



Heart of STEEL

#1

Nonkululeko

“Stop down playing your blessings,” my best friend Vule says, a flute of champagne raised to the air for a toast. I remember these words from my dearest mother. “I agree with your mother when it comes to this. Stop down playing your blessings, babes.” She smiles at me and continues, “You are blessed. Don’t be apologetic about it.”

I slightly nod at her, not wanting her to dwell on this. I know where this is coming from. A few weeks ago I got promoted to Senior Finance Manager at work and it is a big deal. I didn’t want to apply for it but a few of my colleagues pushed me to, urging me to give it a try since I am good at my job. That day when I forwarded my application to our HR team, I was only proving a point to

Leroy who was on my neck about it. When they called me for an interview, I only attended because I wanted to learn a thing or two from an interview of a senior post. And then, when HR called me into their boardroom to share the good news, I didn't jump from my chair like everyone expected me to. Instead, I searched for reasons why I shouldn't have gotten the post. I know two of our team members who were really gunning for this post. One is a lady, Thenjiwe, who is almost my mother's age and the other candidate was Ephraim who sits just one desk away from mine. No! Ephraim used to sit just a desk away from mine because now I occupy a biggest office in our floor. By biggest office, I mean a huge office which could fit all of my one bedroom apartment. What makes it huge is the eight seater table for my meetings. I still don't understand that concept but the owner of the company thought it was a great idea to have such in manager's offices.

"Stop down playing your blessings," Vule continues to torture me with her words. The time she heard my mother say these words was when I bought myself a Mercedes Benz AMG A 35 4matic. I didn't want people to know that it belonged to me. I told my colleagues that the car belonged to my brother. I was apologetic about it until everyone saw me driving it for the whole year without failure.

"I got it," I mumble to Vule, urging her to sit down.

"I have to sound like a broken record for this to get through to your head," she says. Finally, she lets me off the hook by taking her seat. We are celebrating my thirty

second birthday at Eclipse Restaurant in Sandton. My friend outdid herself in getting us here. She is going to make it difficult for me to organise her birthday in a few months to come.

My other friend, Lebo, gets on her feet and throws in her words as well before we dig in our plates. Vule organised supper for the six of us and we plan to finish off the night at the night club.

“Are you still taking a solo vacation next week?” Bonolo asks before she takes a sip from a glass of red wine.

“Without a fail,” I say. Each year on my birthday, I take some time off to go on a solo vacation. I have been religiously doing this since I turned twenty five. Seven years later, I am still doing the same. I love solo dates so much that my long-time boyfriend did not understand right before we broke up. He was a psycho. On my twenty ninth birthday, he tried stopping me from my solo vacation to a five star resort in Cape Town. Didn't he show up there in the middle of the night? Just to check who I had in bed? We broke up right there and then and I haven't seen him since then. This is after dating for five years and it was on that night when he confessed following me around on my solo vacations for three years, just to spy on me. I found it too creepy and apart from the other things I was not happy about in our relationship, his insecurities were a deal breaker for me.

“Where are you off to?” Khodi, Vule's twin sister, asks.

“Knysna.”

“Maybe you’ll finally meet a rich man who will break your celibacy this time,” Vule comments.

“Oh my goodness Vule,” I shriek, placing my glass of wine on the table and laughing at her comment.

“What? Didn’t you say you are going to allow a handsome and rich man to break your celibacy?”

“I did say that I won’t allow just any man to do so,” I respond, nodding at her. I did. I did say that only a rich and handsome man can break my celibacy. At least a rich man could spoil me while at it. My previous boyfriend was the opposite of this. He was not very good looking and I was financially assisting him. There was nothing wrong with giving him money...until he had so much that he could fly himself to my vacations just to spy on me. You can do the maths right? I have been celibate since my break-up – that is how long it has been. Therefore, my return needs to be special.

“Knysna has potential, don’t you think?” Vule asks.

“I am not counting on it. When I go on my solo vacation, it is all about me. I don’t look for company or hook-ups. It is all about me.”

“How about tonight at the club?” Vule asks.

“No clubs, please.”

A Monday after my vacation, I feel rejuvenated. Apart from the sightseeing I did, I invested a lot of money on pampering myself this past week. Right now, when I am supposed to be grumpy about yet another Monday morning, I am in my greatest mood. I had a wonderful time all by myself. I am still as celibate as they come. I almost, almost, hooked up with some guy at the club that other night. I swore on my grandmother's grave that I would never hook-up with anyone in a club but when my eyes landed on this handsome looking man, I almost lost all my morals. He looked so damn fine and the suit he had on screamed 'rich.' I locked eyes with him but then we were disturbed when the guy he was with whispered something to his ear and off they went. Had he come to me, I would have given it up.

Pulling up at Gumede Enterprise, I pull down the sun visor and open the mirror so to check my lipstick. Happy that it is still intact, I reach for my phone and jump out of the car. After grabbing my bags from the boot, I make my way to the office. I love our offices and how perfect this building is. At the reception area, I grab my breakfast which I ordered while I was stuck in traffic. Today is going to be a very long day with back-to-back meetings. Since I left the office last week, I haven't opened my emails.

"Girl, I love that glow," Fifi says when she notices me walking down the corridor to my office. Her desk is stationed just outside my door. Refilwe, who is well-known here as Fifi, is my personal assistant since my

Senior Finance Manager post. Before then, we were just buddies.

“Thank you,” I smile to her as I allow her to take the hundred bags I am carrying. Stopping in front of my door, I reach for my handbag so that I can get my office keys.

“It’s unlocked. I had a cleaner freshen it up for you. How was your trip?”

She is a sweetheart.

“It was more than perfect. I had a great time.”

Walking into the office, I find my window opened and my favourite plant brightly stationed by the window. Fifi places my breakfast on the table and walks back to her table to get me my messages.

I shrug out my blazer and neatly hang it on the coat hanger and thereafter settle on my comfortable chair.

“Yes... did you survive without me?”

“Barely,” she says, rolling her eyes. “Ephraim had us running around.”

I take a deep sigh, knowing what she means. Ephraim has a tendency of showing everyone that he deserved this post more than I do. Come on, I understand his jealousy. I am the youngest manager here – my peers are still clerks. I am glad that our Chief Financial Officer is an old woman; else there would have been bad rumours.

“You know how it is,” I say.

“Oh... our new supply chain clerks started last week Wednesday on the first of the month,” she says excitedly.

“What is so exciting about that?”

“It is nice having new people,” she says with a smile. I agree with her.

“How many are they again?” I am aware of the new candidates coming over but I am not sure how many we are starting with this month. HR has all that information. We are going to have huge projects in the coming months, hence the recruitment of these temporary clerks.

“Six! They fit here. I arranged a welcome meeting with you at ten o’clock.”

“Didn’t Ephraim do it?”

“He said he is too busy to deal with new clerks.”

I shake my head at this. “Fine. Ten o’clock is fine.”

The minute Fifi walks out of my office, I quickly check on my emails and respond to almost all of them. I accept an endless number of meetings and attend a brief meeting with the supervisors. Except for Ephraim, who makes it his duty to piss me off in front of everyone, I have a great team of supervisors. I have seven supervisors that work under me and we make such a great team.

When a knock disturbs me, I drop my eyes to my wrist watch.

Ten o'clock.

I get on my feet and walk to the door so that I welcome the clerks who are here for our meeting. A young girl smiles at me and beside her is a number of other clerks. I open the door widely and step aside for everyone to walk into my office. I allow them to walk in and I direct them to take seats around the table. I remember a few years ago when I walked into this office as a new supervisor in the block. I was trembling then but here we are now.

“How are you guys finding Gumede Enterprise,” I ask as I make my way to my chair which is at the end of the table. I smile as everyone mumble their response and giggle. I pride myself in the work I do. I know for a fact that all these clerks feel at home.

“I was on leave when you guys started. My name is Nonkululeko and you guys can call me Nonku. And who are you guys? Just tell me a little something exciting about yourselves,” I ask this with a warm smile.

I sway my eyes between the clerks, waiting for one to be bold enough to break the ice. I do a double take to the last clerk sitting just next to me. I immediately feel goosebumps when our eyes lock. I swallow hard and shake my head. He turn his eyes to the girl on his left who is introducing herself.

It can't be him, right?

I smile at myself. This is too embarrassing. I really need to break my celibacy before I lose my mind. The guy sitting here cannot be the same rich looking handsome

man who wore that expensive looking black suit. And he didn't wear reading glasses like this one sitting just next to me. This one sitting next to me has a white 'almost see through' shirt on and a red t-shirt he has on in the inside is so untidy.

Everyone else introduce themselves and lastly it is his turn.

He slowly gets on his feet and smiles shyly. Ncooo, he is cute and respectful.

"Hi guys," he says while waving around the table. "My name is Kingston and I love dogs."

I drop my eyes to the girls sitting opposite of him, finding them giggling.

"Is there something else you wanna tell us about yourself Kingston?"

"You can just call me Kings. My mother calls me Kings."

I slowly nod.

He is cute.

Chapter 2

Heart of STEEL!

Nonkululeko

I bite my tongue, not wanting to ask many more questions about this guy, lest I give off the wrong

impression, but I am grateful for the other young guy who asks how old Kings is.

I clear my throat, shifting my eyes to Kings, ready to hear his response.

I get why the other clerk asked, Kings doesn't look like he belongs here, because apart from his hideous dress code, the way he looks isn't befitting of his job title.

"Twenty-eight," he responds.

But, he actually looks older than that...

"You look older than that," the other clerk guy said, as though he's read my mind and took it upon himself to be the voice of my thoughts.

If I am not mistaken, he introduced himself as Zwothe. I haven't grasped all the clerks' names, but I know for a fact that I will know their names before the end of this month. I prefer to know all the members of all my teams by name, as it makes my life easy.

"Well, welcome to all of you," I say, eager to wrap up our meeting so that I can release them. "Are there any questions that any one of you wants to ask me?"

"Are we allowed to change our direct managers? I report to Ephraim, but he doesn't seem to have the time to assist me when I need help."

Sigh!

Ephraim will be the death of me!

"You can always ask the other supervisors and managers to assist you. If that still doesn't work, you are

more than welcome to knock on my door; I am always available to assist.”

Other two clerks raise their complaints with regards to Ephraim and I am seated here, gritting my teeth in frustration, not wanting to bad-mouth him in front of the new staff.

“Any other question, except anything that has to do with Ephraim? I’ll have a word with him about what has been raised here, and don’t worry, I won’t mention names.”

Kings lifts his hand while scanning the room as if he’s checking if there aren’t any other hands raised, then finally lands his eyes on me, seemingly boring them into mine – but, I could be wrong. I swallow hard, not wanting to show that I am affected by his burning eyes setting me alight.

He is an employee, and I don’t date in the office. Worst of all, he is four years younger than me. And I can do better than him... I think.

“Where is the owner of the company?” he asks.

“What do you mean?” I ask, caught totally off-guard by his question.

“When I was doing my research, before I came for the interview, I read something about the owner of the company being a Mr. Ndumiso Gumede, but when we got here, we were introduced to a different CEO.”

“Well, I didn’t work closely with him, so I do not have the answer to that question,” I answer, still battling to understand why he’d ask THAT question.

When it comes to Mr. Gumede, there's just a lot going on, and the best thing I do for myself is to just stay out of his business. But... it was RUMOURED that he is abroad after the whole saga of his wife killing his side-chick. I wasn't interested enough to keep tabs on him and his family; but the last I heard, he was out of the country.

"He used to inspire me a lot when I was still job-hunting, and it would have been great to have met him."

"I understand. Mr. Gumede was a great businessman."

"Was?" Kings asks.

"I mean, before he brought in the new CEO," I respond, and Kingston nods his head slightly, seemingly confused. Or is it him not believing what I just said? I don't know.

After the good round of questions, I excuse the clerks to go back to their workstations, and the second the last intern walks out of my office and closes the door behind her, I jump for my cellphone, making a call to my best friend. She doesn't answer the call, and I know it is because she is having a very hectic day.

I push through my work as much as I can until it's lunchtime.

During lunch, I warm my food up then go sit by the window which overlooks a huge park where our employees get to enjoy their time-out.

Mr. Gumede made this place very accommodative for his employees.

We have an eating area - which is as good as a park; then there is a bar, which only operates on Fridays and each employee receives tokens to spend there. There is also a gym, which most employees utilize, either in the mornings, before work - or after work. I have seen many people come to work for Gumede Enterprise, but not many resign. I am yet to find another employer who's on Gumede Enterprise's level.

I almost mess up my clothes with the juice that's in my glass as I pick it up from the table when I notice Kingston seated at one of the tables under a tree. He has his head buried in a laptop that's on the table, and is typing away. He must be busy with something personal, because we do not issue laptops to our clerks, so that must be his personal laptop.

He is deep into whatever he is doing on that laptop, because he startles when one younger woman approaches his table, then quickly recovers, giving her a once-over, before dropping his eyes back to his laptop. She says something, to which he nods his head, and, with a wide smile on her face, she pulls a chair, and settles down opposite to him.

I cannot help, but study their interaction. Kingston has not lifted his head from the laptop ever since that young lady joined him, even though she keeps at the one-sided conversation with him. It takes him a little while before

he lifts his eyes from the laptop and stares up to the sky before releasing a deep sigh, then, when he swings his head, his eyes land on mine, and he holds my gaze. I gasp, and I swear, he noticed me looking at him, which causes our eyes to lock. Before I can try to act cool and wave my fingers at him, he drops his eyes to the lady seated in front of him, and just continues with life, as if he didn't just catch me staring at him.

I quickly get on my feet and hurry to my phone, dialing Vule's number once again. And, this time around, I get lucky.

"Babes, are you alright?" Vule asks the second she answers her phone. "What could be so important?"

"I think I am ready to hook up. I am losing my mind here!" I say.

"Woah!" Vule exclaims, then laughs. "What is going on?"

"I think I am attracted to some new clerk in the office, and that attraction is starting to make me see things that aren't there. Firstly, I thought he was that guy that we were eyeing in the club. Then, I think he notices-notices me - you know - but he doesn't want me to see that he does."

"Wait, you thought it was which guy?" she asks. "The tuxedo guy?"

"Yes."

"Why would the tuxedo guy be doing, working as a clerk? He didn't even look like one."

“Exactly what I am talking about!” I shriek. “I think I am too horny, and I am starting to lose it.”

Vule laughs.

“The salt is too much! Look, I am in the middle of a report right now. Why don’t we plan for a night-out this coming Friday? We can go back to that club, and hook you up with Mr. Tux...”

Thursday afternoon.

My day is ruined during the meeting.

