved another. She looked as if he had shot her straight in the heart. One moment she looked wounded then the next she had rage and murder in her eyes. She picked up the gun and she was pointing it at him. He wasn't scared, she had already killed parts of him she might as well finish the job. "What do you mean you killed my child?" her voice was eerily calm. "I put a pill in your juice which induced you to have a miscarriage. It was untraceable in your system." If he was dying he might as well come clean. "You selfish bastard!" she was screaming now but the gun was still steadily aimed at his brain. "I told you I could raise that child on my own. I wanted to break off the marriage. What did my baby ever do to you? But no you had to make me your wife you were probably gloating. And you know what the worst part is? You made me raise yours and Candice's child! You made me raise your child, I have loved your child all these years. I raised her like my own flesh and blood. Yet you knew, you knew you killed the one being who had meant so much to me before he even came into this world." Daniel let her rant and somewhere during the rant his anger had melted and he felt shame. He had been selfish in letting Mpumi raise Oyama when he had killed her child. But he had been fueled by a thirst for revenge. She wasn't shouting anymore but she was still talking, "The only reason I have stayed in this marriage is that child. Her father

is a monster but I stayed for her. I could kill you right now but death is too kind for you. I'm leaving and I'm taking Oyama with me."

"You are not taking my child with you Mpumi, she is mine not yours."

"I have a birth certificate that says I am her mother. You had it all planned out. You bribed a nurse and used my ID to take her birth certificate. There is no way in hell you can ever tell anyone that she isn't my daughter without implicating yourself. You took the birth certificate not me. Now move out of my way." He tried to reach out to her but her glare froze his hand in mid-air. The hatred in her eyes made him coil, he loved her and now he had made her hate him. She was wrong, he was a broken man. He let her walk away the gun still in her hands. If she had left it he would have blown his brains out. He was his father's son.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Oyama had known she had made a mistake the minute the name Jarred had left her lips. Her father's face became contorted into an ugly expression. She hadn't understood why, her mother had a lot of male friends and associates and her father had never seemed to mind. She hadn't thought he was the jealous type. But then he had smiled and bought her ice cream and she thought she must have imagined that expression. She hadn't seen this side of her father in a long time. He was being so cool and she couldn't wait to go with him on their promised date. She had finished packing and prepping for the first day of school. It was the first time that she was doing this on her own without her mother. She took care not to forget anything so that her mom would be impressed. She also packed the necklace she had bought for Ryan. She just had to get the nerve to talk to him. He had sat next to her on the plane. He was chilled for a jock and he was also funny. She had been laughing at his jokes. He also had a tattoo. Bad Boy vibes! He was seventeen but because she had skipped grades they were in the same class. She waited for her mom to come, she had so much to tell her. She had seen pictures of them on aunt Nomusa's Instagram and Snap Chat, they were so lit Oyama was jealous. She also wanted to ask her about the girl who had been cozy with them in

some of the pictures. They hadn't talked much after she saw them at her hockey match. She had only called her to ask for the list. Oyama heard voices from downstairs. Good, mama was home. She went out to go and throw herself at her mother. But when she got to the stairs she could hear her father's raised voice, it sounded menacing. She could see them when she got to the bottom of the stairs. Her father was shaking her mother and talking to her, Oyama couldn't hear what they were saying. What was she going to do? All the servants didn't stay in the house they stayed at the servants' cottages around the estate. Oyama contemplated going to take her phone upstairs so she could call 911 but what if he hurt her before the police could come. Oyama was panicking. Then he let go of Mpumi's shoulders and was pointing her to the couch. Oyama sneaked closer to the doorway. OMG! Her father was taking out a gun! There was a gun in their house! He put it next to her mother. She still couldn't hear exactly what was being said. But she could see her mother's face from where she was partly hidden. Mama looked frightened but she was trying to seem calm to her dad. What was happening? Would her parents kill each other? Oyama was scared to get into the room in case it would make her father shoot her mother. Her father was cursing a lot something about a pig but she couldn't hear her mother's responses. Whoa! Her mother was picking up the gun and pointing it at her father! This was really bad. Oyama didn't want to see anymore but she stood fixated by the scene unfolding before her very eyes. Then her mother was screaming, "You selfish bastard! I told you I could raise that child on my own. I wanted to break off the marriage. What did my baby ever do to you? But no you had to make me your wife you were probably gloating. And you know what the worst part is? You made me raise yours and Candice's child! You made me raise your child, I have loved your child all these years. I raised her like my own flesh and blood. Yet you knew, you knew you killed the one being who had meant so much to me before he even came into this world." What?! Who was Candice? Was the child mama talking about her? No! NO!!! This couldn't be happening. So her whole life was a lie? Her mother wasn't really her mother. Oyama couldn't believe what she had just heard. Her mother or the woman she believed to be her mother had stopped screaming, Oyama couldn't hear what she was saying anymore. She had heard enough, she had to get out of there. She was half way up the staircase when Mpumi came out and saw her. "Yaya!" she called out to her but Oyama couldn't look at her. Her whole world had come crushing down. Her whole life was a lie!

Mpumi was coming towards her concern and worry written on her face. Oyama ran all the way up the stairs and stepped into the bathroom. She locked the door. She heard Mpumi's footsteps come thudding after her and she heard her trying to open the door. Tears were streaming down her face. Her mother, her best friend wasn't even her mother. Had she been stolen from her birth mother? And her father had killed Mpumi's child? What kind of monsters had raised her? That woman was staying with her father because of her. It felt like Oyama didn't know herself or her mother anymore. "Oyama sweetheart please open the door. Let me explain baby." Her moth... Mpumi was pleading with her. Oyama couldn't breathe. The pain was suffocating her. She opened the medicine cabinet and took out all the pill bottles and emptied them. Mpumi's pleas on the door where becoming more urgent and more desperate. Oyama ignored her and stuffed all the pills into her mouth. She heard Mpumi shout "Daniel! Daniel!" She was running back down the stairs. Why weren't these pills working? Oyama knew her father would break down the bathroom door and they would pump out the pills. She didn't want to live anymore. Maybe if she died Mpumi would be free to leave her father. She searched through the medicine cabinet again. She found her father's Gillette razor blade. Oyama was scared of blood but she wanted out of this lie that was her life. She looked for the veins, she didn't know which ones she had to slit. The first slit was excruciating. But Oyama couldn't stop. She kept deepening the cut. She had to cut the right wrist as well. Her blood was warm and sticky. The right wrist was harder to slit. She heard pounding on the door. Her father's deep voice commanding her to open the door. She heard the bang sound of the gun as she finished cutting the last wrist. She felt weak. She slid down the bathroom floor. The blood was gushing out now. It was all over the floor. She had made such a mess. Her parents came crushing into the bathroom. Her eyes flew to Mpumi's face. There was so much sorrow in her eyes. Why was she so sad? Oyama was giving her back her freedom. The pills were kicking in. She felt like she was floating on a cloud. She saw her mother hugging and kissing her on her first prize giving day. Her father teaching her how to ride her first bicycle. But that was all a lie. "Oyama don't close your eyes. Stay with me baby please." She heard the voice, it sounded far like it was coming from a tunnel. She couldn't feel the pain anymore. Death felt so welcoming. She let the darkness envelope her.

It felt like she was waking up from a deep sleep. Her throat felt dry and patchy like she hadn't drunk any water in years. She first opened one eye, the lights were too bright. She quickly closed her eye and the darkness felt comforting. She couldn't make out where she was but she felt the beep beep sound of machines. There was something sticking on her arm and it was painful but she didn't have the strength to remove it. She heard a door opening and closing. "Has she woken up yet?" That loud raspy voice could only belong to her aunt Phindiwe. That voice could wake the dead from the grave. But she kept her eyes tightly shut. She loved her aunt but she didn't want to see the judgment in her face. Why hadn't she died? She had felt certain she was dying. Her aunt was certain that spirits had taken hold of her and that these white people medicine wouldn't help her. She knew a traditional healer who could do the cleansing. She seemed to blame Mpumi for what had happened to her niece. Fortunately she didn't stay long. There was silence again. "Mpumi I'm sorry..."

"Not now Daniel, not when my child is still fighting for her life. You don't get to be sorry." She had never heard her mother's voice so cold before. So it hadn't been a nightmare. It was real. Oyama was still very weak she was drifting away again. She felt someone holding her hand and that woke her up, she was careful not to open her eyes or make any movement. It was gog' MaNtuli, she was praying softly. When she was done she started talking to Oyama like she could sense that she was awake. "She can't live without you Oyama. I know to you she has always been your mother. But to me she will always be my baby. I lost her once when she had her first miscarriage, she didn't want to live. I felt that I had lost her for good. Then you came. From the moment she held you in her arms, you became her reason to live. Right now I feel that I'm losing her again. She doesn't eat, or bath all she wants to do is to sit here and wait for you to wake up. She feels all this is her fault. Please don't take away my baby's reason to live. I had to force her to go and bath. She hasn't eaten in three days. Please don't let me lose my child. I know it's hard, you have many questions but you should never question that she loves you. She has been a better mother to you than I ever was to her. We need you nana." Those words pained her so much. She hadn't asked for any of this. Maybe if she slept again this time she wouldn't wake up. She heard aunt Nomusa's voice in her sleep. "Blue-eyed Adonis has been asking about her. He wants to come and see her."

“That won’t be possible Nono. Daniel would have a fit. Now I need to put all my energy on my daughter. I can’t deal with their drama. I just can’t.” Who were they talking about? Oyama still felt weak and tired all she wanted to do was sleep. The next time when she woke up, she opened her eyes and lifted her head slightly. There was only Mpumi in the room, this must be her hospital room. Mpumi was slumped over her chair, her head resting on Oyama’s hospital bed. There were tear stains on her face and there were exhaustion lines etched on her face. Oyama’s heart went out to this woman who had raised her. Oyama had never lacked any maternal affection. Why hadn’t God made this woman her real mother? She had questions about her real mother. What was she like? Did she look like her? Why had she left her? Why hadn’t she wanted her? Where was she now? Instinctively she knew that asking Mpumi these questions would hurt her. She had gone through enough hurt because of her. But Oyama needed to know. Maybe tomorrow she would have the courage to wake up and face them. She slept again. She heard her father’s voice breaking into her sleep-fogged mind, “Candice wants to see her Mpumi...”

“She lost that right when she gave her up at birth.”

“Mpumi please she has to see her daughter!”

“Oh so now she’s her daughter? Where was she when Oyama had to have her appendix removed when she was only three months old? Why didn’t she have to see her when she fractured her ankle at crèche? Where was she when she had chicken pox and I spent sleepless nights nursing her? Now she knows that she is her daughter. Don’t insult me Daniel. I might not have given birth to Oyama but she is mine. She is my baby. So your Candice can go straight to hell or whatever hole you dug for her that she’s been living in.” Ok maybe right that moment wasn’t the right time to ‘wake up’, she had never heard her mother sound so distant. Her mother was all warmth and hugs not this bitter woman she was hearing.

When Oyama finally opened her eyes, the first person she saw was her mother. Yes she had finally resolved that Mpumi was her mother even though she hadn’t given birth to her. Her mother looked like hell. She had no make-up, she still had those cornrows but they weren’t cute anymore. She was wearing some

ugly dress that could only have been picked by gog' MaNtuli. Her mother who was the epitome of style and elegance looked like a hobo woman. "Mama." Her voice was a croak but Mpumi heard her and she was hugging her, laughing and crying at the same time. She smelt of tears and sweat, there was no hint of that expensive perfume which was her signature scent. "Ouch!" she was hugging her too tight. She had been there for a week now, she was told, and she had spent three days in the Intensive care unit. "Yaya, my baby you're ok. Its ok baby, everything will be ok. I promise." Oyama had expected recrimination but her mother seemed so happy that she was alive. "Sorry. Mama." Speaking was still a struggle, "Shhhhhh its ok baby, I'm not mad. I was just worried about you. Don't worry about anything. It's ok." It wasn't ok but hearing her mother saying it was going to be ok, she felt better. Her father was also there but he couldn't look her in the eye. Were those tears in his eyes? Oyama wasn't sure how she felt about him. She was glad that he didn't move to embrace her. That would have been awkward. Her mother was fussing over her, making her sit upright, fluffing her pillows and giving her water to drink. There was a drip attached to her arm and it was hooked to a bag of blood. Her wrists were bandaged. Her stomach felt empty like someone had removed her intestines. Her father went out of the room. He must have gone to call her family because moments later they all came piling in. She was kissed and fussed over till she grew tired. None of them asked her why she did it but she could see the question in their eyes. They were treating her like she was glass. They were a rowdy bunch all her cousins were also there. The nurse came in and shoed everyone out. The nurse reminded her of Nanny McPhee. She had a stern unsmiling face, even aunt Phindiwe reacted to her commands at once. Only her parents remained. There was an awkward silence, she waited for them to speak. "Oyama we are sorry you had to find out the way you found out. And we are sorry you had to witness our fight." Oh so he was talking to her now. She didn't know what to say so she remained silent. "Oyama I know that you were overwhelmed but hurting yourself doesn't solve anything. You could have died and that would have hurt your mother and me."

"Just like it hurt her when you killed her baby?" Oyama saw her father blanch, his face turned an unhealthy shade of grey. "Yaya don't talk to your father like that. You shouldn't concern yourself about that it's in the past. I have you and that's all that matters. Promise me you will never try to kill yourself

again” She sighed, she would never forgive her father. To kill an innocent child? What he said next probably made Mpumi regret backing him up, “Oyama your birth mother wants to come and see you” She had thought about her birth mother a lot when she woke up and when she heard her parents arguing about her. She might not know the circumstances but one thing was clear. That woman had abandoned her. If Oyama hadn’t found out the way she had, she would probably have never known about her. And she didn’t want to hurt her mother who had been there all along, holding her hand, loving her. Oyama looked him straight in the eye and said, “I only have one mother and she is sitting next to me.”

She had changed. She could just feel it. Her mother had shielded her a lot from reality and now it was time to grow up. Now she noticed a lot of things around her. When she looked in the mirror she noticed that she looked nothing like her mother or even her father. She had a heart-shaped face with big black eyes and a naturally pouting mouth. She also had a classically high forehead and she was light in complexion. Why is it she had never noticed something so glaringly obvious. She must look like her, that woman that gave birth to her. She hated her reflection in the mirror. She took the mirror off the wall and threw it at the opposite wall. It broke into a thousand pieces and she felt better. The nurses came rushing in and when they saw the mirror they called the doctor and he had to sedate her. That was another thing that had changed about her. When she wasn’t feeling empty she felt a deep rage. Mostly it was directed at that woman but also at God. Why had He given her the wrong mother? They took her to therapy. The doctor there asked her many stupid questions. She had a high IQ, yes she was traumatized and in the early stages of depression, she knew that. She didn’t need him asking her questions about her childhood. She was still a child. He was a Boer, tall and bulky like most of them. He had that clinically inserted smile always pasted on his face. He must be thinking that this little monkey belonged in a straightjacket with all the other monkeys. Oh yeah she had dark thoughts like that now. She had always had positive thoughts of rainbows and cupid’s arrow but this shit was her reality now. Her father avoided coming to see her when she was awake so sometimes she pretended that she was sleeping and he would tiptoe into her room and kiss her cheeks. She tried hard not to cringe. He seemed

to cry a lot these days. Maybe the Boer doctor needed to look at the big monkey as well. Her mother worried about her, she could just see it. She still refused to leave her bedside, she only bathed when gog' MaNtuli or aunt Nomusa were there. Only aunt Nomusa still treated her the same. She probably didn't know that Oyama wasn't Mpumi's real daughter. But did that mean that she was a fake? She had begun asking herself philosophical questions like that. "You mustn't tell anyone that Mpumi isn't your biological mother," her father had pleaded with her. He was probably worried about how a scandal of that magnitude would harm his precious career. She wanted to blog about it just to get back at him but that would also hurt her mother and Oyama couldn't do that to her. So what was the point of going to therapy when she couldn't say the thing that was at the root of her depression? They had taken off the bandages on her wrists. She had jagged scars on her wrists and they would always be there. Always remind her of who she really was. Sometimes if she closed her eyes really tight and wished really hard, she almost believed that she was her mother's daughter. She no longer wept. Tears had deserted her. Her school friends came to see her but she felt detached from them. They brought her schoolwork and she buried herself in that, trying hard to shut everyone out. Ryan also came to see her, he was just a boy she noticed now. Maybe she would give him her virginity just for fun. What was the point of holding onto her innocence when she didn't have any left? The Boer doctor did help her find alternative ways to let out her frustration and anger. She was into kickboxing now. It helped. Maybe sex would help too. She didn't want drugs that would make her even more pathetic. The days stretched while she was in hospital. The nurses there gave her looks. To them she was probably just another self-entitled rich spoilt brat craving attention. Don't judge me, focus on your miserable lives changing other people's poop, she wanted to scream at them. She didn't talk much now. She only spoke in single syllables. She couldn't remember how to smile.

She had been in that bloody hospital for a month now and she was feeling restless. Her mother took her out to the hospital gardens. They sat on the benches and her mother looked at the trees as if they would help her decide on what she was about to say. "Oyama I know you have many questions and I am going to try to answer them as honestly as I can." She kept quiet for a moment

also looking at those trees. The question that had been burning her the most was, “Why did you do it? Why did you agree to raise me?” her mother was quiet for so long she didn’t think she was going to answer her. “No one ever prepares you for losing a child. When I left Harvard I thought Jarred didn’t love me anymore so I took all the love I had for him and transferred it to his baby. It hadn’t even started kicking yet but I would talk to it every day. I would rub my belly and marvel at the life growing in me. Then when I woke up to blood on my sheets I told myself there was no God. How could He give me so much joy then snatch it from me while I slept? I was married to your father by then traditionally. Then one day they, him, your aunt Phindiwe and my mother, they called me to the sitting room. Then Phindiwe came in with you wrapped in a baby blanket. They told me that your father had gotten a girl pregnant but she was too young and she had to go to school, they begged me to take care of you. To raise you like my own. My first instinct was to refuse. How could they be so cruel and insensitive I had just lost my precious baby. How could they expect me to raise another woman’s baby? But my mother firmly placed you in my arms. Then I looked at you. You were so perfect, with your tiny fingers that you were suckling in your perfect little mouth. I saw my baby in you like his spirit had gone into your body I can’t explain it. But I bonded with you that moment. God had given back what he stole from me.” Oyama had thought she had no more tears but as she looked at her mother talking she felt them slide down her cheeks. Maybe this woman really loved her like her own child. “Is my birthday even on the 6th of December?”

“Yes apparently your father had stolen my ID and he registered Candice under my name so your baby card was issued to me as your mother with the actual date and the actual hospital.”

“Who named me?”

“I did, you gave me the strength to lean on God when I thought He had turned His back on me.” Oyama had never known her mother to be such a religious person. But the way she was talking was beautiful. “Did you ever meet my birth mother?” This was the difficult part, “Only once. I gave her money to go and study abroad.”

“How much?”

“Oyama please....”

“You said you would answer my questions truthfully. How much did you give her?”

“I gave her R30 000, it was all she asked for to go and study.”

“I think she could have at least asked for R50 000. I was probably worth that much don’t you think?”

“You are looking at this the wrong way. She didn’t sell you to me. She was 16 still a child and she had gotten pregnant for a married man. She wanted her child to have a better life. One that she couldn’t give to you. So she gave me the most precious gift. She gave me a second chance at life and motherhood.” They were both openly crying now. But she still had more questions, “Do you ever regret taking me?”

“Never! Oyama you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. You were my lifeline. I don’t think if you were my biological child I would love you more than I already do.” They were talking woman to woman, heart to heart and it was better than the month of therapy she had undergone. But she could feel that her mother still had something to tell her so she waited for her to talk. “I’m divorcing your father. I know I’ve always treated you like a child. But now you know everything. You have to decide for yourself. Do you want to stay with me? If you don’t want to because I’m not your mother, I will understand I won’t be mad. I will only fight for sole custody if it’s what you want.” Oyama had thought this was only difficult on her. But she felt that her mother thought she wouldn’t see her in the same light or love her the same. She also need assurance. Seeing her mother so vulnerable made her love her even more and her wounds were beginning to heal. There were still scars but the healing process had begun. “I want to stay with you. I hate my father.”

“Oyama he might have done some terrible things but he is still your father. Hating him only hurts you. Forgive him so that you can fully heal.” She loved her mother but that was the one thing she couldn’t find in her heart to do. “Do you want to see her? You must be curious about her.” Oyama knew who her mother was talking about. “When I look in the mirror mama I see her, I know I look like her. But I’m not ready to see her yet.”

“Its fine baby, when you are ready just let me know I will arrange a meeting.” Oyama was grateful to this woman, for so many things but mostly she was grateful for her being there at all times. She was glad she was her mother and that she was in her corner.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mpumi felt numb. That was the only word she could use to describe the hollow feeling within her. The last month had been hell. Memories from the safari were a distant memory. She hadn't laughed in a whole month. She had had many miscarriages so she had thought she knew everything about losing a child. Through each miscarriage she had felt a little part of her die and she had felt empty. She had been wrong, holding your child on the bathroom floor trying to stop the flow of blood from her wrists while waiting for the ambulance was the absolute worst feeling. That was hell, she never wished that feeling on her worst enemy. The doctors had managed to bring her back to life but her bubbly, forgetful, ever laughing dose of sunshine died that day on that bathroom floor. Now she had to look after this angry sullen teenager. Oyama was a ticking time bomb, they had to tiptoe around her. She didn't know how to get through her child anymore, Oyama shut everyone out. Daniel wasn't the same man. He was always apologizing, she didn't hate him anymore. She just felt sorry for him. He was suffering the brunt of Oyama's wrath and Mpumi couldn't bring herself to help him out. He had dug his own grave. She had gotten rid of the gun, Oyama hadn't been the only suicidal one. But Daniel wasn't her problem anymore. Oyama was getting discharged after six weeks in the hospital. Mpumi hadn't left the hospital in those six weeks. Daniel must have told her employers what was happening, they had come to see Oyama. They had said Mpumi could stay with her as long as it took. She hadn't really cared because that was what she was going to do even if they had fired her. She felt tired. In fact she had been feeling the fatigue for a couple of days. Her mother had been saying she looked sick but she had ignored her. Was she supposed to look like a pop star when she had almost lost her child? She was going to see Oyama's doctor for him to process the discharge. She hadn't spoken to Jarred since they had left Mozambique. Things had been too hectic and he respected that she wanted to sort out things on her

own. She missed him. She wiped the tear from the corner of her eye. Being with him had brought so much destruction to her family but she wouldn't regret those magical days. She couldn't. He seemed to keep tabs on her via Nomusa. Mpumi was glad that Nomusa was dragging her feet on the move to Cape Town. Nomusa and her mother had kept her afloat. Nomusa had even looked for an apartment for them. The apartment was at The Residency in Sandton close to Oyama's school thankfully. There was no way she was going back to that house. And until their divorce was final and their combined assets were sorted out, she didn't want to move into any of their properties. The doctor had another patient in his office so she waited for him in his foyer. She had to do something about her hair but it was the least of her worries. Oyama flatly refused to repeat grade 11, she was hell bent on writing her Matric that year. She wondered how Lola was doing, her pneumonia was probably over by then. Had Jarred sent her back to America? She had been tempted so many times to call him. She must have dialed his number a thousand times but she had chickened out. It would complicate matters even further. She had had no idea that Daniel hated him that much. The look in his eyes when he had been confronting her about Jarred had been scary. He looked like a deranged man possessed with a thirst for revenge. She was scared of what Daniel would do to Jarred if they ever meet. Yes physically Jarred was taller and muscular but Daniel was like a man possessed nowadays. He blamed Jarred for the mess he had brought on himself. Her stomach felt queasy. She couldn't remember the last time she had a meal. That would explain why she was feeling so dizzy and so lightheaded. She had to get some food. She would try the hospital canteen the food there wasn't half bad. She stood up to go to the canteen. The room suddenly seemed to be moving on an axis, she tried to hold on to something but the darkness shrouded over her.

She woke up in a hospital bed. She wondered what had happened, Mpumi wasn't a fainter. The strain of the past month had finally caught up with her. The doctor was looking at her with concern. He reminded her of her father, he was the fatherly type. "Mrs. Sisulu you have to look after yourself better. When was the last time you had a decent meal? And decent sleep?"

“I don’t remember,” she mumbled. He didn’t seem very impressed by her response. “I think the strain from having your daughter here has finally caught up with you. But I would love to have an ultrasound on you. I already sent your blood samples to the labs. Your blood pressure was exceedingly high. I want to be sure that it’s not a virus or something else.” It was probably fatigue but she let him check her anywhere. He seemed to harrumph to himself a lot as he applied the blue jelly on her belly. It felt so cold she shivered. Then he was moving that machine over her stomach while looking at the screen. She hadn’t had an ultrasound since her last pregnancy. Wait, was that...? The doctor seemed to go back to that little dot and zoomed in. “Well at least now I know it’s not a deadly virus. Congratulations Mrs. Sisulu you are going to be a new mother again.” No! How had this happened? When? Then she remembered that in all the time she made love to Jarred they hadn’t used any protection. But she was on birth control. This would only make things even more complicated. How could she be so irresponsible? The doctor seemed oblivious to her inner turmoil he kept going on with the ultrasound. He seemed puzzled by something, he kept going back over the same spot. Mpumi became worried. Was there something wrong with her baby? The doctor was pointing at a spot on the screen, “You see this? It’s not supposed to be there. I think there is a tear in your placenta.”