I normally have meetings with my team fortnightly, but since every new employee was knocking on my office door to complain about Ephraim, I had no choice but to call for this meeting. For the first time ever, I lost my temper in front of everyone; I was just fed up, and I felt like if I don’t put my foot down now, then he is going to disrespect me as his manager. I don’t give a fuck about his ego; if it’s a fight he wants, he can bring it on! And I’ll show him who the hell I am.

I hate people who disrespect others. And, I hate those who think they are better than others even more.

I can tolerate bullshit - believe me, I can - but if you are going to take advantage of me, I am not going to let you get away with it!

It is four-thirty when Fifi knocks on my door, telling me that she is done for the day; and since I don't have any plans for the rest of my day, I decide to stay in the office to push through some work. I enjoy staying alone, even though some days are lonelier than others.

Just when Fifi closes my door, I place an order for my supper - pork ribs and chips. I wish I could eat healthier than I do, but it is almost Friday, and I am stressed-out tonight; so I need the comfort food.

When I receive a notification a little while later that my food is at the reception, I drop my pen on the pile of papers on my desk, and hurry there. Walking down the corridor, I notice a few people are still rooted in their workstations.

I hurry, going on down to the reception area before the driver decides to drive back with my food.

My phone vibrates as I make my way back to my office.

'Still up for clubbing tomorrow?' – a text from Vule. My rule still stands - I cannot hook up with someone from the club. But I am interested in going back to that club, in search of 'that' guy.

As I am step back into my office, I am reminded of the reasons why I broke up with my ex. These psycho tendencies were the reasons – the very same tendencies I'm now exhibiting.

What the hell, actually!

I don't want to be a spy like he was.

‘We’ll see how tomorrow goes. I had a long week, and I was planning on staying in.’

This is me backtracking out of our plans.

At seven-thirty, my alarm goes off, jerking me off from work. I didn’t want to stay over until late, and knowing that I tend to get carried away with work, I always set my alarm for seven-thirty.

It takes me just a minute to pack my things into my bag.

Strolling down the corridor to the elevator, I am drawn to a light at the corner of the open-plan area. I turn towards there, finding Kingston still rooted in his workstation.

“Kingston?” I calmly call out his name.

“Oh, shit!” he hisses the curse word as he raises his eyes towards me. I expect to see fear cloaking his face, but instead, he just looks pissed. Something flashes in his eyes before he says, “You scared me, ma’am. What are you still doing here at this hour?”

“I should be asking you that.”

“Oh, I was trying to catch up with everyone. I am the slowest in the team, and it sucks. So, I have to put in more working hours than the others.”

I nod my head, understanding where he is coming from. And him being under Ephraim’s mentorship doesn’t make things easier.

“Would you like me to assist you with anything?”

“I’ll figure it out. I always do, ma’am,” he responds.

“Fine, but go home now. It is late,” I say as I turn towards the elevator.

I press the call button, then wait for it to come to our floor.

“How are you even getting home?”

“Bus,” he says while throwing his items into his backpack.

As he carefully places his notebook into his bag, I want to advise him to consider putting on white vests whenever he wears his short sleeve shirts. Like the first day I met him, today, he has on a yellowing shirt, and it is just too disturbing.

My elevator ride pings and I jump inside, running away with my advice.

Vule did not give me the chance to chicken-out on our mission - she was drawn to, and too invested in, my story about my clerk looking like the hot man I saw at the club on my birthday. So, now, we are out here at the club, occupying a table at the corner with our eyes fixed to the area where we saw him the other night.

This is just us trying our luck. It may be that the dude is not even from around here, and he just found himself in this club only on that night. But, that did not stop Vule

from dragging me here in search of him - or any other man who will look good enough to break my celibacy, for that matter.

When the resident DJ starts playing the latest amapiano hits, thus setting the mood, I start enjoying myself. I cannot dance to save my life, but I am a best cheerleader for my friends who are bold enough to dance in front of people. In short, I am bad influence.

Well, you know the DJ is doing his thing when everyone in the club is on their feet at nine o'clock, because, usually, people only get up to dance around midnight.

I am cheering Vule on when I notice the guy we are here to see. He is standing with some guys in a corner of the club. I swear to God, this man looks like Kingston; well, minus the hideous clothes and glasses. But, other than that, he is his replica.

I am not one to introduce myself to men, but my feet are dragging me towards him. He notices me, but he doesn't spare me a second glance, as he seems occupied with the conversation he's having with his acquaintances, a conversation that seems to have sucked his entire being into it.

"Hi? Excuse me," I say just in the nick of time when the DJ changes his playlist to that of Burna Boy's music, and unlike the Amapiano playlist that was on just a second ago, this playlist is more chilled. The man turns to me and raises his eyebrow as if he is questioning me why I am requesting his attention.

"Can I help you?" he asks.

Uhm, shoot! I didn't rehearse my questions. I just wanted to find out if this is Kingston, but by the looks of things, I am mistaken, because this isn't Kingston.

"You look like my colleague, so I thought I could... uhm, say... hi."

"Oh, nah."

I turn, ready to walk away, but I am going to be more curious about him until I have a chat with him again.

"Sorry," I say as I turn back to him. He turns to me, offering me a disgusted look this time around.

"What?"

"What is your name?" I ask.

"Why do you ask?" he asks.

We are in a club, yes, but I swear, this is Kingston's voice.

"I don't give my name to strangers," he adds when I don't answer his question, then turns back to his associates as if he is dismissing me. I turn, ready to leave, when I notice two guys walking to this group here. My feet freeze when one of them says, "Hey, Kings, my man."

I pivot, landing my eyes on 'Kings'. He moves his eyes to me before he greets his associate.

"Now you know my name. I am Kingsley, but my friends call me 'Kings'."

"'Kings'?" I ask, narrowing my eyes at him.

“What are you drinking tonight?” he questions.

“Cosmopolitan,” I find myself say without thinking.

Before I can tell him that I am not here for free drinks, he whispers something to one of his associates, then thereafter, takes my hand. If I wasn't shocked and curious to find out what is going on here, I would be refusing his leading me down the corridor, to what seems like an office.

“You know my twin brother, don't you?” he asks the minute he closes the door.

“Your twin brother?”

“Kingston. I have a twin brother who goes by the name of 'Kingston' but he ran away from home a few years ago. And I have no idea where he is.”

“But Kingston is 'Kings'.”

He shakes his head, then clicks his tongue.

“Only our mother calls him that. I am Kings.” He grabs a chair which is behind the table. “It isn't your first time here, is it?”

He wants to move on from this? Just like that?

“Don't you want to know how Kingston is doing?” I ask.

“No. He wrote us all off, cut us out of his life, and I don't give a fuck about that idiot and what he is busy with. His return to my life won't change anything, because all he is going to be is a burden, and I don't need that in my life right now.”

I slightly shake my head at him. The arrogance! What's up with the attitude?

"What is your name? Why don't you take a seat? Your drink is coming."

"No, thank you," I respond while making way to the door.

Chapter 3

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS

My eyes stay glued to the door even after she's walked out of the room. I was hoping that maybe she'd come back, but, instead, it's Lungelo who walks in with a bottle of beer in his left hand and a glass of cosmopolitan in his right.

"Where did she go?" he asks right after briefly scanning the room.

"She is gone."

"You are losing your touch," he says with a smirk on his face, as he sets the pink drink on the table, then settles on a chair which was meant for my guest.

"Are you interested in going through the plans for the two upcoming gigs?"

"Let's call it a night. We can revisit that topic tomorrow," I respond.

"Did she just fuck up your night?" Lungelo laughs.

“You do know that I could get any woman to walk right into this office, and drink that cocktail if I am desperate for a shag, right?”

“That, I know.”

Lungelo gets on his feet and tells me that he is calling it a night. It is still early to do so, but I don't think twice before I follow him out of the door, disappear into the crowd before we head to the door that takes us out to the private parking.

I could join him at the strip club that he is headed to, but I am freaking tired from the hectic week that I've had.

Jumping into my black Jaguar, I head straight to my apartment for nothing else but sleep.

Saturday morning.

I decide to pass on my morning run with the woman from the room just down the corridor. I am not one to be this exhausted, but there is just so much a body can take.

Stretching out of bed, I drag my feet to the window to pull the curtains open. If I need to start this day, the only easier way would be to let the sun in.

Apart from the lunch that's at my mother's house, I have no plans until noon. Oh, fuck! I do have plans with my assistant before noon. Forgot about that...

A loud bang on my door drags me there. Upon opening it, the lady from down the corridor is standing there, just

staring back at me, with her vest soaking wet from the sweat, and clinging to her body. I make way for her to get in, then walk back to my bed.

“What’s going on? You missed our run,” she says, as she turns towards my kitchen.

I forgot her name the same night she introduced herself a few months ago, and I haven’t had the courage to ask her.

“I am exhausted.”

“You? Exhausted?” she shrieks as if I am a bloody god who never gets tired.

I had forgotten how shitty it is to go to work five days a week. But, then, when it comes to MY life, add five more hours after each long day, because I run many different types of businesses to stay afloat, and afford my lifestyle, and I prefer being hands-on in all of them. Hence, I don’t have a life, or a family, or even a woman to court, for that matter; there is just no room for anything else.

She pulls her vest over her head, revealing her sweat-soaked sports bra. “We could take a shower...”

“Nope!”

Which part of ‘I am exhausted’ doesn’t she get?

“Missed you this week. Where have you been?” she asks with a pout and thereafter puts her sweaty vest back on.

“Been busy.”

“Wanna do something fun later today?” she questions as she helps herself to a fruit juice from my fridge.

She is a good shag when I need a release, but right now, she is starting to get to my nerves. “What are your plans today?”

“Visiting my family.”

“Can I come with?”

Fuck no!

“Why don’t I call you some other time? I have to get ready for my day.”

She pouts at me and sags her shoulders. I am not one to nurse feelings, and I am not about to start now. Without waiting for her to say anything else, I walk to the door and open it wide for her to walk out. What I don’t need right now is this, whatever it is.

Picking up my television remote, I tune into a music channel before slipping into the bathroom for a quick fix. I jump into a cold shower and thereafter pick a black t-shirt and black jeans to put on for my lazy Saturday.

It is not every Saturday that I get to visit my family in Benoni.

While I wait for my assistant, who is supposed to be in my apartment in about fifteen minute’s time, I prepare myself a meal of smoked salmon and avo toast, with a cup of black coffee.

My phone flashes as Rhulani requests for access to my apartment. I send him a code to pass security before I settle on my couch with my breakfast. A few minutes later, Rhulani walks into my apartment with an overnight bag in his hand, and his backpack on his back.

“Sorry I am a little late,” he says as he drops the overnight bag on the couch.

“Did you get better fitting clothes?” I ask, shaking my head as I recall how all the clothes he brought me the previous week were all ridiculous, with nothing fitting me the way I want it to.

“I tried. It isn’t easy to shop for you,” he responds, matter-of-factly, while pulling his laptop from the backpack and occupies a couch on my left.

“You can help yourself to the food. I made enough.”

“Thank you,” he says, but doesn’t get on his feet to take the breakfast. This reminds me of why he is my right-hand man - he gets the job done, and for a man like me, who is forever on the move, I want someone who can keep up with me, who can keep up with all my businesses and their demands.

“The bootcamp starts in two weeks, sir!” Rhulani says.

“Fuck!”

“I knew you’d say that. But all the attendees have confirmed, so there is no cancelling.”

He chuckles while still focused on the computer. It took me so long to get a young boy to run my office, but when Rhulani Baloyi walked into Kings Security four

years ago, dressed in a white short-sleeved shirt, and huge round glasses, I just knew there was no letting him go. He has this genius look, and what's more – he has the balls to match. He survived four years with me, and we are still counting, going strong.

“Before I forget, get me better glasses than the ones you gave me. I cannot fucking see in those things.”

“Sure thing.”

He gives me an update on the happenings at Kings Security, because I haven't been getting a chance to set foot there, all thanks to this 'almost' gratis assignment that I once thought was a great idea.

Fuck my life right now.

It is two-thirty when I walk out of Woolworths Northmead Square with a trolley full of food. This way, I can bribe my dear mother with all this food.

Six years ago, I built this family home for my mother and three sisters and all their children, since they all decided that they don't want to get married.

It is chaos when I park my car in the driveway. I have about twelve nephews and nieces, and even if I wanted to be, I cannot be everyone's favourite. While some always get excited about my arrival, others disappear out of sight; I think it has everything to do with my unfiltered mouth.

“You said you needed to speak to me,” I say while bending to drop a kiss on my mother's almost wrinkled

cheek. She is getting older by the day, and this endless line of grandchildren here is proof.

“I have to find something to discuss with you for you to set foot here, huh?” she complains.

“Been busy.”

I try to stay away from my family as much as I can, because if they were to find out the real reasons for my absence, they wouldn't want me anywhere near them. If I were to tell them about all the men who keep eyes on them, they wouldn't sleep a wink. My job is not very safe, and if staying away from them will keep them safe, I'll stay the fuck away.

My mother orders one of the many grandchildren to bring us a bottle of Coke to the backyard, where my two sisters are lying on a mat under a tree. I take one free chair while my mother takes her favourite green camp chair.

“How many minutes do we have with you?” Glenda, my eldest sister, mocks me. I don't answer her question, which seems to afford her room to continue, “What went wrong? Why are you here?”

“I came to see everyone,” I respond. That is true. I don't get to see them much, so this is true.

“Maybe once you have your own children, you'll find your own home a fun place to be,” Chrissy, my other sister, adds.

This is another reason as to why I stay away - all these women are given the liberty to annoy me whenever I'm here, and they do it so well!

"Vhavenda is too sick, and I think you should visit," Mom says as her granddaughter pours the Coke into her favourite mug.

"Visit him, where?"

"In his home. What if he dies?"

"Let the man die. He has been sick for a while now."

"Kings!" Glenda shouts in a reprimanding tone.

Vhavenda is my father. Out of all the men my mother could have chosen to father me, she had to pick a deadbeat man who cared to know nothing about me, until the day he found out that I built my mother a mansion? I was once a useless piece of shit to him, and when he got married to that devil's incarnate of a woman, he made my life miserable.

Well, I don't blame him for trying to reach out, because his children might have informed him of all the monies I give them whenever they bring themselves closer to me. But now that everyone seems entitled to get my help, I am not one to tolerate such bullshit. My mother is a Xhosa-speaking woman, who grew up in a coloured community in the Eastern cape, and how she met and fell in love with a Venda man from Soweto is a tale to be told for generations. My sisters' father passed away ages ago before I was born and I got to be born of some deadbeat.