“What does that mean for my baby, doctor?”

“I think I need to call your husband before I tell you.”

“No! Please don’t call him. Please. Tell me what’s wrong with my baby.” The doctor was surprised by her reaction but he made no comment about it. “What it means is that the fetus as it grows is going to be oxygen deprived because of this tear. That could lead to still birth or miscarriage.” God, why was nothing ever easy for her. “What can you do for my baby, doctor?”

“I could perform an emergency operation to cover up the tear. But the chances of success are 50-50. It’s a high risk procedure.”

“But without it my baby will definitely die?”

“Unfortunately yes.”

“How soon can you perform the procedure?”

“I would need your medical history from your gynecologist, but I could perform as early as tomorrow evening. It is a costly operation I must warn you.” The cost of the operation was the least of her worries. She was booked to be in the operation theatre the next night at eight pm. After supplying her gynecologist’s information and signing the necessary documents, she left the doctor’s office with Oyama’s discharge papers. Daniel must never know about this pregnancy. She still cringed when she remembered what he had done to the first one. There was no doubt as to the paternity of this child. The doctor had said she shouldn’t eat anything six hours before the operation but he had sternly told her to eat something now. Now she had a baby to worry about. She went to the canteen first. Oyama was being discharged the very next morning. She felt the panic mounting. She couldn’t do this on her own. He picked up her call on the second ring. All she could say between her sobs was, “I need you. I can’t do this on my own. I need you.” All he wanted to know was where she was then the phone call was ended abruptly. Mpumi had to get herself together, Oyama shouldn’t see her like this. Nor Daniel for that matter.

Mpumi was feeling pensive. Daniel was hearing none of them moving out, he was clearly in denial about the state of their marriage. He kept whining that they should work hard to keep the family together that he was willing to change. It was too late for that she felt sorry for him. But there was no way that she was going to stay with him especially now. She had to protect this child from him. She asked him to come outside the private room with her. “Jonga Daniel, this isn’t about you neither is it about me. That girl in there is still emotionally fragile. Going back to that place and being around you could make her have a setback. We will talk about us when the time is right but right now you have to give her some space. You will come and see her when things cool down. I won’t keep you from your child I promise.” He didn’t seem fully convinced but he agreed nonetheless. Pheew. Now she needed to organize someone to look after Oyama when they got home. A stranger wouldn’t do. And her mother would probably report her every movement to Daniel. She would ask Nomusa, she wouldn’t say no and at least she wasn’t walking on eggshells around Oyama like the rest of them. She felt exhausted and sleepy. But she couldn’t let it show. At least morning sickness hadn’t kicked in yet. Daniel would know immediately that this

child wasn't his. The doctor came to sign Oyama's release forms. Mpumi gave a silent prayer that he wouldn't congratulate Daniel. Thankfully the doctor didn't talk about her situation he merely focused on Oyama. Jarred had come to the hospital last night. He had looked disheveled. He was wearing a suit like he had just come from a meeting. He said he had boarded the first plane out of Cape Town, the jet had been used by his lawyer. He thought she called him because something had happened to Oyama. She had found him at the reception barking at the receptionist because they wouldn't allow him to go through. He clearly wasn't family. She had taken him out to the park much to the relief of the fraayed receptionist. "Did something happen to Oyama?" She had drawn a deep breath, "No Oyama is fine she's being discharged to go home in the morning."

"But you called me crying I thought something bad had happened."

"Something did happen but it's both good and bad." He had looked at her with confusion and that look that said explain why exactly you dragged me all the way from Cape Town. "I collapsed earlier today...relax I'm fine now. The doctor did some check-ups. And...well I'm pregnant." The look of wonder in his face was priceless, he had embraced her for the longest time. Then he sobered, "But you said it's good and bad. Is it Daniel's baby?"

"No! I wouldn't have called you if it was." He looked like he wanted to believe her but he was wondering how she could be so certain. "I haven't slept with Daniel since my last pregnancy, when he...you know." He seemed relieved to hear that, "Then what's the bad part Lelo?" She took another deep breath. That had been harder to say than she had imagined, "The doctor also found that there is a tear in my placenta. He has to perform an emergency procedure tomorrow night to close it otherwise our baby will die." He had looked at her for the longest time, "There is something you aren't telling me babe. Level with me." Sigh, he could always see right through her, "It's a high risk procedure with a 50-50 chance of success."

"Does that mean it will be putting your life at risk?"

"Yeah, sort-of. The doctor really didn't say."

“Then you aren’t doing it. Yes I want nothing more in this world than our very own child but it’s not worth risking your life for. We will find an alternative together.”

“I have to do this Jarred. Nothing you say will change my mind. All I need is for you to do is to stand by me. I can’t do this without you by my side, holding my hand.” He knew her well enough to know that she wouldn’t back down. “I won’t leave your side.” He had slept at a hotel last night, it had been hard letting him go. She was ashamed by how much she depended on him. He hadn’t come with any bags, he had just left in the middle of a meeting. Lola had come with him, she was also at the hotel. It was finally time to take her baby home. Daniel left them reluctantly, he seemed so dejected. Oyama was silent on the journey to their apartment. The weave she had on made her look older and there was just an air about her which said keep out. Mpumi was too worried about the coming procedure to try to draw her into any conversation. They found Nomusa at the apartment. She was in the process of getting tenants for her house, her furniture had been put in storage waiting for her move. So she would be staying with them till she moved. The apartment was a bachelor suite with two bedrooms, open-plan lounge and dining room with a separate kitchen and bathroom. It had come furnished with upscale modern furniture including built-in cupboards with Quartz counter tops in pastel and grey colors. It was chic but it was also warm and cozy. The best part was that it was safe and secure which was important with all the journalists who had been tailing them. Oyama promptly went into one of the bedrooms, Mpumi was really worried about her. She wanted to go after her but Nomusa held her back, “Give her some space, she will come to you when she feels like it.” This was so hard but Nomusa was right, she couldn’t baby her anymore. “I have to leave her with you tonight Nono.”

“Wow you not even divorced yet you already getting your freak on.” There was no hope for Nomusa, well she was going to be Amogalang’s problem now. “I have to go to the hospital.” She was instantly concerned. “I’m fine don’t look so panicked. Well I’m pregnant.”

“Daniel’s?”

“No, thank God. It’s Jarred’s baby. But I have to go get a simple procedure to prevent anything happening to the baby.” Mpumi had to downplay the

procedure, she needed Nomusa to be calm because if she panicked Oyama would tell that something was up. Nomusa seemed to believe her which was a relief, she was tired. "I'm going to take a nap please wake me up at around 4pm."

He texted her at six o'clock on the dot, "I'm downstairs babe." She was ready and she was also starving. But she couldn't eat until after the procedure. She had already said her goodbyes to Nomusa and Oyama, the latter hadn't seemed interested to know where she was going. She just prayed that her daughter would come back to her eventually. She let herself out of the apartment she just hoped that she came back to it alive. He had rented a Cadillac, he always had taste in everything. He was dressed more casually in jeans that molded his muscles and a plain white t-shirt with a black blazer, he kissed her knuckles and held her hand even as he was driving. She needed his strength so she leaned on him. "Who did you leave Lola with?"

"She's alone. She's fine don't worry about her."

"Jarred! You can't leave a teenage girl alone."

"There is security outside our hotel room." By security he meant a bodyguard, she relaxed slightly. They arrived at the hospital and she checked in. They changed her into hospital scrubs and Jarred didn't budge from her side. When the doctor came and saw him cradling her hand, he looked taken aback but he had the good taste not to question. She wasn't proud of herself either. But she needed him here, there was no one else she could go through this with. He explained the procedure to them with Jarred interrupting now and then to question him. Mpumi trusted the doctor, it felt like her father was with her. Hopefully he would protect her and his grandchild. They were administering anesthetics on her. She wouldn't feel anything and if everything went well the procedure should take three hours. The last thing she saw was Jarred looking at her like he would never see her again, he kept repeating "I love you Lelo." Like it was a mantra of some sort. She loved him too but she was getting foggy she couldn't tell him but he knew.

She woke up and she found him sleeping next to her. There were worry lines on his forehead even in his sleep. He hadn't let go of her hand. She had been in this hospital for so long it felt like a second home. It was now morning, except for slight cramps she felt as if the procedure hadn't happened. "Good you're awake, the procedure went perfectly Mrs. Sisulu." The doctor was smiling, she was relieved. Jarred woke up and he seemed embarrassed that he had been caught sleeping on the job. "You will have a little bleeding that's to be expected but if it persists please come back. I have already scheduled your review date. You gyne should be able to take over from here." Mpumi felt an unexplainable panic rising. "Dr Babalwa please can you be my doctor till I give birth?" He seemed surprised by her request, "But I'm not a gynecologist Mrs. Sisulu." Jarred was pissed by the reference to her marital status she could just see it in his eyes. This was awkward on all of them.

"Please call me Nompumelelo. I know that but something in my gut tells me only you can deliver my baby safely." The doctor seemed to consider her request, "Although this is highly irregular not to mention the burden you are putting on my shoulders, I will do it. Your pregnancy is still a high risk one, I will have to monitor it closely. I will have my assistant email you your scheduled appointments." After the doctor left Jarred was very quiet, like he was brooding over something. "Hey you. What's on that big brain of yours?"

"Are you sure you want this doctor to monitor you? He said it himself he's not a gyne. I can get DC's best specialists flown here to monitor you." Mpumi couldn't explain it but call it woman's intuition, something told her to stick with this doctor. "I'm hundred percent certain. I'm going to be fine and our baby too."

"Okay, you're the boss my lady but you only have to say the words and I will have the specialists at your doorstep." He was so cute at times and thoughtful. Must be the hormones which were making her extra aware of him. She was horny. "Come here baby-daddy." He was smiling that dare-devil smile of his. His embrace and kiss were so gentle like he was afraid he would break her. He smelt divine. How she had missed him! She wanted more of him, she started kissing his neck right there on the hospital bed but he stopped her. "No sexual intercourse after the procedure till after the first trimester has passed. That's when the baby will be out of danger. Doctor's orders." What?!

“When did the doctor tell you this?”

“Soon after your procedure. I told him I’m the baby’s father. He looked like he wanted to punch me.” Somebody shoot her now. How was she supposed to last that long when she wanted him so much. He looked like he was having as hard a time with this as she was. Good. She had been discharged so she took her sorry arse off the hospital bed and got dressed. She took her sweet time dressing in front of him. The look on his face though was heartbreaking. He looked like a puppy who couldn’t remember where he buried his bone. But Mpumi could see it clearly from the bulge in his pants. They had to wait till he cooled down before they could leave the hospital. It was going to be a long six weeks.

She kept waking up at night to check if there was any blood on the sheets. There wasn’t. She breathed a bit easier. They had passed the critical twenty-four hours without any incident, small mercies. She knew she and the baby weren’t out of the woods yet but she was relieved that they had survived the procedure. You have to be strong for mommy my little fighter, she spoke silently to the baby. Oyama was sharing the bed with her. She had thrown the covers away from her body just as she had when she was a child. Mpumi pulled the covers around her and placed a kiss on her high forehead. She had finally checked her e-mails that afternoon, there had been a reminder from her gyne that she had to come and renew her birth control. That explained why she had fallen pregnant. There were also a bunch of emails from journalists wanting an exclusive interview over her daughter’s near-death scare, people had no more shame. She had promised Jarred that she would help him find a school for Lola. She was good friends with the Principal at Oyama’s school and she would be able to help them out. She had sent the principal a message and had gotten Lola an interview for the coming week. Jarred would now be based in Jozi throughout the duration of her pregnancy. That made her feel safe. There was a message alert. “Are you alright?” She checked the time it was just after one am, what was he doing up? “I’m fine so is the baby. Go to sleep.”

“I can’t. Have a raging boner that you started.” This fool! Mpumi had to cover her mouth as she giggled, she didn’t want Oyama to wake up.

“Stay Strong.”

“You’re mean babe.”

“What did I do? Doctor’s orders.”

“I wish I was sleeping next to you right now.” Mpumi sighed she wished that too but she had to sort out her life first. “You will be. Just be patient. Goodnight or good morning I’m tired.” She waited for his response. He texted back, “I love you Lelo.” If only her life was simple, she would be sleeping with the love of her life right now. He was very proprietary he usually slept with his hand over her cookie jar the whole night no matter which position she slept in. She had to get her horny-self to sleep, she couldn’t even masturbate with Oyama sleeping with her. Mpumi had mastered the craft of masturbation. Perks of having a wandering husband. When he was always away on ‘business trips’ or when he felt too tired or he wasn’t in the mood, she had had to fend for her sexual needs. She had even bought a dildo, it made her orgasm more than Daniel did. She had never understood how men could simply deprive you of sex and you had to deal with it but when the shoe was on the other foot they would read you the Riot Act. She hadn’t masturbated much since Jarred had hurtled back into her life. Now that was a man who knew how to put her sexual needs first. Now they couldn’t have sex for the next two months! She turned a couple of times before she fell into a deep sex-deprived sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

Amogalang was driving her crazy. He was growing impatient but there was no way Nomusa was leaving Mpumi when she obviously needed her. He couldn’t understand that Mpumi wasn’t just her best friend, she was her sister. Even more of a sister than that slutty sister of hers who only called when her children needed something. Nomusa had tried unsuccessfully to get her sister to go back to school but the little minx was having none of that. Her argument was that at 22 she was far too old to go back and spend the next 5 years behind a desk only to be an unemployed graduate. All Noswazi was now was a 22 unemployed single mother who was currently holed up with a 36 year old married man who wanted nothing to do with her children while she looked after his kids who also had different

mothers. So the burden fell on Nomusa and the government to raise her three brats. To her family Nomusa was an ATM. She was the only one who had a successful career and she didn't have any dependents so they leeches off her. That was another reason she was delaying the move to Cape Town. She wasn't looking forward to the unexpected family visits where they would raid her wardrobe and her cupboards. "Hai mntase those boots are nice maan can I have them? And that dress would just fit perfectly with the boots, and that brown handbag." She could just hear her young sister's excited voice. And the way they were excited about her move to Cape Town was making her shudder. She loved her family but they were too much. Mpumi is the one who always looked out for her and being so far from her would be difficult. Mpumi looked like hell, that tummy of hers was beginning to show which was still a bit early. She had lost weight instead of gaining and she needed a hair intervention, Nomusa didn't want her scaring off umlungu bae. She had hooked up with umlungu bae on Facebook and they had exchanged numbers, then she had gone all FBI on all his Facebook pictures. When all she came up with were pictures of him and his Mexican child, Nomusa had gone third degree and Google searched him. Apart from numerous sleazy bimbos who hung on his arm on functions, he didn't seem to be attached to any other female. She had been impressed when his name came up in the Forbes top 40 rich people in America. Amachankura! Mpumi surely knew how to haul in the biggest catch. Today was Oyama's first day back to school after her hospital stay. The problem with kids these days is that they idealized death, she thought wanly. Growing up in Khayelitsha they had been surrounded by death and it wasn't pretty. Seeing someone being burnt beyond recognition or being stoned to death for being a mpimpi or for stealing was horrific. The only time you saw someone hanging from a tree with crap in their pants was when someone hung them there. You never attempted suicide because you knew if you failed your mother would give you an arse whooping so bad death would seem like a holiday. Instead of sending that girl to therapy they should have given her such a whooping that every time she saw a razor blade she would bury it. Nomusa had volunteered to drop her off on her way to work. She was working off her two months' notice. Mpumi had been right she had found a job in Cape Town with a bigger salary, it even had health and housing benefits. She started work there next month and she was looking forward to it. When she finished her coffee she looked at her watch that kid was going to make them both late. She went to get

her from their bedroom. She found Oyama in front of her laptop looking at stories of herself on the Internet. "SISULU PRINCESS ATTEMPTS SUICIDE" was the caption of one story. Some had gone so far as to say she had died. There was a picture of her in the hospital bed, one of the hospital staff must have taken it and leaked it to the media. Knowing Daniel he would deal with whoever had done that thoroughly. This pity party of Oyama's had to come to an end. "Get your bag kid we're getting late."

"I'm not going." Spoken like a true sullen teen. Well Nomusa was having none of that, she noticed that Oyama kept rubbing the scars on her wrists. She took out her blazer and made her wear it then held her by the shoulders, "Look kiddo I can't begin to imagine what it is you are going through. But that's real life for you. You think I want to go to work where the men leer at me and grab my butt as I pass? No I don't but I go anyways and when they grab my butt I kick them in the balls." Was that a smile? Nomusa knew she had to get through to her god daughter. "People are always going to say mean things about you lala but that's because they hate their own lives. You could have died but you didn't so now you have to snap out of it. Life goes on. Now go out there and if any of them are mean to you kick them straight in the balls." She was relieved to see Oyama take her school bag and follow her to the lounge. She hoped the kid didn't take her literally, Mpumi would kill her. Mpumi was sleeping in, this pregnancy was making her cranky and she was always tired. But Nomusa was going to knock off early and drag her pregnant butt to the saloon. She couldn't stare at that overgrown farm hairdo another day, she would lose her sanity.

When Nomusa came back to their apartment she found Mpumi still in bed. She had to drag her out of the blankets into the shower and out of the house. She was such a grouch lately. Her hairstylist looked as if he was going to have a stroke when he saw the state of Mpumi's hair. He had always been such a diva! Nomusa also forced her to do her nails, but Mpumi drew the line at fake eyelashes. Waxing followed as well as a facial. When she was satisfied with the makeover she led Mpumi to the Mall of Africa. Nomusa believed in only two forms of therapy, retail and alcohol since the latter was off the cards, retail therapy would have to do for now. Nomusa wanted to know how white meat

tasted in the sack and if Jarred was a better lover than Daniel but she had to get that one drunk before she loosened her tight lips. When she was sober she was such a prude! It only took three glasses of wine to get Mpumi ratchet and the things she squealed when she was drunk, SMH, Nomusa should start recording her. Mpumi had to get some maternity wear anyway she looked like she was squeezing that baby bump in that halter top and maybe they would also buy one or two cute baby clothes. Nomusa knew that being so far away she would miss out on the tiny tot's life. Her very own colored niece, yes she wanted it to be a girl. But the way Mpumi was becoming so ugly it was probably a boy nx! Thinking about baby clothes and babies just made her so broody. Imagine little yellow Amogalangs running around with those bedroom eyes, chubby cheeks and killer smiles! Nomusa had never been the broody type she found children especially babies annoying and demanding too much of her attention. "So what are we doing at the mall Nono?" She already looked better with the new hairdo, Nomusa had forced her to get a Peruvian weave. She was too rich to be walking around in overgrown cornrows. "We're going to buy you some maternity wear and maybe some cute clothes for my coming niece or nephew." Mpumi paled so much Nomusa had to get her to sit down. She was shivering and sweating, Nomusa became scared. And then? Had she said something wrong? Maybe it was hormones making her act so weird. She gave her some mineral water which had been in her bag. After a while some color came back to Mpumi's cheeks. "What's wrong?"

"It's just hearing you talk about baby clothes. I can't Nono. What if the baby dies in my womb like the rest of them? I am 38 years old and I have never worn maternity wear. I wake up every night to check my sheets for blood and when I go to pee I'm scared to look at the tissue when I wipe. I have nightmares of waking up at the hospital and when they hand me my baby wrapped in a baby blanket but when I look at my baby there is no child just baby blankets!" She was now crying and talking loudly, people were beginning to stare at them. Nomusa had had no idea that the miscarriages had left such a traumatic impact on Mpumi. She had always seemed to move on quickly from each miscarriage. Nomusa tried calming her down till her sobs stopped and the tears receded. A stupid fool had once said on Twitter it's better to cry in a mansion than in a shack. Pain was pain. Mpumi's pain was cutting right through Nomusa. "Mpumi look at me, you can't

let the past haunt you. You have mourned those babies sweetie now you have to let them go. You have to believe that you are going to hold this baby. You have to marvel at its growth, enjoy every change that's happening in your body. Because you will hold this baby I promise you and you will have sleepless nights when it cries and it's always pooping. Take this child as your new lease in life, no more tears only moving on." Nomusa knew she was promising something she had no control over. She let out a silent prayer, please Lord you have taken so much from her please give her this one thing. At least she was quiet now and calmer. They had to fix her make-up at the mall toilets. Nomusa insisted that they should still buy the baby clothes as a sign of hope. Mpumi's face when she was touching those little clothes was heartbreaking. She wanted to feel every fabric and smell everything. Nomusa wasn't an emotional person but even she felt teary just watching her. She was going to miss this dear soul. They bought some groceries as well and headed home.

The way she walked into their apartment as if she owned it. Nx! Her nose was in the air like she was Miss Universe. In another life she had been pretty but having seven children with different men had taken its toll on her. That weave and that lipstick were not age appropriate for her. She was one of those Joburg old women who never wanted to act their age. One of those old birds had harassed Nomusa for calling her 'gogo' in a taxi back when she was still new to Jozi. Nomusa had learnt her lesson. This one who had just barged into their apartment was headed in the same direction. She was somebody's grandmother for crying out loud. Why was she so loud though? "How the mighty have fallen! Heeee I had to see it with my own eyes to believe it. The Harvard wife living in such a low class apartment! Bawo!" Only Phindiwe would call a Sandton luxury apartment, with rates which could buy more than 20 of her fake-arse shiny Brazilian weaves, a low class apartment. Nomusa had never been a fan of Phindiwe that woman was just a mean bully. She hated how Mpumi always treated her with respect even when the woman pushed her around. She was lucky Nomusa wasn't her makoti, she would have dealt with her by now. Most bullies didn't know how to throw punches. Today she just might deal with her, Mpumi must have read her mind because she asked Nomusa to give them a moment alone. She went to the kitchen where she could hear everything. Even if

she was in the bedroom she would have heard Rabheka but Mpumi was more soft-spoken. "So you left my brother to come and live in this pig-sty?"-Phindiwe

"I assume you didn't come all this way to insult me and where I stay."- Mpumi

"I always knew that for an educated woman you are stupid and your actions have proven me right." The nerve of that she-devil!

"Listen Phindiwe this is not your brother's property. Now before I bitch-slap you with a protection order tell me what it is you want in my apartment?" Yass tell her chomma!

"Can't I come to see my brother's child?" She hadn't even asked about her precious brother's daughter in all the ten minutes she had been there. Eye roll.

"Not in my house you can't. You will just have to wait for her to come to your brother. Now if that's all, please see yourself out." Nomusa was proud of the quiet control in her friend's voice. The old witch must have seen that today she wouldn't be able to walk all over Mpumi because she changed tact. "Makoti I know that things haven't been well between you and my brother but you are still family. Is this how you treat family now?" The sly fox!

"Phindiwe you still haven't said what brings you to my house." That woman's hormones were evil! Take that you old bat.

"I came to apologize." Say whaat? Now this Nomusa had not seen coming. Mpumi was probably giving her a doleful look because she went on hurriedly, "I want to apologize for mistreating you all these years. To be honest you are the best thing that has ever happened to my brother..." oh so now she saw that "...he loves you Mpumi. That's why when he came to me telling me you were pregnant for another man I knew I had to do something." Wait what was this old witch talking about now? Mpumi was silent throughout her apology if one could call it that. Phindiwe went on, "I am the one who gave him the pill that induced you to have a miscarriage. He didn't..." Tjo! Nomusa couldn't remember the last time she had heard such a loud clap. She rushed into the lounge to find the old bat holding her cheek and Mpumi with the look of murder in her eye. She was advancing towards Phindiwe who was cowering on one end of the sofa. How she had gotten there was a wonder to Nomusa. This reminded Nomusa of those catfights over

men which broke out in sheebens in Khayelitsha. It was like a scene from Lokshin Biskop. Even though she wanted Phindiwe to get the whooping she deserved, she had to think of Mpumi's pregnancy so she came in between them. "It was the only way Nompumelelo, he couldn't claim that your white bastard was his." That old bat surely had a death wish, Nomusa had never seen Mpumi move so quickly, she wiggled past Nomusa and she was on top of Phindiwe and bitch-slapping her with one hand while strangling her with the other. Things were really hectic. It took all of Nomusa's strength to get her off the old hag. "Get out! Get out of my apartment you witch before I kill you with my own bare hands. May you and your brother rot in hell!" Mpumi was shaking with rage, she was breathing heavily and her weave was standing on ends. She had that crazy woman look in her eyes. Phindiwe didn't need to be told twice, she scuttled out of there like she was being chased by the devil himself. Only when the door closed behind her did Nomusa let go of Mpumi. Wuuuuu shame, never mess with a pregnant woman! She sat there on the sofa staring at space. Nothing Nomusa said could get through to her so she left her there staring into space.