“You need to see him. Maybe all he needs to get better is to see you.”

“No.”

“Why not?” Chrissy asks.

“His family knows why.”

I don't know why I am entertaining this topic, because it just pisses me off.

So, this is how it fucking feels to go to a seven-to-five job?

The past two weeks have been hell, and I thought it'd be better this week. But, nah, it is fucking the same!

Drinking the last bit of my black coffee, Rhulani texts me to tell me that he is outside. It is six-thirty and I should be in the office in third minutes' time – it is better to be the first to arrive.

“You look grumpy,” Rhulani smiles at me, showing off his ugly braces; he is just worsening my mood.

Before I could even buckle up the seatbelt, I reach for my car keys in my pocket and throw them to Rhulani.

“We are using my car,” I say while jumping out of the Polo Vivo that he drives. My knees are forever hitting the freaking dashboard when I am supposed to be relaxing, and I'm having none of that today!

“Are you sure?” he asks excitedly. It is not every day that I let anyone use my car, but ‘this’ Kings cannot be seen driving in a beast.

Without giving me any room to change my mind, he presses the button to open the gate that leads to the private parking. Thereafter, he parks next to my black Jaguar.

“Don’t fucking scratch my car,” I groan while we switch the cars. This doesn’t wipe a smile on his face, though.

At 07h05, I am in an elevator that’s leading me to my workstation at Gumede Enterprise. Just like all the other days that I have been here, I drag my feet to the end of the floor, bracing myself for all the greetings that I have to fucking sing. To avoid having to converse with people gathered at the coffee area, I pick my dirty cup and stroll to the floor kitchenette to wash it. Most people arrive at eight, so I have enough time to brew myself a strong cup of coffee and enjoy it in silence.

“Oh! Morning, Kingston,” the boss lady says from behind me. I close my eyes and release my breath slowly; I have no energy for her today.

I slowly turn to face her.

“Morning, Ms Nonku,” I respond with a forced smile. Thereafter I turn to get on with my business of cleaning my mug.

“How was your weekend?”

And she is chatty!!

“It was good, ma’am.”

She scoffs. “Oh, please! Call me ‘Nonku’.”

I don’t respond, praying that she walks out of the kitchenette.

I take some time to wash just one cup and teaspoon. When I finally don’t hear movement behind me, I slowly turn, only to find her leaning on the fridge with her hands folded across her chest. I give her a small smile, trying my utmost best to not show her how bothered by her presence I am.

When I move away from the basin, she walks to a small table next to it and picks her mug before she walks to where I am. I shift, getting further away from her. I wanted to use that cheap body spay Rhulani bought for me, but I couldn’t get myself to. So, I fucking bathed in my favourite cologne.

I don’t wait for her to say anything before I walk away from where the kitchenette.

“Kings,” Nonku calls out. I stop dead on my tracks and slowly turn to face her. “You don’t have to be the first to arrive and the last to leave. Take it easy, okay?” I give her a brief nod. “There is no need to prove a point to anyone. Take your time to learn.”

“Thank you.”

I am ready to walk away when she says, “Hey, you said you loved dogs, right? My nephew needs a puppy. What breed do you have? Can I see a...?”

“Oh, my phone is ringing.” I smile at her while reaching for my pocket. I quickly pull out my phone, show her the

screen, which is displaying Rhulani's name, swipe the screen and put it to my ear as I walk to my desk.

"Doesn't sound like a good time," Rhulani says.

"No, it's not," I respond.

I grab my seat while listening to Rhulani telling me about a meeting that I need to find a way to attend in two hours. I keep my eyes on Nonku, who is walking into her office.

"I'll send you the link to join the virtual meeting," he says.

"Get me pictures of a friendly dog, give it a name and tell me all the things I need to know about it."

"Huh?"

"I am supposed to be a fucking dog-lover. Get me pictures of a friendly dog, and give it a name... and send me a list of all the things that I need to know about it."

Rhulani laughs, then says, "I am on it boss."

Chapter 4

Heart of STEEL!

Nonkululeko

'He is not your problem. He is NOT my damn problem!' I silently chant to myself as I grab my seat. I sip from my cup and shake my head as if I am shaking off all the thoughts I had about Kingston.

After meeting Kingsley on Friday night, I haven't been lucky with getting Kingston out of my head. Instead, I am now more curious; I have more questions than answers. I tried spotting the difference between the two Kings, but I think I am getting myself even more confused with every second. I tried judging their differences by the size of their brush haircut, but I am still so confused, because Kingston does little waves on his hair, but I didn't notice any wave on Friday when I met Kingsley, not even one.

You know what? I am going to need a box wherein I will shove these two people whenever I want to focus - just like right now!

I grab my cup and take a careful sip before opening my emails. I smile at the email which has just popped up on my screen. We have a new big project and the teams are starting to meet up for brainstorming and preps with the client.

We are the best production company ever, and I bet you, we were not just merely ranked in that position. When I started working here a few years ago, Mr Gumede had just given up on his high-tech operation, and he had just started venturing in event production, and now, we are the masters of it all.

I don't get involved much in the preparation stage, as I am in the finance and the supply chain side, but all the budgets are approved by our CFO, so I do have somewhat of a hand in each project.

We are going to shoot the live concert of Africa's Greatest Pop Star show. It is the finale of the show, and

we are the broadcasters. I am excited about all the complimentary gifts we receive from the clients, especially all the complimentary tickets for our friends - it is going to be massive!

My phone vibrates from the table, revealing my friend's name. We haven't gotten a chance to catch up after our date on Friday night - she was too sloshed and in a mood to dance all night long. Then, the next day, she had plans with her boyfriend, and I didn't want to intrude. Sundays, after church, I take time for myself.

'Wanna catch up after work?' – Vule.

'It is a Monday.'

'I was drunk when you told me about Mr Tux. Now I am sober.' – Vule.

I smile at her text message.

'I'll call you after work.' – Me.

'No, I need a drink and I cannot go out drinking on my own on a Monday; I need an ear.' – Vule.

'Fine. Two cocktails won't kill me.' – Me.

'Mama's Spot?' – Vule.

'Perfect!'

Fifi knocks and walks into my office just as I put my phone away. She drops some folders and tells me about the meeting I was just reading about. We are about to get busy, and I am looking forward to the hectic days.

Hours later, the only time I lift my head up from the laptop is when Fifi walks into my office and asks if I want something from the cafeteria, where she is headed to grab some lunch. I shake my head 'No', and tell her that I have my lunch. I am attempting to eat healthy at least four days a week - from Sunday, up until Wednesday - and then for the rest of the week, I feed my body what it craves.

I drop my pen on the pile of papers in front of me, and head to where my lunch bag is. I pull out my green salad and green juice, then head to the chair which is by the window. Again, Kingston is seated at his table, with the same girl who kept him company the other time, but this time around, he is buried in his phone. I don't know, but I think Kingston doesn't know how not to be busy. He looks like a hard-worker, and after having a chat with his arrogant brother, I feel like he is trying to make up from all his failures.

I wonder what happened between him and Kingsley... I hate how disgusted Kingsley looked when I asked him about his brother. There is a lot that happened between them.

I chuckle...out of the blue. It is funny how two men can fight for a nickname. Sibling rivalry, I guess.

As if my burning stare summons him, Kingston lifts his eyes towards my office window. This time, he was intentionally looking at me so I wave my fingers at him,

silently beating myself up for gawking. He just smiles at me, and drops his eyes back to his phone thereafter.

I jerk up from my seat as soon as I come back to my senses, then drag the chair further away from the window.

I really have to stop staring at this guy; I am a manager, and I cannot be found making clerks feel uncomfortable at their place of work. The last thing I want is to be reported for sexual harassment, because I tend to kinda undress the poor guy with my eyes.

Speaking of undressing – well, DRESSING, in this case - today, he looked better than the previous week. I wanted to mention it when we were in the kitchen, but I didn't want him to think that I am noticing him.

I finish my lunch while seated at my table, Googling a gift I could buy for my nephew – anything that's not a puppy. We are celebrating his seventh birthday soon, and a puppy is what he asked for. I know nothing about dogs, and now that I have asked Kingston about it, I feel horrible. I hate that I am giving him a bad impression of myself.

I am the first to arrive at Mama's Spot, so I order my favourite drink - a Cosmopolitan. Vule has already told

me that she is stuck in traffic, so, here I am, stuck in this place, all on my own.

I have turned the waitress away twice because I am not ready to order supper - it is still early. I left the office at four thirty, and it is not even six o'clock yet.

Sitting here, bored, I cannot help but find myself searching all the social media networks at my disposal for Kings. There is no Kingston or Kingsley, and I am getting more curious with each click.

Do people like these still exist?

Not a single social media presence?

I type the name 'Kings' on Google, and a security company pops up, but the website doesn't say much – it is as good as a blank piece of paper. Defeated by my search, I put my phone down and enjoy my drink.

Just a few minutes later, Vule hurries to my table, and I roll my eyes when she forces to hug me.

"You took long," I complain.

"It is not like you have a man to hurry home to," she jokes while throwing her handbag on the chair next to mine, before she pulls another chair and relaxes on it. First, she takes a deep sigh and thereafter sits up straight to call for the waitress.

"Looks like you need a drink more than I do," I comment. I also need a refill though.

The waitress takes our drinks order and leaves two meal menus in front of us.

I listen as my friend vents about the horrible day she had.

She is also in finance, but her office seems to be busier than ours. She complains about the new project the company is busy with, and I make her day by telling her about Africa's Greatest Pop Star show that we are about to work on; she knows how fun the finale always is, and I am definitely going to have VIP tickets to it.

"Enough about work... tell me about Mr Tux, and why you are so obsessed with him," she says just when the waitress places her margarita in front of her – yes, that's how slow the service is here tonight!

"I am not obsessed with him," I correct her, and thereafter, take a long sip from my glass. "By the way, Mr Tux has a name – Kingsley, and the one in the office is Kingston."

"Hmmm!" she hums before sipping her drink and wiggling her eyebrows. "So, who is breaking your celibacy?"

"What?!" I shriek before choking on my drink. What the hell, Vule! "None of them."

"Why not?" she shrugs at me.

"I don't date at work, you know that."

"And the sexy one from the club?" she asks.

"He is arrogant." I sigh at this.

He was sexy until he opened his mouth. I wish I had stayed longer though, so that I could ask him as many

questions as I wanted, but then, I couldn't leave my friend in the club all by herself, and I didn't want to spend more time in a closed office with a strange man.

"You are thinking about it," Vule comments, then laughs. I shake my head at her, because I wasn't thinking about Kingsley breaking my celibacy.

"No, I am not." I continue shaking my head at her.

"What are you scared of?" Vule continues. "He ticks all the boxes. And you can teach him a little lesson about his arrogance. Let him make love to you all night, then thereafter, leave him in bed the following day."

"Like a one-night stand?" I ask.

"Yep!" she says.

I shake my head. I am not made for one-night stands; I am one for the feelings – the whole nine yards.

"You are so boring. I wish women were more sexually liberated as men. How many times do men get away with hooking up with women, then leaving them after endless rounds of sex? We are so boring; we cannot even do that."

"Men think we are cheap when we do that."

"Nxa! Who cares what men think?" she asks.

I laugh before asking her, "What did he do? Come with the news."

She sips her drink, then sighs before telling me about her lunch date with her boyfriend this past Saturday.

As I relax in my bathtub after my supper with my friend, my mind wanders to what Vule was saying. I don't know why I am digesting her idea, but I am tempted to give it a try. I have been longing for a man for quite some time now, I am even bored with using my vibrator to scratch the itch - I need someone breathing down on me, just someone whispering sweet nothings in my ear. I long for those fingers sensually making tracks on my skin, I really do. And to be honest, if I am looking for just a night hook-up, Kingsley ticks all the boxes:- He is rich – well, he sure does look rich; he is sexy – I'll give him that; he is also so damn tall! He doesn't have to be as dark as my ex, because Kingsley is handsome just as he is.

'Stop it, Nonku!' I shake all these bad thoughts away at the very same second that my phone vibrates with my sister's name flashing on the screen.

"Hey, sis," I respond.

"Did you promise your nephew a dog?" Phelele asks without even greeting. "He told me to erase it from his wishlist because you said you'd take care of it. His birthday is in two weeks."

"I'll get him a dog, yes."

"I wished you'd say 'No'; I am not ready to raise a dog."

"Come on, don't be a boring parent."

“Says a single woman who is probably sipping on some wine as we speak,” she says. She sure does know her little sister. “By the way, before I forget, Zwano is requesting for a date.”

“No,” I say sternly.

Zwano is her husband’s friend; just imagine, a double date with my sister!

“What is wrong with you? Do you enjoy being single?”

“Yep!”

Apart from craving for steamy sex, being single is the best feeling ever! I wouldn’t be spending an hour and a half just taking a bath and taking care of my skin if I had people expecting me to take care of them. I don’t know which part of ‘I am enjoying my freedom’ people don’t get!

When she says her goodbyes, I drain half of the cold water and open the tap for more hot water - I have all the time in the world to relax in here.

I am in the office at seven-thirty, and I smile when I walk down the corridor to my office. Kingston listened to me, and he is not here as early as he was yesterday. I think I like his spirit; he reminds me of myself when I started my first job. I always wanted to impress my supervisor, and my hard-work sure did.

I get settled in for just a few minutes before I hurry to the management meeting. The Chief Financial Officer

approved funds for the upcoming projects and I am the key person to be by her side during these discussions.

As I make my way back to my office after the meeting, I am welcomed by Ephraim's loud voice, throwing remarks at Kingston and the young clerk who sits next to him.

"I don't have time to teach the things you should have learnt at school. How were YOU successful candidates?" Ephraim loudly says. I sigh deeply, before making my way there. Kingston sees me first, and he lifts his sad eyes at me, then drops them just when I step to stand beside Ephraim.

"You are going to MAKE time," I calmly say to Ephraim, causing him to turn and face me. "Maggie?" I turn to Maggie, one of the floor supervisors, who is typing on her computer. She quickly stands when she notices that it is I who called her name. I don't know what she sees in me, but I wish everyone was as respectful as she is.

"Ma'am," she responds.

"Please take the tasks that Ephraim has. He is going to be focusing on coaching and training our new colleagues on how to go about their work."

"What!" Ephraim bark.

"You are going to sit with each of our new colleagues, and teach them the work until they are confident enough to do their work on their own, and that, up to standard."

"I don't have time for that."

"You are excused; you can go home now."

“What?”

“HR gave me the go-ahead to excuse you until you are ready to do your job. I have requested that they remove you from our team. So, you are excused – you can leave and go home until HR calls you for a new position,” I say sternly, my chin raised so that I don’t cower. Ephraim looks down at me without a word, and I know he is shaken by this. He won’t be the first person to be demoted around here, and he knows it very well.

I turn to Maggie, “Take everything that’s on his desk.” I then turn to Kingston and the clerk sitting next to him, “If he ever raises his voice at you again, don’t you say a word to him. Just get up from your seat and walk to my office.” Kingston looks at me with... what seems like eyes of gratitude. Our eyes lock and before I move mine away from him, he gives me a small smile and mouths, ‘Thank you’, then he drops his eyes, and the other clerk nervously nods at me.

With that, I proceed to my office.

I snatch my jacket off of my body and throw it on my chair. Ephraim will be the death of me!

Or is it even Ephraim who is making me sweat like this?

I reach for my phone and send a text to my friend.

Her response is immediate.

‘Let’s do what?’ – Vule.

‘Hooking me with Kingsley to break the celibacy. I think I need to get rid of some tension.’ – me.

'Oh, she is human after all. We are on.' - Vule.

Chapter 5

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS (unedited)

The minute she closes the door, I turn my burning gaze to this motherfucker who is now squirming on his chair. I am glad she put him in his place before I lost my temper and compromised my mission. I have no room for that. I am already in and what is a better way to fit in than to act dumb on my new job?

"She is nice," the tiny girl says to me. I am horrible with names and Rhulani is not here to remind me of the important ones.

"Huh?" I ask, pulling my deadly eyes from the moron called Ephraim.

"Nonku... she is nice, neh?"

Nonku. Of course I cannot forget our 'boss's' name. Hers I remember very well.

"She is," I agree, because she is. She makes a very good leader even though there is moron who is working against her.

"Ephraim is mean," she states the obvious.

Okay, she is getting carried away now. I grab the headsets from my table and put them on. I pull my back

screen and go through my company's email. I groan at one particular email that is marked 'Important'. It is of the camp dinner I am supposed to have with the parents who are dropping off their children at the summer camp this coming Sunday. I could choose not to be there, but I know it makes a difference to the parents when I do show face. I have been running these camps for many years now and I enjoy them much. This is going to be the first year that I am going to miss much activities. I have many men for the job, so I'll only join them on a Friday.

I quickly exited the screen when I notice Nonku's secretary walking towards me. She stops in front of my desk and smiles at me. I lift my eyes at her and wait for her to tell me why she is invading my space.

She waves her hand at me and I slowly pull my headsets as to give her attention.

"Yes?"

"Nonku asks if you could recommend a pet store or a website where she could buy a puppy."

"Ahhh..." Fuck! "Well, it was a gift from my mother. I don't know where she got it."

"Can you ask her for me?"

"I...don't speak to my family anymore," I respond and drop my eyes to a file which sits on my table.

"Oh, I am sorry."

"It's okay," I mumble.

“What breed is it.”

“English shepherd.”

“So they are perfect for kids as well?”

“Yes.” I don’t know. I have no idea why Rhulani chose it amongst the other hundred dogs but I trust him. When she is satisfied, the secretary leaves my desk and give me room to breathe.

As I take a seat at my usual table, my lunch companion is by my side in an instant. Today, I have my headsets on but she is not bothered. She is seated right beside me, chit chatting as usual. I keep myself busy on my phone, trying to run my hundred business in a palm of my hand. There is just much that Rhulani can do for me. Today is different from the other days, Nonku isn’t looking down at me like she did this previous days. I have been watching her. Anyone who seems to be a threat to my mission must be kept closer. Nothing, and I mean nothing can come between me and this mission. One mistake and I might lose it all. I have pumped so much money in this work, there is no way I am going to allow it to fail.

After work I let half of the staff leave the floor before I grab a hard drive and connect it to the computer to copy the folder I have been working on since last week. I place a pile of paper on top of it to hide it before I rest my feet on the table. It is only when Nonku walks out of her office that I drop my feet back to the floor. I pretend

to be busy filing, but I am keeping an eye on her. She noticed me but just walks past to the kitchen.

How is she refilling her cup at five o'clock? Is she that much of a workaholic?

Only when she closes her door again do I get rid of the file. I wait for ten more minutes for the files to be 100% transferred to my hard drive. Once done, I throw my hard drive into my bag, and throw it to my back before rushing out to where Rhulani awaits me outside the office.

"We are working tonight. I have all the credentials we need," I inform my assistant just the minute I step into my Jaguar.

"Perfect!" he responds while starting the engine.

I open the glove compartment and pull my personal iPhone – one I don't take the office unless I have someone ask how afford a latest Pro Max.

"Now that I submitted the credentials... can't I skip work until next week when I have to get more data?"

"No," Rhulani laughs. "You just started."

"Is this how my employees feel about going to work daily?"

"Nope. They don't complain like you do."

Finally Friday arrives and I am out of Gumedede Enterprise at 15:30. Today I grab an Uber to my apartment since Rhulani is still stuck at Kings Security working on my project. The second I close my door, I peel the hideous clothes off from my body and throw them into the washing basket. I set an alarm for nine thirty when I need to go to the club to check on things. I don't necessarily need to be there all the time but I meet most clients there. And what else can a single man do on a Friday night? How I recently appreciate weekends – I can fuckin be myself.

Before throwing myself to bed, I jump into the shower to get rid of all these gel I put on my head to style the hair. Thereafter I force myself to sleep until eight thirty when I wake up and prepare my supper - salmon steak and spinach. After eating and downing a litre of water, I freshen up and pick my clothes for the night. It could be a sin to wear a suit on a Friday night but there is no other way for me. Luckily my club is one of those exclusive ones so I am never on my own. As usual, I go for the black fitted suit and a black shirt. If it were up to me, I wouldn't have permitted other colours to be invented. I pull my accessory drawer and pull a black wrist watch before putting it on. Before walking out of the walk-in closet, I don't forget to wear my favourite cologne.

At twenty past nine, I pick my car keys and cell phone from the table and head out. My apartment is in Sandton and so is my club so I am at the club in fifteen minutes. It is already a full house when I step into the club. The

lights are already down and the DJ is already prepping the crowd for a great night.

“Whisky on the rock,” I order from my barman who doesn’t waste time preparing a glass for me. From where I stand I can see two of my guys occupying a table with four women. Maybe a man can get some ass tonight. I feel well rested and in a damn mood.

‘Work first and play later,’ I convince myself while heading down a dark corridor that leads to my office. If I find some paper work on my desk from any of my two managers then I’ll be spending a few hours in here before I go bury my balls in one of the two sexy women I saw earlier.

Scanning my table, I find just two invoices for the stock we received this morning. Fuck, it takes millions to stock up this place but there isn’t need to complain. We make the stock money back in just a week.

A knock grabs my attention.

“Yeah!” I call out while I grab my seat, bracing myself for any sort of work I need to focus on. I swallow hard when Nonku walks in. she doesn’t look anything like the boss lady she was at the office today. She has changed the hair from the black wavy hair she had earlier to an almost blonde silky hair. And... the dress is too short and almost too revealing for my liking. I give her a frown and stare at her as if she is lost.

“The rest rooms are on the other corridor on your left,” I say.

“I am not looking for the restrooms.”

“Uhm... can I help you?” I ask.

She slightly widens her eyes and quickly recover. She gives me a nervous smile and shakes her head slightly.

“You don’t remember me from your other day, do you?” she asks.

“Am I supposed to remember you?” I ask. She sighs deeply and grabs a seat without my invitation. I don’t show my curiosity but I am wondering what she is doing here, dressed like that and looking like a woman I can fuck right away without thinking twice. As if my question didn’t defeat her, I ask, “Did we hook up or something?”

“No!” she huff a laughter. This time I rest my back on the chair and stare at her to explain herself. “I am the one who asked about your brother Kingston.”

“Ah!” I sigh deeply before grabbing a pile of paper from the table.

“You hate him that much, don’t you?”

“He doesn’t exist to me anymore. So... where you here to ask about him again?”

“No!” she says, her eyes not meeting mine. “I am a coward, okay.”

“Why?”

“Because I was supposed to come here to seduce you.”

“Seduce me?” This time I lean in and cross my eyes, staring down at her. Why am I excited about this?

“The plan was to come and seduce you because you tick the boxes of a man I supposed to sleep with tonight. But, I freaked out when I opened the door.”

“Ahhh!” I smirk at her. I bite my tongue to avoid asking her if this is the reason she looks like this today.

She quickly jumps to her feet, spin and aim for the door before I even say what is on my mind. And just like that, I am no longer interested in going through any of tonight’s possible work. I pick the glass of whiskey and throw it down my throat. Thereafter I punch the code on the door to lock it before heading to the club. I want to see what the boss lady is up to tonight. I don’t take time finding her because she is occupying the same table at the last time. She is seated with a friend and they are laughing and drinking. I head to my friends’ table and occupy an empty seat next to one beautiful woman. Lungelo introduces her to me as Layla and her eyes twinkled with excitement when she catches my name. I turn to Lungelo and he shrugs at me. He has a tendency of telling everyone that I make more than he does. I do but that is not the information I want strange women to know. I am listening to Layla telling me about her latest vacation to Sydney when I notice a man sliding into Nonku’s booth. I don’t know where the flash of jealousy comes from but it hits me.

“When you find yourself there, you must try food at Sydney Tower,” Layla says, and adds more other items I should put on my list to do when I travel to Sydney. She mentions something about a zoo but I am on my feet, making my way to where Nonku is. Her friend notices

me first but Nonku doesn't because the man who is at her table is making her giggle. I slide next to her friend, and only now does Nonku widens her eyes.

"Kingsley," she says and then the man turns to face me. She turns to her friend but her friend's tongue is twisted.

"I thought you were leaving with me tonight," I say with a smirk. I didn't want to do this, but I cannot let her go home with a stranger. I am stranger to her too but I am a better stranger.

"You are with him?" the guy asks.

"She is," the friend answers for her. The dude gives me a once-over before he excuses himself. He is good player.

"Are you ladies in need of men tonight?" I ask, posing the question to the both of them.

"She is. It has been three years and tonight she is letting loose."

"Oh my God Vule," Nonku says, her cheeks blushing.

I might be compromising my mission but my balls are blue too. It hasn't been three years or three months but a good shag would do tonight.

"Why don't we go somewhere more quiet?" I say, getting on my feet and holding out my hand for Nonku. She looks up at me as if to calculate me and then gets on her feet. Her friend does too.

"I'll head out. And I know where to find you Mr Kingsley," the friend says before giving Nonku a hug. When the

friend heads out, I take Nonku's hand and lead her out of the club. Our club occupy the top floor and the rooftop area, and below us is a five star hotel. It wouldn't be my first time booking their room right away and it wouldn't be my tenth time either. They do come in handy in times like this.

Riding in the elevator, I ask, "Would you like to grab supper first? I need to feed you first. I am a gentleman like that."

"Supper is fine," she says.

I give her a brief nod and press the floor to the restaurant. It is funny that this is not close to how I imagined my evening to be like. On the fifth floor, the cart stops and I lead the way out. I take her hand in mine before we reach the hostess by the entrance of the restaurant. Her hand is warm and she smells like flowers.

I am a regular here so even though the restaurant is fully booked, they always make a plan. Seated in a table for two, the waitress brings a bottle of complimentary champagne.

"So, what's your name?" I ask, giving her a smirk. She is very brave or determined. Whatever it is, I like it. I love women who know what they want and I appreciate those who go for it. I am not any different.

"Zama Bhengu."

"Zama," I repeat after her. I see I am not the only liar. "I am Kingsley."

“I remember your name.”

“So, what do you do?”

“I am a nurse.”

“So Kingston is a nurse now?” I ask. She gives me a nod for an answer. I give her a slow nod too. So, I am not the only smooth liar, huh? I continue, “So are you here because of him?”

“Because of who?”

“My brother? Do you wanna get over the crush you have on him by sleeping with me?” I ask.

“Jeez! You are so arrogant.”

“Even if the answer is yes, I will be fucking you after this dinner.” Her breath hitches when I say this. “So, what’s the answer?”

“No!”

“Either way, we are going to have a beautiful night together.”

Chapter 6

18S

Heart of STEEL!

Nonkululeko

He is good. He is good at his thing. And as I sip my champagne, I realise that my barely there underwear is

soaking wet. It is the way he speaks and damn, the way he smells. I have been trying to hide how much effect he has on me. How my body was burning up when he took my hand and lead me to the restaurant. And now, when he assures me a freaking great evening, I want to leave the food and drag him to the nearest closed door.

“Three years without sex?” he asks this with a smirk on his face. I blush and slightly shake my head at his attempt to tease him. His smirk turns into a wide and sexy smile while he waits for me to give him an answer.

“Yep!” I respond and thereafter lick the champagne off my lips. He is not shy to drop his eyes to my lips and thereafter trace my cleavage. I made sure, okay? I prepared for this night and if it doesn't turn out the best for the both us, it is going to be a perfect one for me. This dinner date here is a bonus. And I am glad that he is the one who is pop the cherry for the second time – if you know what I mean.

“What happened?” he questions while filling my flute with more champagne. He pours it diligently.

“I last dated then.”

“You don't have to date to have sex,” he comments. I smile, pleased that he knows what this is. Pleased that I don't have to explain myself why I need to hook up with someone. I am not looking for a relationship but just a proper hook-up. The reason I prepped for this is because I want this night to work to my favour. I wasn't willing to just walk into a club and wait to be picked by the random man who would give me ten minutes of his

time and let me walk out of bed without reaching an orgasm.

“I was waiting for the right candidate.”

“And I was a right candidate.” He slowly nods, probably feeling proud of himself for grabbing my attention.

“Yeah. You look like you know how to give a woman a good orgasm,” I say, very much aware that I am fuelling him to prove a point.

“Orgasms!” he corrects, emphasising the ‘s’ for plural. This gets me blushing and shifting on my chair.

“Do we really have to stay for supper?” I ask.

“I am not in the rush. We have the whole night and morning.”

I clear my throat at the morning part. I don’t plan to stay all night long but he doesn’t have to know.

“I take it you don’t have a girlfriend,” I ask. I cross my fingers so that he tells me he doesn’t have one. I didn’t think of this before coming this far but I don’t think I’ll enjoy myself knowing that I am betraying someone who is waiting for him at home. I get sick immediately, wanting to abort the mission immediately.

“Nix! No girlfriend, no cat, no dog, no nothing,” he response while raising his hand to call the waitress. He orders a glass of whiskey on the rocks and asks me what I want for supper. I take this opportunity to scan the menu that is in front of me. When the waiter returns with his glass and stands beside him to take our food order, he refuses supper and asks if he could choose for me.