The weeks following the Rabheka saga things started slowly going back to normal or the new version of normal they were currently living. Oyama ignored them most of the time but at least now she talked to them during dinner. She didn't mention how the other children were treating her at school so Nomusa assumed it must be really bad. Teenage girls could be so ruthless and so shallow. Oh and when Mpumi told Oyama to have that weave removed they dropped her off at the saloon and when they came back she had white braids on. Not grey but snow white. Mpumi almost strangled her but Nomusa intervened. She reminded her of the time when she and Mpumi had slipped out of their homes on New Year's Eve to go and party when they were 15. Oyama was acting out like most teenagers Mpumi should just let her be. Then she had wanted a tattoo. The kid was also into rock music now, hardcore rock that made your ears buzz when she was playing it at maximum volume. There was never a dull moment in that apartment. Mpumi was also acting very shady these days. She was officially working from home now. So when they left her in the apartment in the morning she would be bathed and dressed working on her laptop. But when they came back she would be having a different outfit and the house would be spotless.

Nomusa suspected she sneaked in blue-eyed Adonis the moment they turned the corner. She was acting very sneaky. Then there was her diet. Mpumi now lived on cereal. Other foods seemed to tick her off, Nomusa couldn't understand why it was called morning sickness when her friend was spending the whole night in the toilet. The weird part is that instead of adding milk to the cereal she used Ultramel, yes the yellow custard. She added it to Corn Flakes and to Muesli. Yuck! Last weekend when they had gone to the movies she had added Smarties and Jelly Beans to her popcorn. No wonder she was getting so big. Or to be more accurate her stomach was getting so big. Nomusa still thought they should get the dates re-checked because there was no way that tummy was not even three months yet. She was already showing and Nomusa didn't think it was normal. But then again she couldn't be too sure she had never had a child. They had thrown a farewell party for her at work. She had been pleasantly surprised, she hadn't thought they cared. Then there was Amogalang her yellow bone Tswana, she missed him like crazy but he got on her nerves easily. She had told him that he should tell all his whores that she was coming to town, she wouldn't tolerate any hussies all over her man. He liked it when she was being possessive. She had to buy herself a homecoming present. For a parting gift Mpumi had bought her Victoria's Secret lingerie, it was a red and black lacy number. It was so skimpy Nomusa had blushed when she saw herself in the mirror. It came complete with its own pair of wings. Just when you thought you knew your prude friend, Mpumi would go around and surprise you. Wait till her bedroom eyed man saw her in that getup, he would know what a freak meant.

It was during her last week in Jozi that they had another unexpected visitor. Nomusa had assumed the role of butler because it took ages for Mpumi to get off the sofa and Oyama was always locked in the bedroom with her rock music. The first thing Nomusa saw was the protruding belly, that woman could give birth in their lounge. It didn't take long for Nomusa to recognize who she was, that kind of stunning beauty was impossible to forget. Even when she looked as if each step cost her dearly, her face unmade-up and a bead of sweat on top of her pouting lip she was still beautiful. The heart-shaped face looked drained and the big black eyes were full of apprehension. The sole fact that she had reached their twelfth floor apartment without going into labour was a miracle on its own.

If she hadn't been pregnant Nomusa would have shut the door in her face but that would be a sin in her current state. She let her into the apartment. Mpumi looked up from her laptop and she seemed like she had seen a ghost. But she recovered quickly and she sat upright removing her feet from the other sofa and closing her laptop. Their visitor sat perched on the sofa that Mpumi's feet had just vacated. Nomusa could just cut through the tension in the room with a butter knife. She braced herself to be the bouncer if these two highly hormonal women got into a catfight. "Nompumelelo."

"Candice." Wow the greetings were not very cordial but that's to be expected as one had been screwing the other's soon to be ex-husband. Nomusa kept looking from one woman to the other like that forward kid who would be listening in on adults' conversations. Mpumi was looking at her to continue but Candice seemed to have lost her nerve. "What can I help you with?" she didn't sound like she wanted to help the poor girl at all. Candice had to clear her throat a couple of times before finally talking, "I want to see Oyama."

"Why now?" She said it so coldly. Tjo!

"I need to make things right with her before I give birth." The girl had spunk Nomusa gave her that.

"Oh so Oyama is the only one you have wronged Candice?" The eye Mpumi was giving the poor girl was glacial.

"No... I also wronged you I'm sorry." She was really humbling herself ngoku.

"What exactly are you sorry for? Screwing my husband and being pregnant with his child yet again. Or are you sorry that you screwed me over by taking my money claiming you needed to go to school while my husband made you his mistress?" Nomusa made a note never to cross Mpumi, she was ruthless and she didn't even raise her voice.

"I'm sorry for everything. I was wrong I shouldn't have done any of it. But I love Daniel." The things we choose to love. Sies! Wait till she discovered that he was screwing his PA and half the Cabinet wives and the female Cabinet members. She would just have to be strong. Mpumi was quiet for a long time as if she had fallen asleep but Nomusa could see that she was really struggling with herself.

Pretty girl looked scared but she was standing her ground. "If you want me to grovel I will. Please I just need to talk to Oyama." She was really about to kneel in front of Mpumi. Nomusa hadn't expected to feel sorry for Candice but she did. Mpumi waved her up, "You don't need to kneel before me. I forgive you. I'm leaving Daniel." There was no hate or malice in Mpumi's voice she probably meant it. Nomusa would never have forgiven a slut who slept with her man continuously so easily. The girl seemed shocked by this revelation. Daniel probably hadn't notified her of his impending status change. Men!

"Oyama is in the second door to your right. If I go and talk to her first she won't agree to come out." Nomusa knew it took guts for Mpumi to say those words.

"Thank you." There were so many emotions underlying Candice's words, her eyes were tearing up. It must be the hormones, Nomusa was used to the random tears by now. She heaved herself slowly up, none of them offered to help her they just watched. Candice waddled painfully to Mpumi and Oyama's room and she knocked on the door. When there was no response she went in and closed the door. Nomusa wanted to go and see what was happening but Mpumi placed a restraining hand on her arm, "Give them some space Nono." Nomusa had no idea how her friend still remained so calm through all of this. There was no sound coming from the bedroom. At least it meant that Oyama wasn't throwing things at her birth mother. Candice must have stayed about ten minutes in that room and then she came out. She was crying openly, her tears were streaming down her face. Nomusa rushed over to her and made her sit down, Mpumi brought her tissues and water. She cried for a long time but no one made a move to comfort her. They didn't know how to. Finally when she was almost calm and the tears had almost dried up she drank the water and wiped her face. When she spoke it was in a low voice, "She hates me. My own daughter hates me." Nomusa had expected that, probably pretty girl had thought that Mpumi was the one keeping Oyama from her. They let her talk, "When I was talking to her she looked at me with so much hatred. She didn't even say a single word to me. I begged her and I apologized but she kept looking at me with hatred in her eyes. I tried to explain to her that I only wanted her to have a better life than I could give her. She hates me. She hates me so much and it hurts. Ouuuwww!" Ok it must really hurt because she was howling now. She was breathing heavily. Whaat! She had

wet their sofa, Nomusa couldn't believe that girl. Mpumi cursed softly, "Her water just broke. Shit Nomusa call the ambulance." Oh God! This was not happening. Where was her phone? Nomusa was panicking she had never seen a woman in labour before. Candice was now moaning and wriggling and Mpumi was trying to make her sit more comfortably. Nomusa grabbed her phone and dialed the ambulance. Candice screamed. Nooo! She couldn't have her baby in their lounge. The ambulance was on its way. Mpumi seemed calmer than Nomusa, "I don't think we can wait for the ambulance, let's drive her to the hospital." Oyama had come out of the bedroom when Candice started screaming and she looked scared. Mpumi was giving out orders, "Oyama come and help Nomusa hold her. Grab a throw blanket from the bed and hand me those keys. Candice you have to breath and don't start pushing just yet." Trying to lift her up was a struggle, both Nomusa and Oyama were huffing and puffing. Mpumi was already opening the door for them and they left the apartment. The elevator took ages to come and Candice was writhing in pain. Mpumi kept breathing with her, Nomusa was as shit-scared as Oyama. Finally they were in the elevator. Candice let out another curdling scream. She was sweating profusely and Nomusa just hoped they didn't have to deliver this baby on their own. Mpumi drove like a demon while Nomusa was trying hard to hold Candice down. At least for now there seemed to be a lull in her pains. Oyama was wiping her brow with a wet cloth. So much for the mother-daughter reunion that Candice had been expecting. They must have gotten so many speeding tickets by the time they reached the hospital. It wasn't the hospital where Candice had registered so the nurse at the reception area was giving them hell. Mpumi finally snapped and told her exactly where to get off even threatening mal-practice law suits if they didn't get Candice into the Delivery Room. Mpumi tried calling Daniel but his phone was on voicemail. It was Parliament season he was probably in Parliament at that moment. Or maybe he was busy flashing his red Lamborghini and designer clothes worth a million on the red carpet if it was the opening of SONA. "We can't leave her alone here like this. Nomusa stay with Oyama here while I go with her to the Delivery Room." She was rushing after the wheelchair Candice was in as she spoke. Nomusa was glad to finally put her butt down but the hospital chairs were uncomfortable. Oyama was oddly quiet and her face was as white as her braids then when Nomusa looked at her closely she noticed the tears. Nomusa held her god-daughter while she cried. "How can I hate her aunt Nomusa when she went through the same pain to bring

me into this world?" Nomusa had no comeback for that or even any wise words of comfort so she just held her.

CHAPTER TEN

She held on to the toilet seat as wave after wave of nausea hit her and she threw up for what seemed like forever. She had told him repeatedly that she couldn't stomach the full breakfast he had made for her but the daddy-to-be was adamant. Now he was paying for it by holding back her weave and looking worried as she threw up her guts. Nomusa had finally gone to Cape Town and the apartment just wasn't the same without her. The last month with Oyama had really tried her patience and most of the time she had felt like strangling her but Nomusa had been the one who held her back. Nomusa had been the one who could get through to her and understand Oyama when Mpumi had almost given up. Nomusa had also been the one to teach Oyama how to cook, clean and do her own laundry. Mpumi had been ashamed that at almost 15 her baby didn't even know how to boil water. But that was because she had been waited on hand and foot by a fleet of servants all her life. Staying in a two-bedroomed apartment was a new experience to the kid. In her crazy way Nomusa had been the glue that had held them together and Mpumi already missed her. Finally she was done puking and he helped her stand up. She had never suffered from morning sickness this severe before. Jarred shame he looked green as well maybe next time he would listen to her when she said she couldn't stomach food. "Baby I have to go and grab a file I have to fax I think I forgot it at the hotel room." He placed a swift perk on her temple and just like that he was gone. Mpumi laughed softly he was such a coward. She got into the shower and let the water wash off the stench of puke from her. The past week had been a crazy one. Nomusa said she was strong for helping Candice but Mpumi didn't think she was strong, a part of her had thirsted for revenge but then she saw Oyama standing at the bedroom door looking scared and she had had no choice. In the delivery room during her lucid moments Candice had tried to explain that she had gone to school, beauty school but had only bumped into Daniel two years back when he had been accompanying an 'acquaintance' to her beauty salon. Mpumi hadn't been interested and she told her to save her strength for delivery. She had given birth to a healthy baby girl

and when the nurses had cleaned her up Candice had wanted Mpumi to be the first to hold her. She was a tiny replica of Oyama, she reminded Mpumi of the first day she had held Oyama in her arms. Nomusa had been right at the mall, it was time for Mpumi to lay the past to rest and focus on her present and future. Jarred, Oyama, Lola and this baby growing inside her were her present and her future. She was happy these days. The best moment had been when Oyama had held her baby sister, there was so much love there, and Mpumi had taken pictures of them together. Oyama would thank her later. Then Phindiwe had come with Candice's bag, she couldn't look Mpumi in the eye. Apparently Phindiwe had been staying with Candice this whole time. The nerve of some people, Mpumi had been surprised that that woman who had come begging her to return to her brother was staying with his mistress. Mpumi was just glad she was getting out of that union. She had e-mailed and faxed Daniel the divorce papers she had already signed but he hadn't responded. It was going on a month now. If he wanted to play hard ball she was game, as far as she was concerned their marriage had ended the moment he had admitted that he had killed her baby. As Mpumi was drying herself she heard a knock at the door. Who could that be? She wondered because Oyama was at school and Jarred had his own key. They were moving out of this apartment soon. Jarred had insisted just the night before when she had called him at eleven pm to tell him that she was craving braaied meat. The poor man had to trek all the way from the other side of Jozi to look for the meat and when he finally came to her apartment two hours later she said the craving had vanished. To say he had been frustrated was an understatement. She could see the smoke literally coming out of his ears and nose. "That's it Lelo, I'm buying a house we are moving in together." When she had tried to protest he had looked at her with a withering stare and she had immediately shut the fuck up, "I can't be leaving my daughter alone in the middle of the night at a hotel and I worry every night that something might happen to you and I will be too late to do anything to help you." So they were moving that was final. With a robe tied firmly around her Mpumi went to open the door. Daniel walked into their apartment and made himself comfortable on the sofa. Mpumi's hand automatically moved to her belly. There was no way she could hide the bump from him now and he was already looking at it. She sat on the sofa across from him and waited for him to state the purpose for his visit. He was only carrying a brown envelope and as usual he was in a designer tailor made suit that

fit him like a glove. "This pregnancy really suits you more than the rest. You're glowing Mpumi." That she hadn't expected him to say and she didn't know how to respond all she could muster was an awkward "Thank you," she wasn't going to tell him that it also gave her the most severe morning sickness. He didn't ask whose it was because he knew. After looking around the apartment he said out of the blue, "Phindiwe told me that you gave her a thrashing." Mpumi was still ashamed of that saga and she couldn't look him in the eye but when she did she saw that he was smiling broadly. That was unexpected. "No one has ever stood up to my sister before. Thank you for what you did for Candice..." he changed quickly from being playful to being very serious, he seemed to struggle with the words which was unlike Daniel, "...I don't think if I were in your shoes I would have helped her." Mpumi looked him straight in the eye but he kept shifting his gaze, "Oh so you would have expected me to let your child die just because you murdered my child in my womb?" He let out a long breath, "That is the one thing I regret more than anything I ever did in my life." She must have given him the yeah right expression because he quickly went on with even more conviction. "I'm serious Mpumi, I wish I could take it back or make things right. If only I could go back in time but I can't." She was still disbelieving, she remembered how he had been taunting her with the news when she came back from the safari. "Do you know why I couldn't look you in the eye after each of your seven miscarriages after that one?" He had been counting her miscarriages, Mpumi widened her eyes in surprise. "Because each time we lost a child I knew I was paying for the child I took from you. I was the reason you had all those miscarriages. I felt guilty for the pain I made you go through. I know you may not believe it but I have never loved any woman the way I love you. And if there is anything I can do to make up for all the hurt and neglect I've subjected you to please let me know. I'm really sorry Mpumi." At that moment Mpumi realized that karma did exist and what you do to people comes back to you with twice the force. Daniel hadn't really been punished for his sins but he had been punished by them. It really was a moving speech but it didn't move Mpumi one inch, she knew how Daniel could switch the charm on and off even when he seemed sincere. This man had put her through hell especially the last months. "Did you also feel guilty about raping me? The only thing you can do for me Daniel is to sign the divorce papers so that I can move on with my life and be happy." Yep she needed these hormones of hers to be checked Nomusa said she was turning into a grouchy ice Queen. He looked like

she had slapped him across the face. He had the wounded look on his face but she stared him down with a withering look. He took some papers out of the brown envelope and put them on the coffee table and also took out a pen from his inner pocket. Mpumi held her breath as he signed across the dotted lines. Freedom was looming near. She hadn't thought it was going to be this easy to persuade him to sign the divorce papers. She had even devised a speech about how Mandela had divorced Winnie and later married a 'Kwerekwere' the unpleasant term used for other African foreigners but the same narrow-minded people still held him in high esteem. And also how Mugabe had an affair with his secretary while his wife was battling for her life and thirty-something years later he and his side-chick were still ruling Zimbabwe. But hey she wasn't complaining, she wanted to be free from him. He took his sweet time signing but finally he was done. But she also had to make sure they were on the same page about one crucial thing, "I get full custody of Oyama Daniel and that's non-negotiable. If you try to pull any stunt and I mean any, I will drag your good name through the gutter." She stared him down, he let out a weary sigh. "Its fine, Oyama already hates me I only hope that she agrees to come and visit me." Mpumi wasn't about to console him or give him false expectation, Oyama was almost an adult she would make her own decisions. She changed the subject, "She said she loves you." He knew who she meant and he gave a dismissive shrug, "I could never marry her. She doesn't have the right pedigree or even come from a good family. And the moment people see us together they will put two and two together and our secret can never come out it would ruin my political career and she's not worth that." He said it so coldly with such disdain. That's the problem with dating a married man, he might promise you heaven on earth but some never even left their wives and even when they separated with the wives, he might never elevate you to the coveted wifey post. In Candice's place she had given him two beautiful daughters and she was still not good enough to be considered wife material and Phindiwe would probably be the first to kick her to the curb. But it was not Mpumi's problem, she had gotten what she wanted and Daniel's presence was now beginning to annoy her. He must have read her easily because he stood up and came to stand next to her, "Goodbye Nompumelelo, I hope he makes you happy." He kissed her on the forehead and that was the gentlest he had ever been to her during their whole marriage. She was happy that this was how they

left things, there was no love lost but there was no animosity either. “He lives to make me happy Daniel.”

After Daniel had left Mpumi sat staring at his signature on the divorce papers, she would give it to her lawyers to file for her at the High Court. 16 years of marriage were coming to an end and she felt alive for the first time in a long while. Now she was free to live her happily ever after! She stood up to go and place them in a safer place. Wait until she told... “Jarred!” He was standing quietly in the kitchen with the makings of a sandwich in front of him. Mpumi had thought he had gone back to his hotel room. There was a file on the small table on the passage, he must have found it and when he had come to make her a sandwich he must have seen that she was with Daniel. As she wondered how much of their conversation he had overheard she began to panic. Damn Daniel and his love for English she cursed him silently, if they had been speaking in Xhosa Jarred wouldn’t have heard the whole thing. She had told him that Oyama wasn’t her daughter but she hadn’t told him that Daniel had slipped a pill in her juice which had caused her to miscarry Jarred’s child. The look on his face said he had heard the whole conversation. She had never seen him so detached and icy cold. “What are you doing here I thought you had to pick something at your hotel room?” Mpumi’s voice sounded rushed and breathless to her own ears, he just continued looking at her with that cold rage gleaming in his eyes. “So he killed my child and you never told me?” The words were softly spoken but they still made her shiver. “Baby please he only told me the night Oyama attempted suicide, I didn’t know before then.” She was pleading with him and when she attempted to step closer to him, he gave her the look and she put down her hand. “So you have known for over two months now and you kept it from me.” If only he would shout and rant, his calmness was scaring her, she rubbed her belly in frustration. “I was scared of your reaction. When he told me I almost shot his brains out. It’s done Jarred let’s move on and live our lives.”

“He killed my child Lelo and you are telling me to move on with my life. Do you fucken hear yourself when you are talking?” Jarred had never used that tone with her, ever, it was scathing. He let out an angry growl and the next instant the mayonnaise and bread and other ingredients were crashing into the floor. He

walked past her and hit the hall on the passage hard. He was out of the apartment and she was left with a messy kitchen floor. "Ouch!" she cut her hand as she was trying to pick up the mayonnaise glass from the floor. Just when she was thinking she could start her life afresh this had to happen, she was beyond tears now. After cleaning up the kitchen, she tried calling Jarred his phone went unanswered. What if he had gone to kill Daniel? Mpumi was panicking and she really wished Nomusa was still around. She changed into a long flowing Greek-style dress and flip-flops and she rushed out of the apartment. She kept the doek on her head, she didn't have time to comb that blasted weave. Jarred wasn't there in his hotel room, neither was he at Daniel's house she checked and kept calling and he ignored her. She was beginning to worry. What if he had been involved in an accident driving in such a rage? It was getting late she had to pick up the kids from school, Jarred was the designated driver but today she had no choice. Oyama's uniform hadn't been that short when she left home in the morning, Mpumi would deal with her later. "Lola have you seen your dad? Or has he called you?" Mpumi regretted the question as soon as it left her mouth, the girl was immediately worried. "No did something happen to him?"

"No no, he was looking for a document he needed to fax so he thought maybe it had gotten misplaced in your schoolbag." The lies we tell our children, she sounded convincing to herself and Lola seemed to believe her. "And you have to sleepover tonight, he had to go somewhere, he should be back by tomorrow." Dear God please don't make a liar out of me, Mpumi prayed silently. Jarred couldn't be doing this to her, she was carrying his freaking child! Mpumi's worry was being replaced by anger. He was probably sulking somewhere and she was worrying herself sick. She couldn't afford to be unduly stressed. When they got to the apartment, the girls changed out of their uniforms and started working on supper. Mpumi was restless, she tried calling and there was still no answer. Lola and Oyama seemed to be getting along they were laughing as Lola taught Oyama some Cuban dishes. Lola's mother was from Cuba and Jarred had made sure she learnt Cuban Spanish, Cuban culture and Cuban cuisine. The spices would probably give Mpumi major heartburn but she let them cook. She kept expecting Jarred to walk through the door but he was nowhere to be seen. She ate the dinner and listened with half an ear to the girls' talk, she barely ate. This was not like Jarred at all. When he got mad they usually ended up having hot steamy sex

not him storming out and ignoring her the whole day. The girls were picking up on her restlessness and they had become subdued as well, after dinner they cleaned up quickly and went into their bedroom. Mpumi had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach, something was definitely wrong. When the clock struck midnight she had to drag herself to bed and hope that he would come back to her and his children. It seemed like she had just fallen asleep when her phone woke her up. It was him. She was fuming as she picked his call, "Where the fuck are you?" There was a silence on the other end of the line, "Ummm hello madam, do you know owner of this phone?" It was a Nigerian voice in what sounded like a loud place. Mpumi felt her heart sinking, this was the line most people used before they told you the worst news of your life. She had to calm her breath before she could say anything, "Yes, is he in any trouble?"

"I think its best you come down here right now madam. I will text you address." Mpumi was about to scream at the caller in frustration but he had already ended the phone call. She dragged herself out of bed and pulled the dress she had been wearing on and also grabbed a jacket and her car keys. The address she had been sent was of a nightclub owned by Nigerians and mostly frequented by Nigerians and those money-grubbing skanks. It was in Rivonia on Kelvin Drive at 90 degrees. She had heard about the place from some of her party loving workmates. As to what Jarred was doing there at two am, she couldn't understand. If he had died the man on the phone would have told her she tried to assure herself. Just the thought of Jarred in some nightclub lying there dead instantly made her eyes began to tear up, she had to wipe the tears from her eyes as she tore through the almost deserted streets. The staircase leading to the club was steep and she had to hold on to the railing. People were staring at her as she made her way up the staircase. They were probably wondering what the pregnant woman with the crazy eyes was doing in a nightclub at the early hours of the morning. She had to shout for the large bouncers at the door to hear what she was rumbling about. Normally she would have been intimidated by them, they were tall and buffed up but today she was almost insane with worry. They were very friendly to her though it must have been because of her pregnant state. One of the bouncers ushered her into the dimly lit room, there was some loud Naija songs blasting away and girls in skimpy clothing who seemed a bit older than Oyama were on the arms of some tall thug looking men. Mpumi tried locating

Jarred but she couldn't see anything. She was being led into a back room which looked like an office at least this one was brightly lit. Jarred was lying on the floor and a huge man was kneeling next to him trying to hold him down. Mpumi rushed to where he was lying. His face was contorted in convulsions, his arms and legs were moving in a jerky movement and there was white froth on the corner of his mouth. He seemed to be conscious because his eyes widened when he recognized her and his convulsions worsened. "What did you give him?!" she screamed at the man kneeling next to him who seemed like the manager or owner of that joint. "Nothing madam, he had been sitted alone at the corner nursing his whisky, he barely touched it and he sat there for hours not talking. Then one of the hostesses called me to say white Igwe had toppled over to floor. When I go there I found him like this. I promise no one gave him anything." The man was sweating as he told her this, he desperately needed her to believe him, but how could she when Jarred seemed like he was having an overdose episode. "We run a clean establishment madam please believe me." Mpumi didn't have a time to listen to his excuses, she was cradling Jarred and he was still having seizures. Oddly his temperature felt normal even though his skin was clammy. She couldn't risk moving him then. "Call an Ambulance!" It seemed all she could do was shout and scream. "The ambulance will be here now now madam." How could he put her through this? He had been really angry but to take drugs? She felt disappointed in him and Jarred seemed like he wanted to say something but that only made him foam even more. "Hush baby, its ok I'm here now, you're going to be ok." She had said the same words to Oyama but right now she didn't believe them. The tears she had been holding back were flowing freely now.