When I give him the rights to do so, he questions my like for seafood and after establishing that I am open for anything, he suggests a lemon garlic baked salmon on the bed of buttered asparagus. I listen as he gives the waitress instructions on how the chef must prepare the salmon. I can't help but roll my eyes at him when the waitress leaves our table.

“Are you that controlling?”

“In bed? Not all the time,” he responds with twitching lips. I smile because, he is good at his game.

While I devour the best meal I have ever eaten in my entire life, Kings continues to throw in questions about me as if he is interested in me. The last time I felt something close to this was when my ex-boyfriend. It feels good to be wanted but that is not what I am looking for tonight.

By the time he takes my hand and guides me to the elevator, I am light headed. The mood is set and I am as horny as fuck. Before he reaches for the buttons, I press one for the hotel lobby. He turns his head and stares down at me.

“I booked a room,” I advise.

“You came prepared, didn't you?” he asks with a smirk.

“I wasn't just going to leave with a stranger.”

“Armed for war, aren't you?” he asks just when the elevator stops at the hotel lobby. It pings and the doors fly open. As we make our way to the corridor, I pull my hand from Kings hand so that I could reach for my key

which is in my clutch bag. Once done, he reaches for my hand once again. Looks like someone is big on public display. I used to crave for it when I was in a relationship, but now when Kings does it, my heart is flipping around and I don't like this feeling.

We are the only ones in the hotel elevator – which leads to where my room is – so Kings drops his mouth to my lips. My eyes shut before they reach there.

“You smell nice,” he mumbles to my ear.

What happened to those lips?

I open my eyes slowly, finding him smirking at me. The tease! When I am about to open my lips to speak, he finally delivers that kiss. His lips are so soft and wet that I close my eyes once again, to savour the kiss. He shifts closer to, almost sandwiching me to the wall of the elevator. I feel like fainting because he is taking up all the air. I moan softly, and he stops kissing me just to smile on my lips. I slowly open my eyes to find him staring down at me. The elevator stops and again, he takes my hand. I am wearing the shortest dress I ever owned but I feel so hot all over my body. We stop at the third door and I open the room for us. He pushes the door open and makes way for me.

“This must have costed you a fortune,” he comments when he closes the door. It did cost me a little fortune but it was the only place I could feel safe to go on this adventure. I am booked into the superior bedroom with lavish finishing. The Californian bed in the middle of the bedroom is well-made with what seems like the best

while bedding a hotel can offer, “I didn’t know nurses get paid well.”

I almost corrected him but luckily I recover by telling him that I got a good bonus for my birthday. While he takes his blazer off, I dart into the luxurious bathroom to take a quickest shower known to man.

I am applying my favourite strawberry body wash when Kings walks into the bathroom. He turns to me and watches me from behind the shower glass. He was right when he said that I am armed for war. In all way possible. Instead of hiding from him, I stand tall while he sits on the edge of the bath tub. He doesn’t shift his eyes from mine while I scrub my arms. It was supposed to be a quick shower but not anymore now that I have a spectator. We have all the time in the world. I know I have an effect on him when his eyes don’t follow my hand but stay locked with mine.

How weird is it to connect with someone in a situation like this? I don’t think I would have been comfortable to shower like this in front of a stranger.

Maybe it is the cocktails and champagne I had earlier.

He keeps his eyes on me but this time I cower, feeling like he can see through me and my lies about my name. I turn away from him, running away from his burning gaze. I focus on my shower and seducing him more with my movements. When I turn so that I could step out of the shower, he slowly gets on his feet and walks closer to the shower door, handing me a clean towel.

“Thank you,” I mumble while wrapping it.

He steps back and sits on the edge of the bath-tub watching me put on my favourite body butter and brush my weave back in place.

“Do you enjoy watching?” I ask.

“You have a beautiful body,” he responds. That is not what I asked but I smile at his response. It took me many years to get my body in this shape. I am a size 34 and I wish to keep it that way – no size down or up. I am content here.

I make my way back to the bedroom and end up at the closet where I have an overnight bag. I don't know how to initiate what comes next and Kings doesn't look like he is in a hurry. I pull the white gown from the rack but before I could put it on, Kings is standing behind me. I feel his body pressing on my back, and then his lips are on my bare shoulder. He drop soft kisses on my shoulder blades.

“You smell very nice,” he mumbles. I close my eyes when I feel his hands loosening my towel. He hasn't stopped dropping them kisses and now I can feel his penis against my butt. He tugs the towel and let the towel fly to the floor. Thereafter he turns me so that I could face him. His eyes are as blazing as mine and he is as hungry as I am.

“You are beautiful,” he mumbles before dropping his lips to one of my breasts. I gasp loudly when his tongue starts swiping my nipple while his warm and strong hands squeeze my butt softly. He swipes another nipple and cover it with his mouth.

Oh, holy Mary! I had forgotten how great it feels to be touched like this. He moves me closer to him, and I do feel his strong penis pressed on my stomach. He stands up straight and carefully lifts me up, and I don't fail to wrap my legs around his waist – this might be my only change to do this. He lifts his head and our mouths lock once again into a long passionate kiss.

This is my first! – being held like this while we kiss? I honestly thought stunts like these were staged.

He turns and carefully lays me on the bed. He stands at the edge of the bed before he gets on his knees as if he is about to worship me. He reaches for my legs, spread both of them and thereafter moves his hands to my butt to move me closer to the edge.

Am I not happy about the shower I just took?

Am I not proud of the waxing I did during the week in preparation for tonight?

Kings takes his time admiring me – he is indeed worshiping my body. I am about to ask him if he likes what he sees but I find myself rolling my eyes when his tongue parts my vagina lips and thereafter swipes my clit. Then he sucks!!

I slightly shake, making the both of us laugh.

I cannot believe that I am this weak! I am about to cover my eyes when he sucks the life out of me. I gasp loudly and widen my eyes as I welcome all the feelings that I am feeling. I tremble slightly but this time he doesn't stop. Instead he is determine to prove a point to me.

I feel the orgasm creeping close. My insides are tingling and I am ready to welcome the wave of orgasm when Kings stops.

Are you kidding me? I open my eyes which were shut and find him smirking down at me. He slowly gets on his feet and I watch eagerly as he unbuttons his black shirt. I want to rip the fucking thing off his body. He giggles – probably witnessing how impatient I am. His chest has a huge fascinating dark tattoo but I don't bother trying to make out what it is. My focus is on his toned abs. He strips down to nothing, and boy, I don't help but lick my lips when his penis stands strong, ready for action.

I move away from the edge so that I make room for him. I stop him from reaching for his wallet which is on the table. I show him the condom which I had placed under the pillow before I went out. He shakes his head with a smile while getting closer to me.

“I am armed for war,” I mumble while he puts it on. I spread my legs widely and Kings, like a King that he is, doesn't waste time giving me what I am looking for. He enters me slowly and carefully, causing my body to tremble with pain and pleasure. I bite my lips, close my eyes and welcome all, and when I mean all, I mean.... alllll of him.

He hisses while I moan.

Our eyes locks and communicate what is in our hearts.

I want him. He wants me. We want to drink from each other.

His hands are on my waist, pulling me to him so that he could fit it all in. Everything is happening in slow-motion and this is because Kings is so careful and loving with me. He is so tender. So, so, tender.

Once we are in tune, he starts. He starts sliding in and out. He starts making love... I mean fuckin me. Yes, he starts fuckin me like there isn't tomorrow.

That orgasm... that one which was ready to rip my body apart starts creeping back. I feel it on the tip of my toes first before it explodes and takes over my body. I don't hide it from him. I open my eyes wide and gasp for air before I breath out all the air slowly. A smile on my face confirms my satisfaction and his smirk tells me to brace myself for more.

I do brace myself for more because my toes tingle again! Inviting my second orgasm for the night.

I smile again!

This is how imagined my evening!

Chapter 7

Heart of STEEL

KINGS

Three more rounds later and seven more orgasms, Nonku is exhausted and so am I. While discarding the condom with a tissue, she watches me with a drunk smile on her face. She is overly satisfied. I throw the

tissue into the bin in the bathroom and join her under the sheets.

“Are you happy now?” I ask, while spooning her. I love how she fits perfectly in my arms. I love how she smells. I like me some woman who smells clean. She doesn’t have to smell like a floral shop... but just clean.

“Mhhh!”

“Tired much?”

“Exhausted,” she mumbles this with a smile. Her smiles always reach her eyes and they always brighten her face. Truth be told, she is a beautiful woman.

It takes her just a few minutes for her to fall asleep. I know this because the way she breathes has changed. When I am about to trace my fingers on her bare shoulder, she sighs deeply before shifting to change the side. I freeze, not wanting to wake her up but I am too late. She opens her eyes slightly before she looks up at me. We are facing each other this time.

“Did I wake you?” I ask.

“I am a light sleeper,” she mumbles before giving me her beautiful smile.

“Do you really have to sleep?”

“I have no more orgasms left in me,” she jokes. I burst into a loud laughter, so loud I might have disturbed the guests in the next room.

“Should I prove you wrong?” I ask, already running my hand over her hip. I could let us sleep and finish this up

in the morning but I don't think I'll still be up when she wakes up. She blinks at me with heavy eye lids. I want to continue to mark her body but I am not that selfish. Maybe I could sleep in and finish this off in the morning before I take her to breakfast. I am not one to do this but she is quite something else. I drop a kiss on her lips and tell her to sleep. She doesn't respond but closes her eyes and drifts back to sleep.

After our first round, we ordered more champagne and whiskey into the room and spent most of the evening chatting up. By the time we were on our third round of sex, we were having drunk sex and I'd say, it was the best sex I have had in a very long while ... if not ever! Nonku giggled throughout our fucking session and her screams were louder.

Right now, I'm cursing myself for sleeping before I headed to the club yesterday. It is almost four o'clock and I have no sleep and I am no longer as tipsy as I was earlier. If it wasn't Nonku in my arms, I would have walked out of here hours ago. I don't know why but I couldn't get myself to leave her sleeping like I normally sneak out of the room. I don't know why I can't bring myself to leave some money on the pedestal and a note instructing her to spoil herself when she wakes up.

My alarm goes off at five o'clock and I quickly switch it off before it could wake Nonku up. I change the alarm to nine o'clock – three or so hours of sleep should be enough for me to survive a day. After sliding my phone under the pillow, I force myself to rest.

The room is still dark when I lift my head from the pillow. My phone is vibrating from under it. Pulling it so that I could switch the alarm off, I notice that I am alone in bed. Nonku's side is empty and cold. I switch the alarm off before jumping out of bed in search of her.

She didn't, did she?

The bathroom door is open but I still make my way there to check if she is inside.

She isn't and her huge toiletry bag that was by the bath tub is not there anymore. After taking a leak and washing my hands and running cold water on my face, I head back to the bedroom and scan the room for any sign of Nonku's belongings.

There isn't any.

Her clutch bag which was on the pedestal is gone.

Maybe she went to grab a good cup of coffee for us, right? She likes a good cup of coffee just like I do, right?

Mhh!

I don't bother trying to make excuses for her or search the closet for the overnight bag when I notice a written note on the table.

'Thank you for a great time. It'll sure take a miracle for me to forget it.'

Like fuck it will. She just managed to piss me off and my day is going to be nothing but shitty. But I am pissed at myself more for not walking out of this room hours ago

when I couldn't fucking sleep! To think that I stayed for her? I stayed because I didn't want to break her little heart?

But wait!

I don't know what to make of this. Was this her plan all along? Or did she realise that this was a mistake?

Fuck! I jump when a thought creeps in. I rush to where I had gathered my clothes last night during our drinking session. My wallet is still in place and I am very certain she didn't try to open it. If she did, I would have known. Frustrated, and I don't know why I am fucking frustrated, I put my boxers on and then my pants. I pick the note from the table and turn it, wondering if she left her cell phone numbers.

And she didn't.

She didn't have the decency to leave her numbers so that she could explain herself.

I snatch my shirt from where I left it last night and put it on. I grab my jacket and put it on before before walking out of the room and straight to the parking lot.

Oh, wow!

My phone vibrates as I drive into my garage. Rhulani's name is flashing on my screen.

"What?" I groan.

"Not a good morning?" he asks but continues before I give him an answer because he knows the answer.

"Thabitha needs to confirm your driver for Sunday

evening. What time do you need to drive out of the camp?”

“Soon after the dinner event,” I respond.

“When do you drive out from Sandton?”

“Tomorrow, four o’clock.”

“Got it!” With that, he is gone.

As I step out of the black Mercedes Benz GLE, Thabitha walks up to me. I am late for the formal welcome to our summer camp. She hands me a tablet and steps beside me.

“We tried delaying the start but you should go ahead to the podium,” she informs me. I browse through the programme before handing the tablet back to her.

I unbutton my blazer as I step into the podium and smile to the room filled with hopeful parents and a bunch of teenagers who probably don’t see a need to be here.

For ten minutes I give a speech about what our summer camp is all about. The term ‘summer camp’ is to make this camp sounds like fun. It is far from that. This is a boot camp where no shit is considered. Obviously not everyone qualifies to be here. I have a team that do intakes and I am quite sure that all these teenagers darting their eyes at me have deep issues we need to

out-root. For that reason, we work closely with a team of therapists to jump in.

“I did not want to do this but a friend of mine needed help with his teenagers. After a successful turn out of events, I saw a need to do this. Before you give up on your children, we are here to offer the help you might be looking for. Trust us with your kids. After 10 days of engagement with them, we need you back here for what we call, ‘Family Repair’. When your child returns home, we need the systems to be in place for him and her to be successful.’

By the time I walk out of the stage, the parents are more hopeful than they were.

During supper, I plant that wide fake smile on my face and walk around the tables to meet and greet the families and our candidates. Some children need not to be here but their parents spoil them to no return. Some kids don’t see a need to live and those ones are the vulnerable ones. The ones Karen deals with mostly.

I am taken aback when I stop on a table with a family of three and the boy is hissing at his mother. This is not new to me since most parents hide the truth about this camp but the man who looks defeated next to the woman is Theodore Masindi. The man behind the reason why I have to be at Gumede Enterprise. The reason why I got to meet the first woman to succeed in the hit ‘n run, where I am the victim.

Bloody Nonkululeko.

“Good evening,” I greet, standing next to the boy and the mother.

Theodore quickly gets on his feet and takes my hand. He needs not to say it, I know what that look is all about. His woman doesn't know about me and she doesn't have to know now.

“I am pleased to meet you, sir,” Theodore says, shaking my hand. I didn't know his kid is enrolled for this.