She was once again back at the hospital. They should just give Mpumi her own set of keys, she thought wryly. This time she was pacing the corridor outside the emergency room, they had chucked her out of there because she continued to panic. This time there was no relative with her, she was three months pregnant with no mother offering endless coffee and no Nomusa to give her reassuring hugs. She only had the tall Nigerian manager who quietly watched her pacing up and down the corridor. He had insisted that he would come with her to the hospital and Mpumi was glad that he had. After what seemed like hours later Dr. Babalwa came out of the Emergency Room and beckoned her to follow him to his

office. She sat pensively at the edge of the leather chair in his office and waited for him to give her some news. “Mrs. ...Nompumelelo contrary to what I first assumed when the paramedics brought him in, your hus... the patient did not suffer from a drug overdose,” the doctor said in his calm voice. Mpumi was even more bewildered, she had been there she had seen him convulsing. But she waited for the doctor to continue, “I’m still waiting for the results from the lab to prove me right but he’s fully conscious now and he seems stable like the seizure never happened. He is however tired and sleeping. Until I get the results we won’t know for certain what triggered the convulsions.” Just hearing that he was better was making Mpumi breathe easier, she asked, “May I go see him now?”

“Yes just take care not to upset him until we are sure what we are dealing with.” She had no intension of upsetting him, she just needed to see for herself that he was ok. She assured the manager that Jarred was fine and that the doctor suspected that he hadn’t suffered from a drug overdose. Only then did he leave her to go back to his club and she went in search of her man. She found him sleeping, they had moved him from the emergency room to a single private room. He was sleeping so peacefully as if he hadn’t just turned her whole world upside down. She smoothed a lock of hair from his forehead and kissed him gently careful not to wake him up. “Daddy is fine baby,” she whispered to her stomach and gently rubbed it. She sat next to him and held his hand the way he had held hers. His hand was warm and limp, she kissed all his fingers prepared to watch over him till he woke up. She must have fallen asleep because she was woken by a gentle nudge on her shoulder. It was the doctor, he called her outside. Jarred was still sleeping deeply. “The results are out ma’am.” Why did he have to leave her in such suspense, she just wanted him to give her the verdict. “As I suspected, he came clean of any drugs and with little traces of alcohol. From your description I would hazard that he had a simple epileptic partial seizure and it’s cryptogenic, I need a second opinion from a neurologist.” Mpumi went from relief to slack disbelief, the doctor ushered her into a hospital seat. Jarred epileptic? He was so full of life always in control and seemed perfect to her. There had to be some mistake, she had known him for so long and he had never suffered from an epileptic seizure. Surely he would have told her that he was epileptic. Instinctively her hand reached for her stomach, what did all this mean for their baby? “You did not know that he was epileptic?” the doctor queried softly, he must think them a

very weird couple to say the least. “No I had no idea, it’s come as a shock to me.” Mpumi was surprised by how calm her voice sounded. The doctor seemed puzzled, “So you mean he has never had any such episodes?” She would have told him he was epileptic if he had had such episodes. Mpumi struggled to not roll her eyes at the doctor.

“Not that I’m aware of, you will have to ask him when he wakes up.” Her tone was a bit snappy to her own ears. The doctor cleared his throat suspiciously, “Ok then you can go and be with him, I will talk to him when he is awake.” Mpumi went back to the room with a heavy heart, this man who said he loved her had kept something so important from her that could affect their child. Not that she would love him or the child any less but she had deserved to know. He had suffered alone in silence and helped her fight her battles. He was beautiful in sleep with a stub of beard shadowing his cheeks. His eyelashes were long and curly, they rested a bit on the upper part of his cheeks. She had kissed those soft pink lips of his many times, they were surprisingly full well for a white man anyway. His straight little nose twitched in his sleep. He was her perfection. She got a message alert on her phone, it was Oyama. “Mom where are you?” Oh crap! She had totally forgotten about the girls it was just after 7am, she couldn’t tell them about Jarred’s episode she instinctively knew he didn’t want any of them to know. “At the hospital, had minor cramps. But I’m fine now, the baby is also fine.”

“Ok, we going to take an Uber to school.”

“Did you get all your school things?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll see you after school love you.” As she expected there wasn’t a response to her last text, but she was relieved that they could take care of themselves now, her girls were all grown up. The tone must have woken him up, Jarred was stirring from his sleep. He kept his gaze fixed on her hand which was holding his like he couldn’t look her in the eye. “I’m sorry you had to see that.” His voice sounded subdued, she could feel his shame and his pain and she wanted to assure him that she loved him and he was perfect as he was. The doctor chose that moment to come into the room. “Good you’re up Mr. Levine. How are you feeling?” Jarred focused on the doctor, “I feel like I was hit by a train doc.” At least he still had his humor Mpumi thought.

“Have you ever had such an episode before yesterday?”-doctor

“Yes, as far as I remember the first was at my father’s funeral when I was a boy, back then they were more frequent then I was put on medication they stopped. That is until the death of my brother and his wife but that seizure was isolated. Yesterday was the most severe one.”-Jarred

“So you were diagnosed with epilepsy?”-doctor

“Not to my knowledge my mother got her doctor friend to give me medicine for my ummmh episodes.”-Jarred sounded embarrassed

“Is there anyone in your family who has ever suffered from epilepsy?”-
doctor

“No.”-Jarred

“Are you always conscious during the seizures?”-doctor

“Yes I can see and hear everything but I just lose control over my body.”-
Jarred

“I see. When was your father’s funeral?”-doctor

“When I was fourteen.”-Jarred

“So before that you had never suffered from such episodes?”-doctor

“No.”-Jarred

“Have you ever suffered from head trauma?”-doctor

“I did during the car wreck that claimed my father’s life.”-Jarred

“I see, I recommend that you see my friend whose practice specializes in neurology. Can I fax her these notes?” Jarred seemed to hesitate before mumbling “Yes”. Mpumi had sat quietly throughout this solemn exchange as Jarred responded and the doctor took down notes and her heart went out to her man. His father’s death was something they had never gotten into, she hadn’t known that he had been there in the car with his father when the car crushed. When the doctor left there was awkward silence. She had to ask him, “Why didn’t you tell me about the seizures?” Jarred was still not looking her in the eye, “I didn’t want your pity.” Mpumi was shocked by the bitterness in his voice, “Why

would I pity you baby? You're the most perfect human being." This time he did look her in the eye as if he wanted re-assurance that she wasn't bluffing, he squeezed her hand gently. "When the seizures started my mother would lock me in my bedroom, she said she didn't want people to know that she had given birth to a freak." Mpumi felt rage well up for the poor traumatized boy who had needed his mother's love and medical help but had been shut away in his room while he convulsed alone. That woman had been heartless hopefully she was rolling in hell. As if he could read her mind he squeezed her hand again, "Don't look so sad my brother was always with me through each episode and he held me till the convulsions ended the way you cradled me last night." It was still a sad image to picture in her mind, they had unlimited funds he could have easily gotten the best medical attention. "Did you ever get hurt?" she asked him with tears in her voice. He pointed to a tiny scar on his forehead, "I fell and hit the corner of my bed once." She kissed the scar softly then kissed him on the lips. At first he was unresponsive then he held her tightly and kissed her savagely. She was probably going to get bruised lips but she wanted to share his pain. When he finally let her go, she cradled his face in her hands, "Promise me that you won't ever suffer alone or in silence again." He smiled and kissed her gently, "Yes mama bear, I promise. You scared the shit out of that huge man at the club. Did you see how profusely he was sweating?" She smiled and snuggled up to him on the hospital bed, her man was back and her joy was complete.

And now ladies and gentlemen for the finale. Drumroll please...

FIVE YEARS LATER...

"Wake up babe, you're gonna miss your flight," she could hear the voice but it was irritating her, she wanted to sleep some more. She tried pulling the pillow over her head but he was stronger than her and she had no choice but to wake up. Crap! Was that the time? No, no, noo!!! "Why didn't you wake me up earlier?" she snapped at him as she sprinted to the bathroom and left him shrugging. After taking the world's shortest shower, she squeezed into her tiny shorts, a crop top then she wore a long red checkered shirt which reached just under her shorts and she put on her Timberland wedge boots. Luckily she had cut

her hair recently and she slightly combed through her mini-fro, the cut emphasized her high forehead and it suited her to perfection. Zach had been a darling and had already put all of her luggage into the boot of his mini cooper. She rushed out of his Manhattan apartment knowing that she probably wouldn't see it again. She did her make-up in the car, at least there wasn't the usual traffic jam yet. "So when am I going to see you again Onyx," probably never but she couldn't tell him that. When they couldn't pronounce her name they had nicknamed her Onyx. "I don't know Zach but we will keep in touch," she had no intentions of keeping in touch with him but she was a smooth liar. Zach had been a friend with benefits who mistakenly thought they had a real thing going on. This was it. She was going home for good this time. She looked at the passing landscapes, Manhattan was sunny and beautiful in July. They had been celebrating the Fourth of July last night and it had been so lit she couldn't remember how they had gotten back to Zach's apartment. She had to wear sunglasses to curb her hangover. They were at the airport now and Zach was taking out her luggage. Make no mistake about it Zach was fine, he had the looks and the brains but he just didn't have that thing nje. She was still into bad boys, she had even dated Crips and Bloods members at some point. The airport was a hubbub of activity, she hated it. She couldn't remember the last time she had flown commercial. It had been her sister's clever idea that she 'surprise' the parents, they thought she was coming the following week. Thus she couldn't take the jet and she found herself being frisked by airport security. Lola would pay for her dumb idea. She had to go through the metal detector machine and it made that irritating beeping sound. She was asked to step aside. She had to remove her bloody belly ring. She went through the machine again and set it off for the second time. That machine must be broken... then she remembered the bet she had lost to Lola. She wished she could strangle her right now. The official who was sent to accompany her to the ladies room had a very judgmental look on her face. It had just been a silly bet that had ended with her getting a piercing in her... well ummmh down there. The lady was watching her like a hawk as she lowered her shorts and looked even more disapproving when she saw that she had no underwear on. Oyama rolled her eyes and took out the other intimate earring then dressed up. This time around the machine didn't make a sound and she found herself past Immigration. Then she was kissing Zach goodbye, she really hoped he wouldn't do something stupid like pine after her or worse try to follow her home. She was sitting in first

class but that wasn't comforting because she still had to come in contact with other human beings. Their supervisor had always said she had militant precision when it came to administering procedures but her "bedside manner was disappointing to say the least." But that hadn't stopped her from graduating valedictorian in her Medicine class and her Quantum Physics class as well as a first class Pharmaceuticals degree. She was sitting next to a man who seemed very fascinated by the tattoos on her belly. "That is some cool ink you have there," it always started like that and next thing he will start making conversation and hitting on her and she wasn't in the mood. "Thanks," she said it as blandly as she could but he still persisted.

"If I may ask what do they say?" Here we go again.

"Onathi, Owethu, Amandla and that one there says Atlegang."

"Fascinating, what do they mean?"

"It's the names of my children. Wait let me show you their picture, yes here are my little munchkins," she was showing him her screensaver. It was the last picture of the fantastic four that she had taken on her last break. Suddenly the man had lost all interest on her tattoos or on her and he was now totally focused on his I-pad. Mission completed. The kids' card always worked like a charm. After texting Lola that she had boarded the plane she settled back to enjoy not being bothered, she even put her headphones on in case her trick didn't hold up for long.

Oyama had not thought this through. It had been sunny and warm in America but it was windy and drizzling when she got to OR Tambo airport. And she couldn't even take a jacket because she wasn't sure which suitcase she had thrown it in. To make matters worse her internet wasn't working so she couldn't use her Uber App. She tried calling Lola but that bitch's phone went straight to voicemail. Great, just great. So there she was standing alone with her luggage and she was shivering from the cold in her shorts and she couldn't really button her shirt because then she would look totally naked. Then she did something she hadn't ever done before, she got into a meter taxi. She prayed that she wouldn't be abducted but she texted Lola the number plate just in case she

didn't turn up. "Where to ma'am?" she could go straight home but what if there was nobody there? She had lost her key again. Her mother was probably at the Centre so she directed the driver to go there. She tried fixing her internet but that was Lola's area of expertise. She tried calling her again and it still went straight to voicemail. She was going to kill Lola. The minx had gotten her into this mess and now she was unavailable. Nx! And now she couldn't even call her mother because it would ruin the 'surprise'. Finally she was at the Centre and she took out her Platinum card. The driver who had grey hair told her that he didn't have a speed point. Bloody hell! Who in this day and age still operated any business without a speed point? Oyama was getting more frustrated by the minute. And he wouldn't let her go to a bank to withdraw the money because she might run away and she didn't want to leave her luggage with him what if he ran away. She tried giving him her Rolex watch but he refused, he probably didn't know that if he sold it he could buy another taxi. Lola's phone was still unavailable, Oyama had no other option but to call the next best thing. "Lala what are you doing back so soon? Weren't you supposed to be back next week?" trust aunt Nomusa to start barricading you with questions as if she was the one who had called Oyama, not the other way round.

"It's a long story aunty but can you come down to the entrance with some cash."

"Which entrance?"

"The first one at The Child Centre."

"Sorry lala I'm out of the office meeting a client at Morningside."

This day just kept getting better and better. And the driver looked a bit aggressive now, he had taken out his knobkerrie. Not that Oyama blamed him, Jozi was full of chancers. She heard someone clearing their throat next to her, she was standing next to the taxi door. She turned around in irritation and looked up at the intruder. He had the most piercing eyes. That was the first thing she noticed. He was so tall and handsome as hell... ok maybe she was just stealing from Taylor Swift's 'Wildest dreams'. But dang, the nigga was fine. Well that is except for the UZZI brand that he was wearing which screamed ghetto thug. Oyama like everyone else had witnessed the heist which had taken place a couple of years back.

“Ausie wee I don’t have the whole day!” the driver’s angry tone dragged her from her daydream. She was still in hot soup.

“Sorry to interrupt Ntate but what seems to be the problem?” Mr. Handsome here had a very deep but lazy voice.

“She doesn’t want to pay her taxi fare and I’ve been waiting here for ages. I have to make a living I have children to feed.” Oyama fought very hard not to roll her eyes at an elder.

“It’s not my fault that you don’t have a speed point Ntate and you refused for me to go and withdraw some cash.”

“How much does she owe you?” Ok, just who did this guy think he was? A black Bill Gates in the making?

“R1 156 and 50c,” WTF?!! “The meter is still running.” Damn this driver was conniving. Oyama was boiling in anger and she watched in disbelief as the stranger took out his wallet and extracted six R200 bills and handed them to the driver.

“You can keep the change sir and sorry for any inconvenience.” Oyama just clicked her tongue, what was it, piss the fuck off Oyama day? She hadn’t asked for this stranger’s help and here he was taking out her luggage as if he knew her.

“Wait, where are you taking my luggage?” she had to rush to catch up with him. He stopped and looked at her like she was crazy.

“I don’t know about you but I will not stand outside in the drizzling rain.” He said and continued on his way into the Centre. The nerve of the guy! Oyama fumed silently as she tried keeping pace with his long strides. She was shivering and even her teeth were chattering. He didn’t seem to notice and he led her straight to a cozy restaurant that she hadn’t been in before. The décor was warm and child friendly like every other shop in that Centre. He dumped her luggage unceremoniously next to a table next to the counter and he went behind into the kitchen. Oh so he worked here at The Piper’s Dream, maybe he was the manager which meant he was a bit well off but still R1 200 would put a dent on his budget. Oyama would have to pay him back. At least the place had an air con and

it was warm but she was still shivering. He came back with a steaming mug of hot chocolate, he had even added tiny marshmallows just how she liked it. Wait she had come to this place once with her mother and she had ordered hot chocolate extra creamy with marshmallows but she wasn't sure anymore, the memory was hazy. She was very forgetful if you hadn't already established that. He looked at her from her sodden boots to her damp shirt. But it wasn't a lustful look, if she read him correctly he seemed angry. She had no idea what his problem was. "Why are you dressed like that in this cold?" she didn't think he was going to understand her explanation that where she came from it was summer so she didn't bother responding. Anyhow, who had died and made him her daddy. "Take that off." Excuse you? Ooh he meant the shirt, she took it off while he went to the back again. This time he came back with a huge fluffy towel and he began to rub her down roughly. Luckily the shop was empty but the cashier was giving them speculative looks. His touch wasn't sexual in any way but she found herself becoming aware of him. His masculine scent, he smelled like Hugo Boss the body spray but suddenly she found it the sexiest smell in the world. Ok Oyama get a grip, she admonished herself. When he was done rubbing her dry he took off his jacket and made her wear it. By then she had stopped shivering and she felt warm and cozy in his jacket it was an oversize for her. She was beginning to feel weird about this whole set up, she didn't even know this guy's name but she was wearing a jacket which smelled exactly like him. The anger had abated in his face and he looked less scary and as handsome as when she first saw him which was less than an hour ago. She wanted to go home now. As if he read her mind he said, "If you're done I will take you home." Alarm bells started going off in Oyama's head. Why was he being so kind? She didn't trust people, the last time she had trusted a guy she actually knew she had ended up pregnant at 15. He must have read her unease because he was speaking gently now, "I would never hurt you Nokwindla." What the hell was going on here? How did he know her clan name? Only her great-uncle had called her that. Who was this guy? "If you don't trust me you can call sis Nomusa and confirm." Oyama looked into his eyes and they told her that he didn't mean her any harm. But the way he seemed to know everything and everyone in her life still creeped her out and she still didn't even know his name. Aunt Nomusa answered her call on the fifth ring, "Yaya." Oyama hated that name but it had stuck with her even her daughter called her Yaya.

“Aunty sorry to disturb you but do you know ummmh...” she looked at him for some help and he smiled rakishly at her and she felt a different warmth down there. He mouthed the word Sphola, what kinda dumb arse name was that? “...do you know Sphola?”

“Yeah, he’s pretty close with Mpumi. Why?”

“No reason, he offered me a ride home.”

“Ok sweetie you can trust him, I’ve got to go now love you.” The only problem now was Oyama didn’t trust herself around this guy. He was just too intense. But when he smiled she felt weak in the knees. He took her luggage again like it didn’t weigh a ton and they left. She was now engulfed in his jacket and she tried keeping up with him as he made his way to the garage. She expected him to be driving a GTI, it went well with his UZZI brand. But no he was driving a Ford Ranger, now she felt really bad for that taxi fare he was probably still paying off the installments on this car. He put her bags in the back seat and opened the front door for her. He was a gentleman wasn’t he? Well Oyama didn’t trust gentlemen they are the ones who fucked you over. He also had some bad boy vibes that she was catching on, but that could just be wishful thinking on her side. He reversed and drove out of the car park in silence. He only stopped to greet the security guards on the exit. It seemed they knew him well. He didn’t try to chat her up which was strange, he didn’t even glance at her thighs. He’s definitely gay, Oyama thought glumly and she didn’t even want to question why the thought of him being gay hurt her so much. He took out a disk from the glove compartment and put it on. Oyama braved herself from some awful house mix, he was just the type. The song began.

“Been sitting eyes wide open behind these four walls

(Hoping you’d call)

It’s just a cruel existence like there’s no point hoping at all...”

Wait! She knew this song!

“Baby, baby, I feel crazy, up all night, all night and every day

Give me something, oh, but you say nothing

What is happening to me?

I don't wanna live forever, 'cause I know I'll be living in vain

And I don't wanna fit wherever

I just wanna keep calling your name until you come back home

I just wanna keep calling your name until you come back home

I just wanna keep calling your name until you come back home!"

She found herself singing along to the chorus. She couldn't help it she was a Taylor Swift fan. And the song took her back to when she and Lola had sneaked out to go and watch Fifty Shades Darker. She missed her almost twin, Lola had come back two weeks back to start working on her very own IT company and Oyama was excited for her. She had been singing along and she had even forgotten that she was a passenger in a stranger's car. She caught him staring at her and he had that little side smile, she found herself looking down. Oh my God I'm blushing what is happening to me, she thought to herself and she looked out at the window. "You have a beautiful voice," that was the first personal thing he had said to her and she bit her tongue before she said something as lame as "Thank you?" this guy really got to her and she felt uncomfortable around him yet she didn't want him to go. It was Ludacris! She cleared her throat, she had to say something otherwise he would think she was a slow teenager.

"So is your name really Sphola?"

"You make it sound like you hate my name," he was frowning at her slightly. Dammit she hadn't meant for it to come out that way. "Its fine you can call me Sipho." Now Sipho she could live with not Sphola.

"I like Sipho, I think it suits you," why did she say that? He just looked at her and smiled. She had to stop making him smile because his smile would be the death of her. They were turning at their gate that had been quick. Too quick in fact. The guards at the gate let them in without questioning him, it meant that he had been here before. But when? She was sure she would have

remembered him if she had ever met him before. He parked close to the door and took out her bags carrying them to the door. At least the door was open but he didn't get in. he put her bags down and he came up to her. He cupped her face up by placing his forefinger and thumb under her chin. Her breath caught in her chest. She was already anticipating how those full strangely pinkish lips would taste. But he didn't kiss her, he just stared deep into her eyes. Then he let her go with an, "I'll see you around nana." Just like that he left her standing there like a drowned rat and he got into his car and he left. Who was that guy? He hadn't even asked for her phone number and too late she remembered that she was still wearing his jacket. There was only one conclusion she came to. He was gay. She stopped being disappointed and went in with her bags. After putting them in her bedroom, the gothic décor she had definitely outgrown, she went out to look for her family around the house. The house seemed empty which was strange. She went into the living room, it was also deserted then she looked through the floor length glasses and saw her parents in the pool. Their living room was like an Aquarium and it was so cool. She could see them swimming in the heated in-door pool but it seemed like they were playing tag or some sort of underwater game. Her mother looked like she wasn't a day over 30 but Oyama knew her 45th birthday was coming up in August. Not that her mother was skinny like her, her mother was curvy but she still looked youthful. From the looks of it her daddy had been forcing her mother to hit the gym and his efforts had paid off. They started kissing underwater and they looked so cute. Then her dad was untying her mother's bikini top. Now that was gross. On top of her horrible day she didn't want to be subjected to her parents' live underwater porn. She left the living room and went back to her bedroom. Before taking off Siphos jacket she smelled it and it was like he was wrapped around her. She took off the rest of her clothes and went to the bathroom all the while thinking about the tall stranger who had left her puzzled and wanting more of him.

After taking a long bath and dressing up in warm sweat pants and her favorite sweater she made her way to the kitchen. She had put Siphos jacket in her closet, she wasn't going to wash it, ever. She wanted to keep smelling him, which was weird she would be the first to admit. After the day she had, she was starving and she decided to make herself an omelet. Her parents came in as she

was finishing up her meal. Her mother lost it when she saw her. She was screaming and laughing and crying and squeezing the breath out of Oyama's chest. Then she was also wrapped in her dad's bear hug and it was crazy. Seeing her parents' joy made her forgive Lola her 'surprise' suggestion had paid off.

"When did you get back?"-her mother asked.

"Earlier today."

"Why didn't you call us to come and pick you up?"-her dad asked.

"Because I wanted to surprise you guys but then I found you in the pool..." at least Mpumi had the decency to blush while Jarred was grinning like a Cheshire cat that had swallowed a big fat rat. "Next time you should call princess," her goofy dad was impossible.

"Where's the fantastic four?" that was her name for her siblings, her daughter and her god-sister.

"They are at a friend's birthday in Gold Reef city, we were preparing to go and collect them."

"No its fine, you old people can relax and I will go and pick them up."

"Are you sure you not tired?"

"I'm fine mama, I want to surprise them too and I miss them." Even though Oyama skyped with them often it wasn't the same. She left her parents looking all cozy to go and get her phone and her car keys. She decide to take the Mercedes Benz, it was more child friendly. Her biological father Daniel, had bought her a Lamborghini Aventador for her 18th birthday. He thought he could buy her love and forgiveness. Their relationship was still rocky but at least she could talk to him now without cringing. She was about to start the car when she got a text. "It's about time that cunt responded to my texts," she said thinking the text was from Lola. It wasn't. She didn't know the number. The text read, "It's good to see you back home Princess. But know that I'm coming for you. I told you what would happen if you opened that big trap of yours. Ooh and kiss my daughter when she comes from Gold Reef City." Oyama felt her blood going cold. No it couldn't be! How did he know she was back? Most importantly how did he

know where Amandla was? Oyama felt the panic rising. She tried breathing as she had been taught during therapy but it didn't help. She was hyperventilating and sweating even though it was cold. She felt the pressure in her chest as if she was having a heart attack. Her medical training taught her that what she was having was actually a panic attack but it could be as painful as a real heart attack. She tried controlling her breathing but the attack only seemed to worsen. She tried calling the number back but it said the number she had dialed did not exist. That only worsened her anxiety and she had to clutch her chest as wave after wave of the panic attack shook her. This couldn't be happening. Not today. But it seemed like Mhlanguli Lubisi was back in her life and he was baying for her blood.

THE END.