“I am not going to talk to you twice,” the woman hisses but the boy jumps to his feet and marches away from the table. I lift my eyes and when they meet Thabitha's, whose job is to make my life easier, I point at the boy – indicating that she gets someone to attend to him.

“They'll handle him,” I say to the mother who was getting ready to follow him. She sighs deeply and turns to face me.

“We didn't want to tell him about the camp because he would have refused to come,” she announces. I nod at her.

“Is he even a teenager?” I ask.

“No. But he really needs this. The lady at recruitment said you could make an exception. He really needs this.”

Theodore pulls his woman close, rubs her back to calm her and kisses her temple and thereafter suggests that she goes and grab some dessert while he has a word with me. She turns to face him, gives him a hug and thereafter drags her feet to the buffet.

“He is Gumede’s biological son,” Theodore says. I knew the back story minus all the shittiest mess the man did on his son. I get why the boy is the way he is. The mighty Gumede’s offspring. We don’t touch about the case because he knows that the turnaround time for the first report is not even close. When Abigail returns, Theodore told me her name just a minute ago, I find myself staring at her. Ndumiso Gumede is a scumbag of a man. I can only wonder what she saw in a piece of trash like him. And when she comments about the cakes, I realise that she is the main wife... well, ex-wife... who made the news.

I leave the lovers to finish their supper after promising to see them the coming week when we do the Family Repair.

Monday morning I am late for work. Of course, I only made it back to my apartment after midnight. The camp site is miles away and I couldn’t leave until the last parent left the restaurant to their booked accommodation. I promised Thabile that I’ll return to the camp on Wednesday, after finding a valid reason to skip work for a week and half.

Dragging my feet to Gumede Enterprise, I take a deep sigh. I am not ready for what awaits me inside. The elevator pings before the doors open. I am always here by seven thirty but today, I am a good hour late. Ephraim

gives me a frown as I greet him quietly while walking past his desk. I don't even get a chance to sit down before the girl who sits next to me tells me not to bother sit down because the boss wants to see the payment capturers.

I carefully place my backpack in the drawer and grab a notebook just like this girl here. The other three guys make their way to Nonku's office and I follow behind. Believe me, this is the last place I want to go to. I am afraid I cannot hide how pissed I am at her and I don't want her to see through me. I am not very lucky because I get the chair not too far away from where she is seated. She has gotten rid of that weave she had on Friday night. The pink suit she has on is sophisticated; nothing like that short dress that had my blood rushing. The only thing that hasn't changed is the sweet smile. Her scent is very fresh to my nose.

I groan, shaking my head so that I can shake off my fresh memory of her face each time she reached her orgasm. How perfect her face was each time I fucked her. Her scent is so strong and I made sure to spray cheap body spread all over my clothes and body so that she doesn't pick mine.

She has been busy on her laptop, so she is done with whatever she was busy with, she shuts her laptop and stares at us.

"Good morning guys," she greets and sighs deeply. Everyone, including me, mumbles back the greeting. "How was your weekend?" she throws this question and

smiles at us. Again, everyone mumble something between 'good', 'great' and 'short'. She likes being very casual with the colleagues so she asks what we were all up to. She listens as we share with her about what we were doing this past weekend. She had her eyes on me when I mumbled that I spent mine playing FIFA computer games with my cousin. She can't tell that I was the one making her roll her eyes the whole of Friday night.

"What did You do this weekend, ma'am?" the girl, who normally invades my space during lunch, asks. I am yet to catch her name.

Nonku smiles, looks up to the ceiling, sighs deeply as she bring her eyes back to the girl and said, "I got to finally do something that was on my bucket list for quite some time. I had fun."

'Why don't you just tell them that you spent the Friday night in bed...with me, curling your toes to countless orgasms only for you to run away while I slept?' It takes every little fibre in my body for me to stop myself from spitting those exact words.

Bucket list my foot!

Chapter 8

Heart of STEEL

NONKU

These guys are lucky that I am in a great mood today, or else we would have started on THE wrong foot.

I dart my eyes around the table, waiting for all the mumbles to die down.

“How are you guys finding it here at Gumedede Enterprise?” I ask. I like throwing these kinds of questions to my teams, as I like to get to know how things on the floor are, because I know how things can get there in the cubicles.

Everyone agrees that everything is going well, and Ephraim has not given them any problems since the day I put him in his place. I am glad to hear this.

“The reason I called you here is because of the mistakes we picked up on some of the payments captured this past Friday. The mistakes might be insignificant, but I want you guys to be diligent with your work. Do you need training?” I ask.

“Is it all of us who are making mistakes?” Kingston asks. I turn my gaze to him, and for a second there, our eyes lock and I hate that his brother’s face is all I see in my head. I swallow hard and shake my head to get rid of those thoughts before they dominate my mind to the extent of slipping off of my tongue.

“It isn’t all of you,” I respond.

“I don’t need training,” Dinah, one of the sweet ladies, says then turns to Kingston and says, “And that’s a good question, Kingston, because it cannot be all of us who are making mistakes. I am very diligent with my work.”

“I understand, Dinah. I do have two names of the officials who made some minor mistakes, but I called you all so that I could address this once and for all to everyone who is here. You are clerks, right? This is a first job to some of you, so I don't want to be hard on you and I don't want the floor supervisors to be hard on you as well.”

When I heard one of the floor supervisors complaining about three transactions which were incorrectly captured, I saw the need to bring these guys in and give them a little session on what to look out for when capturing the transactions on our Accounting system. I get it, our system is complicated, and before I come down hard on my staff, I am going to bring myself to their level so that I take them through a step-by-step tutorial. I am that patient. VERY patient.

We are done with our session just before lunch.

When Fifi walks into my office to give me all the messages she took for me while I was tied up, she stresses that I call Vule, because she has been flooding my office phone with calls. I scan through the message sticky notes, stopping at one with a reminder to join the CFO when she attends a meeting with the team for the 'Africa's Greatest Pop Star Show' project. This is the first and most important briefing session with the client. I put the message notes on the table and reach for my cellphone, which I had put away before my meeting, and, indeed, my friend has been blowing up my phone. I

don't really panic, because I know the reason for this is because she likes gossip so much.

On Saturday morning, I sent her that 'I am home and safe' text, and that was at half-past seven, which is too early for her to be up on a weekend. She texted back, asking how things went, and I promised to call her with the details. I never called her, with the knowledge that she is spending her weekend in her man's arms.

After dialling her number, I roll my lipgloss on my lips while I wait for her to pick up.

"You are a hard woman to find," she answers the call.

"Been busy, okay? Just like you have been busy entertaining indoda the whole weekend."

"You know that I am trying to make things work with him before I throw in the towel. But I couldn't wait for Monday so that you could fill me in on your adventure. Mama's Spot?"

"It's a Monday..."

"No, I don't want an update over the phone. I want to see your face and that smile," she says.

"What smile?" I ask.

"The one you have on right now," she responds before she bursts out laughing. She knows me all too well.

"Two cocktails have never killed anyone," I respond.

This time around, my friend is the first to arrive and she is already halfway through her martini. I blow her a kiss

while I pull my chair and settle on it. She doesn't even give me a chance to breathe before she leans in and stares at me with eyes full of judgment.

“What?”

“You are glowing,” she says. “Nonkululeko, you are glowing!”

“Oh, please.” I laugh, but she doesn't remove her gaze from me, instead, she stares at me until I blush. “Stop it!”

“So, I left the club, and then...?” she leads MY story. This girl!

“Can I order a drink first?” I say and laugh just when the waitress walks over to our table. I give her my order for my usual – a Cosmopolitan; after which she drops the menu on the table, then disappears.

“I left the club...” Vule is so impatient.

I smile as I recall the events of that night.

I am very pleased with my pick, because he was perfect in every way. Vule smiles when I tell her about our supper, and oh, my new favourite meal. I don't leave out how sexy Kings is; the tattoo on his chest, and the huge one which covers his back. She claps her hands when I close my eyes and tell her about how perfect he smells, as though I can smell him right now.

“Did he deliver the orgasms?”

“Ohhhh!” I throw my head back and do a little dance.

“THAT good?”

“That good? He is a King!”

“King of orgasms.”

“Bonaaa!!!”

Vule giggles as I unpack each and every orgasm he gave me. I was aiming for two orgasms, but hey, he exceeded my expectations - beyond!

“Did you cuddle?”

“Most of the night,” I respond with a smile.

We stay quiet, sipping our cocktails.

And during that silence, my mind wanders off to that night... Kings was perfect in all ways, and the fact that he is neat and was very careful with me, it is going to be so difficult to find the perfect boyfriend. The older I get, the pickier I get, and my sister worries that with all these expectations that I have, I might end up alone, and that is not a very bad idea. But if Kings is -

“And she fell in love,” Vule says, pulling me from my thoughts.

“What? No!”

“Yes!”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“I am not in love. If I was, I would have stayed with him in the next morning,” I say.

Vule’s eyes widen.

“You went ahead with the plan?” she asks, and when I nod, she gets on her feet and unexpectedly claps her hands. This girl! “Nonku? You hit it and ran?”

“Don’t say it like THAT. Please sit down,” I say while pulling her hand so that she can sit down, and stop exaggerating the whole thing.

“That is what it is.”

I wonder how he felt when he woke up and found me gone... He cannot be hurt, right? We both knew this was a hook-up, a one-night stand. I was very clear and honest with my intentions.

“So, are you going to see him again?”

“What? No! You’d have to kill me before I set foot at his club again.”

“What if he comes looking for you? He has your name and he does look like a man with the resources to do so.”

“He’ll go searching for 'Zama Bhengu',” I respond before we crack into another fit of laughter.

I had a great time, man! But now, it is time to move on.

My Friday morning is already hectic.

I had to start work at six o'clock to finalise my reports for the meeting the CFO and I are headed to right now; this client is big and there is no room for mistakes.

"Are you ready to charm them with your presentation?" the CFO asks. She laughs softly before tapping my hand and telling me that she is already proud of what I am going to present, and I give her a warm smile; I don't doubt her words.

We are seated at the back of the shuttle and I am praying that I DO nail the presentation; this is my first year as a manager and this meeting is with the big shots.

At the reception of BNK Pty, the receptionist asks that we take a seat while she finds out why our meeting is not on the calendar.

"Are you sure your meeting is confirmed? I don't have anything on my screen for ten o'clock," the receptionist says from behind her desk. I pull my laptop from my bag and scroll through to the calendar. Right there, under 10 o'clock, is a meeting scheduled at BNK Pty. I jump from the chair and head to the receptionist, turning my screen to her so that she sees the meeting request.

"Who are the attendees from our side?"

"Jerry, Tumelo and Alfred," I respond.

She picks the landline and makes a call. I watch her as she explains to whoever is on the other side of the phone, and also as she nods a few times before putting the phone down.

“Jerry will come see you. He is just stuck in a meeting.”

“Thank you.”

Returning to where the CFO is seated, I continue to scroll through my emails in search of any meeting cancellation or postponement; I give up when I don't find anything.

Twenty minutes later, a tall white guy hurriedly walks over to where the CFO and I are seated; he shakes our hands before taking the chair and introducing himself as Jerry.

“I think I am confused,” he says, darting his eyes between the CFO and I. “You guys cancelled the meeting after informing us that you will not be taking our gig this year.”

“What?” I shriek.

“Who said such a thing?” the CFO asks.

“You! The email came from you last week.”

“Me? I did no such a thing. How can I cancel one of our biggest deals? And why would I cancel without a reason?” she adds. Jerry reaches for his cellphone and scroll through it before handing it to the CFO. She frowns and says, “I don't remember sending such an email.” She passes the phone to me, and I scroll through a chain of messages where the email informing BNK Pty about the cancellation of services is, right there on Jerry's phone.

“We are busy searching for another company to work with, right as we speak,” Jerry says.

“No, this is a huge misunderstanding; we are not cancelling anything. We are here to make a presentation, and Nonku has worked on this thing for the whole week. Why would she waste her time if we were planning on cancelling?”

After the back and forth, Jerry agrees to reschedule the meeting and inform his team about the misunderstanding.

Thank goodness!

On our drive back, the CFO is on her phone with her team and IT team, trying to figure out what happened.

Fifi is shocked to see me standing in front of her desk, fishing for my keys. I tell her the meeting was postponed before I walk into my office and kick off my stilettoes.

Yoh, I worked my ass off this week.

I am only back here for my one o'clock meeting, then I am heading out of the office. If there was ever a day when I needed a glass of wine, it is today. I can't wait to get home and soak myself in a bathtub before picking a series to binge-watch while sipping on some wine.

Fifi walks into my office while I am standing by the window, just taking a breather. She drops her eyes to my shoes, then moves them back at me, but doesn't comment.

“Lehlo is collecting contribution money. She is scared to come in and ask for some money from you,” Fifi says

while handing me a paper with our colleagues' names and signatures.

“Contribution, for what?”

“Kingston’s brother passed away on Wednesday. He was here at work on Wednesday morning when he received the call to urgently come back home. So yesternoon, he called Aus' Nobuntu to tell her that his brother’s passed away in an accident and he needs a few days off.”

“What?” I ask, my hand landing on my stomach as if someone just gave me a blow. I am glad I don’t have my stilettos on, or else I would have missed a step while reaching for the chair that I am throwing myself onto.

“It is sad, right?” Fifi says. “He was so sad on Wednesday.”

“Did he say what his brother’s name was?” I ask. She shakes her head. I clear my throat. “Can you please get me his number, so that I can call him and check up on him?”

“Okay.”

My body is filled with goosebumps. I don’t know why, but, for some reason, I am affected by this.

My hands are shaking while I wait for Fifi to return with the cellphone number. She walks into my office with a piece of paper.

“Are you alright?” she asks.

“I hate funerals,” I mumble while receiving the paper. I hand her the contribution list together with the only three hundred rands I had in my wallet. The second she closes the door behind her, I dial Kingston’s number, which rings unanswered and when I am about to give up on my third try, the phone is answered.

“Hello?”

“Hi!” I say while jumping up from the chair. The line goes quiet, so I add, “Kingston, is that you?”

“Who is this?” he asks.

“Nonku...” I quickly answer and the phone goes quiet again. “I heard about your brother. Are you okay?”

“Yah!”

“I am so sorry, Kingston,” I whisper. I have no words for him.

“Sorry for?”

“Your brother,” I say.

“Oh yah!” he clears his throat. “It’s okay.”

“Which brother is it?” I ask, hoping that it is not Kingsley. I swallow hard at the possibility that it is him - I feel bad, I don’t know why. I know that I might not see him again, but knowing that he is dead won’t sit well with me.

“Do you know my brothers?” he asks.

“Uhm...” I clear my throat, contemplating on whether I should lie or tell the truth. But if I don’t tell the truth, I might not get the answer I am looking for. “I know your twin brother.”

“You know my twin brother?”

“He owns a club I go to.”

“Oh,” he says, then becomes quiet. I wait for him to give me the answer.

“Is it him?” I ask, but he doesn’t say anything. I wait, even though I am not patient. But after what seems like forever, I ask, and this time my voice is breaking, “Kingston, is it Kingsley who passed away?”

“No,” he whispers.

“Oh...” I whisper back while taking my seat.

Relief!

I have no idea why I am relieved!

“I have to go,” Kingston says after a deep sigh.

“Yes, don’t let me keep you.”

He is long gone when I remember that I was supposed to say, 'My condolences'.

Chapter 9

Heart of STEEL

KINGS!

She has a heart after all...

I smirk, sending back the phone to Rhulani who slides it into the laptop sleeve.

“Did you really have to tell people that your brother – a brother that doesn’t exist, at that – has passed away?” Rhulani asks before downing a bottle of water. We are in the middle of the bushes, basically nowhere, but Rhulani has a laptop open on his lap, because he has to work.

“What was I supposed to say?” I ask. “There was no way that moron Ephraim was going to allow me to leave the office and be absent for a week and a half; I started that job just two weeks ago, for crying out loud!”

“I am just saying that it is a little too much. People are sympathizing with you!”

“Well, good for me.” Rhulani shakes his head, not pleased with my answer.

I get him, though, it IS a little too much, but I didn’t have any other – better – excuse. And I didn’t think anyone would care, I met all those people from Gumede Enterprise just a few weeks ago, I didn’t know they were going to cry and hug me upon receiving a fake phonecall; and, I didn’t know the boss lady cared enough.

“They are scheduling another meeting,” Rhulani says as he punches on the laptop.

“Let them. We will strike when they least expect it,” I respond, dropping my hands to my waist and scanning the field before me. It is lunch hour, and the teenagers are seated in groups, eating the fruits they gathered during their challenge.

“What is the boy’s name again?” I ask, pointing at Theodore’s boy. He is seated alone in a corner, not bothering to eat the fruits in front of him, or drink water, at the very least.

Rhulani gives the boy a once-over and says, “Mpho!”

“Mpho!” I repeat to myself, trying to engrave the name in my thick skull.

“He is the only kid here. So, why don’t you associate his name with that fun fact, so that you don’t forget it? You keep asking his name every second hour.”

“Speaking of that, how was he granted enrolment? He is tiny, for crying out loud,” I comment and Rhulani shrugs.

I sigh, ready to make my way to where he is seated, when Rhulani says, “Be nice, he is just a kid.”

What is that supposed to mean? Karen and Stephanie are the nicer ones, not me.

I walk up to him and stand just in front of him. He sees my feet, but doesn’t lift his head to look at me.

“Why are you not eating?” I ask. I give him a chance to respond, but he stays quiet, doesn’t even bother raising his head. “In thirty minutes, we are going to start with another task.”

I thought these past few days something had changed – improved, if you may – because he’s been participating in the activities with the other kids, but sometimes, he just likes to isolate himself.

I call out to Jim, one of the camp instructors, and he jogs up to me.

“Sir!”

“Can he swim?” I ask. I only got here just two days ago, so I wasn’t with them when they did the water activities on Tuesday.

“Yes, he can.”

“Deep water?” I ask and Jim nods. He is tiny, hence I am worried about him.

“Yes!”

Without thinking twice, I stand behind him and scoop him up off the ground. He gasps loudly before he starts fighting me when it has registered in his mind what is going on. This grabs the attention of all the other kids who are eating from the lined benches. I cross the field towards the obstacle course that we have prepared for tomorrow’s activities, with Mpho still fighting, and when I climb the steps that lead me to the top of a huge water tank, he fights even harder. I don’t think twice before I throw him into the water tank. He screams, then closes his mouth before he gets deep into the water. I give him two seconds before he comes back floating up.

“Why did you do that?!” he yells.

“No one keeps quiet to me when I talk to them. If you knew your way home from here, I would have kicked you out of my camp.”

“Get me out,” he says. The only way he can get out of the tank is by reaching a rope which is just on top of his

head, and he can't do that on his own, because this exercise is designed for team-work.

I turn to Jim and order him to bring me the boy's food. I don't give a damn whether or not he eats his food, but I don't want him fainting on us – the day before us is still long.

While I wait for Jim, I sit on the top edge of the tank, my feet dangling inside the tank.

“We have thirty minutes until the next task. If you don't finish your food before then, I'll leave you behind, only to come back for you after an hour,” I warn.

He is a swimmer, so an hour of him being in this tank of water won't kill him. Jim gives me a container with Mpho's untouched food. I pick an apple and tell him to catch it, but he doesn't.

I smile.

We are dealing with a serious case here.

I don't bother myself again, so I get up, and go back to stand on the top of the step.

“When you are ready to eat, call out my name. If not, you are welcome to die in there,” I say before walking away from the tank. He is not moved by my threat, because chances are his parents threaten him so much, he's gotten used to it being a bluff, because they never act on it.

Well, difference is, I am not his parents.

Stopping next to Rhulani, he shakes his head at me.

“What?”

The next task of the day is paintballing.

Jim and Sharon help the kids get in teams of two and give them their uniforms.

This is our fifth day, so these kids have made friends already, and are, by now, enjoying the tasks; well, except for just a selected few who have to go in and out of the therapists’ office. The only difference between Mpho and those other kids is the fact that he doesn’t WANT to talk about his issues.

Everyone around here is soft, and I don’t think I consider myself that.

It has been over forty-five minutes since I threw the boy into the tank, and he hasn’t called for me yet, and Rhulani has not stopped reminding me that, should he drown, I’ll be sued; to which, with a smile on my face, I respond with the reminder of the indemnity forms his parents signed on his behalf.

“Help!” Mpho calls out.

It’s about time.

“He needs help,” Rhulani calls out from the tent where he is seated.

I stop Jim from going there, since Mpho and I need to talk. I grab his container, then make my way to the tank.

“Can you be a little fast?” Rhulani is panicking on Mpho’s behalf..

“He is fine,” I respond.

I know how a person at the brink of death sounds.

I get to the top of the staircase and look down at Mpho. His little face is burnt by the sun, and he looks weak this time around. Without warning him, I throw a bottle of water to him and he catches it. I get settled on the edge of the tank while he downs the water. When he is done, the empty bottle floats there next to him. I aim the banana at him, and he doesn't miss it. Next, are the two peaches.

“They tell me you don't want to talk to the therapists,” I say and this time he doesn't move his eyes up to me. “Look at me when I talk to you.” He drags his eyes up to me. “Why are you not talking to the therapists?” He shrugs his response. “Speak!”

“I don't have anything to say,” he says in a breaking voice.

“I CAN'T HEAR YOU!” I roar.

“I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY!” he yells back.

“What is your name?”

“Mpho!”

“Why are you here?”

“My mother brought me here.”

“Why did your mother bring you here?”

“Because she says she is tired of my behaviour,” he says.

“I CAN’T HEAR YOU!” I yell out, so that he repeats himself; he must hear himself say that.

“She is tired of my behaviour.”

“What behaviour is that?”

He goes quiet, so I repeat myself to him.

“I don’t listen to anyone – at all,” this, he says in a whisper.

I want to yell at him to repeat that, but he sounds defeated. So I ask my next question, “Why don’t you want to listen to everyone?”

“I don’t know; it just happens,” he says, this time he is crying.

I know about all the things he went through in his formative years, and I know he has anger in him – which is his defense mode from getting his tiny heart hurt – but he is too young to know that; he doesn’t even know what it is that he is feeling.

“Is this how I am going to get you to talk?” I question, and he shakes his head. “I can’t hear you.”

“No!”

“No, what?”

“No, Sir!” he cries out.

I get on my feet and snatch off the vest I am wearing before I dive into the tank. I help him to the rope and guide him through what to do in order to get to the staircase. He grabs the rope, and swings his little legs,

then fights to get to where I direct him. His little body shakes when he finally stands on the top of the stairs.

I jump up to get the rope and pull myself out of the tank. Moses, one of our paramedics in sight, reaches for the boy and throws a blanket over his head.

“Go and rest, I’ll see you at supper.” I excuse the boy for the rest of the day.

Five-thirty. We have an hour before supper is served, then it’s board games around the bonfire.

I throw myself on the bed that is in my luxurious tent. Of course, I am in a luxurious tent that most couples book for their honeymoon, while the kids sleep in the tent they attempted to put up themselves.

I pull up the text messages that Rhulani informed me about.

One text message is from Dinah from work, asking that I send her the banking details so that she can transfer the money they contributed for my brother’s funeral.

Maybe Rhulani is right – maybe I should have come up with a better excuse.

The next message has me sitting up:-

‘Hey, Kingston, Nonku here. I just wanted to offer my sincere condolences to you and your family; I am so sorry for your loss. You and your family are in my prayers. And please, don’t hesitate to call me if you need someone to talk to.’

Hmm!

I sigh, reading the messages over and over again. Checking the details of the SMS, it was sent just after the phone call she made.

I lie back on the bed and contemplate whether to respond to the text message or not. I am tempted to respond, but I don't want to take this fake death thing to the next level. I could, but it wouldn't benefit me in any way.

So I ignore the text message.

Five-thirty, the following morning, everyone is up and taking their place on the yoga mat.

Nomfundo, the yoga instructor, is stretching on the small podium, getting ready to start the day. I scan the field until I find the boy I am looking for.

"Mpho!" I roar.

Few heads turn, including the one that belongs to the Mpho that I am looking for. I beckon for him to come to me. He gets on his feet and walks up to me, and before he even reaches me, I ask, "Are you feeling fresh?"

"Yes..." he says as he stands in front of me.

"Yes, what?" I ask, my voice slightly raised.

"Yes, Sir!"

That's better.

It is five thirty, the boy is grumpy, and to be fair, so is everyone else.

I turn towards the cart where we keep our gym equipment. I pull two boxing gloves that seem small enough to fit his small hands and help him put them on. Thereafter, I pick two punch mitts.

“Are we doing boxing?” he asks.

“Yes.”

If it weren't for time, I would have been teaching him Martial Arts. This is the one thing I am to suggest the parents to enroll him under, because studying Martial Arts is an incredibly effective way for developing self-discipline. And this boy here needs to learn how to control his feelings and overcome his weaknesses. But for now, Boxing will do.

They have been practicing Boxing as part of their exercises, but Mpho needs more than that.

I position the mitts and tell him to start punching. He throws in a punch and I suppress a laugh. He knows the techniques because he has been doing it since the beginning of the week.

“Give me a sharp punch!” I roar and he throws a better one. He throws another one. “Breathe, and throw!” I continue. He does, and ten punches later, we start moving like he has learnt this past week. We move as he throws the combo punch.

“Hands high and elbows down,” I correct him from a wrong move. “Move faster.” He tries to catch up with me. “Faster!” He tries to match my movements. “Breathe, and throw sharp punches.” I can see the frustration on his face as he tries to keep up with me. “Hit! Breathe! Elbows down. Hands high, and elbows down! Faster!”

He stops and his shoulders start shaking as he cries and tries to catch his breath. I don’t entertain him, but what I do is push him even more. “Come on, let’s go! Sharp punches! Let’s go!” He shakes his head. “We are getting rid of that anger. Come on, punch the mitts!” He shakes his head and walks closer to me. My hands are in the air, ready for his punch, but instead, he wraps his arms around my waist.

“I don’t want to,” he says, trying hard to catch his breath. He is still crying.

“Why!?”

“I don’t like how it makes me feel more angry.”

“What are you angry about?”

“My dad. I am angry at my dad and his friends.”

“Are you ready to talk to Karen?” I ask. Karen is the therapist.

He nods. My vest is getting wet, and my hands are still in the air while his are wrapped around my torso.

“I will,” he whisper. Only now do I drop my hands to his shoulders.

He deals with his anger and stubbornness and I'll deal with his father.

Chapter 10

Heart of Steel

Nonkululeko (Unedited)

It is three thirty when I finally give up of expecting a text message from Kingston. He must be busy with the funeral preparations or it might be that he is hurting about his brother's death. I don't know, but I wish I had Kingsley's number, just to send my condolences message to him.

Or maybe not – it cannot be a good idea.

I have no business with Kingsley anymore. But I can only wonder if he is going to reconnect with his twin brother? If he does, and gets to ask about me, he is going to find out the truth about my lies.

I shake all these thoughts away. I have no business thinking about Kings. I have no business at all. Do I?

A faint knock comes from my door, jerking me from my thoughts. Fifi opens the door and stands there leaning on the frame.

“Are you okay?” she asks. My mood hasn't been the best today. But I think I am just exhausted from overworking myself this past week.

“Yeah! I think I should just head home,” I say this as I get on my feet so that I pack my things into my bag.

I need my bath tub right away.

I place my laptop bag on the table and start packing my things in it.

“I guess we will give Kingston the contribution money when he returns to the office or next week,” Fifi says. I stop and turn to face her. “He is not responding to any of our text messages.”

“Oh, okay,” I respond, feeling some sense of relief. He might be really tied up. With that she walks out of the office, leaving me to my packing. I pick my phone which is on the table and clear the search tab where I wanted to search for Kings Club. I don’t know why I feel guilty for not saying anything to him while I know about the death of his sibling.

I grab my chair and search for a Florist. When I find one in town, I place an order for a white lily sympathy bouquet to be sent to the club.

Yes, this makes me feel better.

At home, I throw a packet of frozen veggies in the oven and strip out of my clothes before throwing them into the washing machine with the pile I need to wash. I pick the remote from my coffee table and play the afrobeats mix I love so much. I put the speaker on full blast and get in tune to better my mood. It is at five thirty when I dish for myself and fill a glass with white wine before taking the couch. I text my sister, checking in with her about the

birthday party tomorrow. She tells me that everything should be ready and the party starts at one. I promise to show up at twelve so that I can assist with the touch ups.

My evening routine includes soaking myself in a bathtub, with a glass of wine. I do just that until the water gets cold. I get into my short PJs and jump to bed. Going through my Instagram, I notice that Bonolo and Khodi are on vacation with their boyfriends. How sweet! I react to all their pictures before screen crabbing one and sending it to Vule, asking her why she is not at the bae cation.

Her responds comes in immediately.

‘What relationship? Mine is dead.’

‘Stop playing, Vule.’

‘I am serious. We broke up two days ago but you were too busy to answer my call.’

I immediately dial her number, already neglecting her this past week. Thinking about how hard I worked and how the meeting was accidentally cancelled, I am pissed.

“You need to share your sex toys’ supplier,” Vule answers the phone. I laugh at her craziness. We are supposed to be mourning her relationship here.

“Yeah, right,” I roll my eyes at her, even though she doesn’t see me.

“I am serious. I am in search of a vibrator as we speak. He has been starving me for two weeks,” she says.

“You are not going to enjoy it so soon,” I say.

“Enjoy what?”

“The vibrator. You need to forget the real dick first.”

“Speaking from experience? Hmmm! Are you having a problem after tasting Kings dick?”

“Oh, my goodness... I thought you needed a shoulder.”

“Nah! I am fine now.” We stay quiet for a short while.

“What’s wrong? Whats up?”

“What do you mean?” I ask her.

“You are sad. What wrong?”

“I don’t know,” I mumble with a shrug. “I had a bad week and I just can’t wait to see my sister and mother tomorrow at my nephew’s birthday party. I’ll be fine after seeing them.”

“Are you sure you are not missing Kings? We can hit the club right now,” Vule offers.

“Stop that, Vule. I am never setting my foot there. Also, Kings might be in a very bad space wherever he is. He lost a brother. I know because Kingston is away because of that.”

“Oh, that is why you are sad.”

“What? No! Why would I be sad? I didn’t even know the brother.”

“You know how it is to lose a sibling. You lost your brother once. So, now because you care about Kings, you are sad...”

I hang up the phone.

I don't have it in me to joke about death and my friend knows it very well.

My phone pings with a 'sorry text' before it rings.

"Okay, I am sorry... let's not bring Mlungisi up," she immediately says when I put the phone to my ear. She knows how I still feel about my little brother's death. We were very young but I get so saddened when I think about it. His death was a shock to all of us, mostly because he was shot in Kimberly. The family never got an answer, so we do not have closure to his death. If I could, I'd never bring his name up for the rest of my life.

Vule stays on the phone with me, telling me about her broken relationship. Each time she told me about their fight, I didn't assume it was as bad as it was because she would joke about it. And after she sent a screenshot of their conversation about why they can never mend things, I believed her. She is not sad about it and I think it is because she tried working things out with him. She tried her very best and there was nothing more she could do.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqLBJjOuLHc>

Saturday morning, it is after eight when I wake up to deep clean my apartment and do laundry. Only at eleven thirty do I leave my house for Glen Lauriston. My sister and her husband, Kagiso own a beautiful mansion with a huge yard. Kagiso is an architecture and he was showing off when he designed his home. Their deck is my favourite part of their home and I am quite sure that it is where they are setting up for the party.

From the drive way where I park my car, the whole place is filled with balloons – it is no place from anyone who has globophobia. Boikanyo comes charging to me with his cousins in tow.

“Where is my dog?” he calls out before he reaches me.

“Happy birthday,” I say instead, opening my arms for a hug.

“Did you get me a dog?” he asks.

“It is a surprise,” I say with a smile. Before he could even respond, one of his cousins pulls him and off he ran.

Phelele is in the kitchen, running around dressed in a white dress, fit for the birthday boy’s mother. She waves at me before her usual décor lady pull her to the side.

It is as chaotic as I imagined it to be.

I look around the kitchen table, searching for something I could bite on. When I notice a platter plate with wraps, I help myself to two. Boi runs into the kitchen just when I finish fixing myself a glass of mimosa, telling me that ‘granny’ is asking for me. Granny is definitely my mother. I finish my wraps, pick my mimosa and head to

the living room where my mother is sitting with two older women. I drop a kiss on her cheek before sitting on a couch just next to her. A few people are at the deck and only now do I notice three of Phelele's friends with their children.

"I was telling Mrs Maake here that I am still waiting for grandchildren from you," Mom says, darting her eyes between me and the old lady next to her. If I want to spoil my day, I am going to try to reason with her but because I know her too well, I give her a smile and promise that a grandchild is coming soon.

No grandchild is coming any soon.

I am enjoying my independency.

Just when she starts asking about when she is going to meet my boyfriend, Phelele asks for me. As I run to where she is, I thank the gods for allowing me this escape. Only when I reach Phelele do I roll my eyes at her because I notice Zwano starring at us from the braai area.

"Thought I should save you from the old ladies," she says.

"Just because your hubby's friend is here," I respond.

"Not really."

"Why can't you just let me be single and enjoy my life?" I ask, staring deep into her eyes. Phelele is so different from me and I bet she tolerates me because I am her little sister. I wish she was more of a friend than this over protective sister who wants to impose her beliefs on me.

“Are you sure you are happy by yourself?” she asks, and this time she is genuine.

“I promise you. I am perfectly fine. If I wasn’t, I was going to let you know,” I say. This is a lie though. I’d rather tell Vule than her. Her choice of men is... very different from mine. I want sexy. I want rich. I want handsome. I want bold. And Phelele here just wants a respectful man who can provide for his family. God worked overtime to hook her up with Kagiso who is what she wants but richer and decent looking.

Right on time, when the party is about to start, I receive a call from a breeder who is dropping off the puppy for my nephew. I meet her at the gate and walk her to the deck where Boi is playing with his friend. When they call him to the side so that he receives his surprise, I pull my cellphone from my jean pocket and snap a video of the present reveal. The breeder opens the box she has and I notice my baby nephew cry before kneeling next to her. I did get him a dog like he had been begging for the past two years. We all watch as he runs his fingers on his new puppy. He turns to give me a smile. My sister’s smile is all wide, even though she was complaining about raising this dog because her son will not manage on his own.

I am almost emotional when Boi runs to give me a warm hug. The hug is short before he runs back to his new party.

Okay, the party can begin now.

I am glad I had a chance to catch up with my family. It is always great. Even though they were trying to hook me up with Zwano. I am so used to it by now and all I do is roll my eyes at them when they pretend not be part of it.

Monday morning, at seven thirty, I am getting settled in my office. I got myself a cup of coffee on my way so I don't have to brew one right now. Maybe after two hours or so.

I am getting ready for my eight o'clock meeting when Fifi transfers a call to my phone.

"Nonkululeko speaking, how may I help you?" I ask, setting my pen down so that I can focus on the call.

"We have been trying to get help but it seems your employees don't know how to do their job," someone says.

I frown, trying to make out what they are trying to say.

"Okay... how can I help?" I try again.

"I have been waiting for my payment for half a million but your staff said they processed a payment last week. I haven't received my money. I need that money to run other projects."

"Okay, who am I speaking to?" I ask, reaching for my pen and sticky notes.

"Greg from Global Lines," the guys says.

"Okay, so you never received a payment from us?"

“No!” he roars.

“Okay, I find out what could be the problem regarding....” My attention goes off to another line coming through. “Uhm... can I get the team to get back to you?”

“Please! This is urgent.”

I urgently respond to the line that’s coming in. It is another client complaining about not receiving their payment. Just like Gregg, I promise to sort it out ASAP! When I am done on the line, I hurry to the floor to get to the bottom of this chaos.

This is not what I need on a Monday morning.

“What is going on?” I ask Flora, who is busy on the phone and her laptop. I can tell that she is also dealing with one of our suppliers. I watch as she tells the client to give her room to get to the bottom of the issue and report back as soon as she can. When she hangs up, I ask again, “What is going on?” she is one of the floor supervisors, she must know what the issue is.

“The suppliers said they are not paid while our records say otherwise,” she says.

“What do you mean?”

“Here!” She jumps to her feet and pick four payment advances. From the pile, I notice one from Global Line – the half a million one. “The capturer captured these and we authorized... and we are very certain that everything was done accordingly. So it looks like the payments didn’t interface.”

“What is bookkeeping saying?” I question.

“The monies went out of our bank account but the suppliers didn’t receive their payments.”

I frown.

I have never heard of this before.

Flora’s desk phone rings again and she turns to stare at me. I nod at her and she picks the phone up. I watch and listen... it is definitely another client.

What the hell is going on?

I try to listen to Flora’s conversation but Fifi grabs her attention when I notice her rushing to me. She stops in front of me.

“The CFO wants to see you,” she says.

I nod at her before turning to Flora and instruct her to call IT to figure out what the problem is.

This has never happened before and I am not ready for any of this.

Chapter 11

Heart of STEEL

KINGS

The reunion between the children and their parents every single time they join camp is always cute to watch, as the mood is always off the roof!

The parents arrived on Tuesday, and they have been taking part in the camp since then. We have therapists who know what to do with families such as these, and they are equipped on how to handle this; they know better than I do when it comes to how deep some their issues go, and I don't give a flying fuck about any of those - seriously!

"Mpho is happy," Rhulani comments as we stand by the coffee station on Friday morning, where everyone is grabbing their breakfast before we depart. We had the award ceremony last night and I couldn't agree more, it was fun and fulfilling to watch the smiles on everyone's faces.

"He better stay that way," I comment while sipping from my cup of coffee.

"There is progress," he adds.

Speaking of progress, I place my cup on the table and make my way to the table where Mpho sits with his parents. I stand next to him, my presence forcing him to lift his head up to look at me.

"Are you done eating your food?" I ask.

"Yes, Sir!" he chants loudly.

"Go and bid your friends farewell." I don't have to say it twice before he runs to where the other kids are gathered.

"What did you do to my son?" the mother asks with a smile.

"Ms...?"

“Abigail. You can call me Abigail,” she offers with a smile.

“Ms Abigail,” I nod, as I register her name. “We had to be a little tough with him, and I sure was. And I take it you know that this camp cannot solve a problem in just two weeks, so there is still a lot that needs to be done with him.”

“Yes, the therapists explained everything to me.”

“Well... I did note it in his report that I suggest you enroll him for Martial Arts, right? He needs to learn how to control his feelings and Martial Arts will help him stay disciplined.” Both Theodore and his woman - Abigail - nod their heads at me. Then, I turn to face Theodore, “If you could manage to bring him to Johannesburg on some weekends, I can take him through some exercises; I feel I can do a better job with him.”

“Yes, I can do that.”

If it were in church, we were going to say that we need to exorcise that demon his father created in him. But here, I use a simple term - we need to put him back in line. We need to put that smile back on his face, then keep it there, and it won't take just a week to put him back together.

“One weekend a month will do, until I am quite happy with his progress,” I offer.

“I'd be grateful,” Abigail says. I nod at the both of them, then I ask if I could have a word with Theodore.

I lead the way back to Rhulani, who is now seated at a small table just close to the coffee station. I take a seat before reaching for a black card which is next to Rhulani's laptop then I hand it to Theodore.

"Password is 7789. When you get back to Bloem, get to an ATM and send me the location, and after I give you the go-ahead, you are going to withdraw R10 000 a day until the account runs dry," I advise.

"What for?"

"Just milking Ndumiso's ghost account, and we don't know what to do with the money. He won't be able to trace these transaction; so, go and have fun."

"How much is in there?" Theodore asks. He sounds uncertain.

I shrug and turn to Rhulani.

"Right now, there is eight hundred..."

"Eight hundred rands?"

"Thousand."

"Eight hundred THOUSAND?" Theodore almost drops his jaws to the floor.

"Take it, don't take - it is none of my business," I retort. "You can go back, before your woman starts sniffing a rat."

Theodore composes himself and returns to his family with a wide fake smile on his face.

"Do you think he will withdraw the money?" I ask as both Rhulani and I watch him from our table.

“I bet you, he will.”

I am going to take this weekend off – just to unwind and rest. It has been one hell-and-a-half of a week.

When we land in Johannesburg, we drop off Rhulani first before I make a stop at the club. Lungelo has been taking care of things and there was nothing I needed to handle while I was gone.

It is still noon, and we are still closed, but I have four barmen filling our fridges up with stock. Everything seems to be in place, and Link, one of my trusted bouncers, tells me that everything went smoothly in my absence; it is good to receive such news.

I head down to my office to see if there is anything on my desk that I need to attend to. Walking into my office, I notice a bouquet of flowers - it is almost dead, and I take it that Lungelo didn't bother nursing it. Picking the card, I read the heartfelt condolences message from Zama... well Nonkululeko.

I forgot about the dead brother. It has been almost two weeks now.

I send a text to Rhulani to get me a fake death certificate to submit at work.

Grabbing my chair, I spin around, re-reading the message that Nonku wrote for me. There is no number

or anything on the card, so I take it she still doesn't want to be contacted. And I don't want to call her and claim that I got her number from my fucking twin brother.

My lies!

I pull my drawer open and throw the card inside before jumping to my feet. There isn't anything on my In-tray, so I take it the team survived without me. I pull the flowers from the vase and walk to the bin which is by the door, but instead of discarding them in the bin, I turn back to the table, put them back into the vase and move it to the window. Thereafter, I head out, going straight to my apartment.

"Hey... Kings," she rushes to me as I try to open my apartment.

"Heeyy!" I greet back, as I push my door open.

"Where have you been?" she asks, crossing her arms over her chest and eyeing my luggage.

"Been busy."

"I can see that. Can I come in?"

"Not a good time, Babes," I respond while walking in. I quickly turn to face her, before she lets herself in the apartment.

"Thought we could have some fun...?" She pouts her lips. Well, her suggestion is tempting, but I think I am too exhausted. And it is too soon to erase Nonku - or should I say Zama's - image, as it's her face which I like better when I jerk off. I turn to my guest, offer her a tight-lipped

smile, and thereafter shrug my shoulder while closing the door.

Why can't she read the signal?!

I managed to rest this weekend, and on Monday morning, I am as fresh as a cucumber. 'As fresh as a cucumber' – that's what they say, right?

Stepping outside the elevator at Gumede Enterprise's floor, I find it unusually empty. I know that I arrive early sometimes, but that is not the case today - it is exactly seven o'clock, but there isn't anyone sitting behind their computers.

Scanning the floor, even the PA is not sitting outside Nonku's office. I position my glasses well and walk down to my workstation. I didn't get Rhulani to check my emails, so that my return here is as organic as possible.

I place my bag on the floor and log into my account. Opening the emails, I notice a thread of emails regarding a possible cyber-attack. A lot has been happening this past week, huh? The last email was sent last Friday, and it is instructing the Finance team to not come back to the office until a call confirming their return is made.

The elevator pings before it opens, causing me to lift my eyes towards that direction and out walks Nonku, dragging her feet towards her office. She does not have her laptop bag like she usually does, and she looks like

she just rolled out of bed - dressed in a trackpant and an oversized t-shirt, she still looks sexy as fuck, though. But, she looks exhausted – her shoulders tell it all.

I give her a minute to settle in before I knock on her door.

“Come in.” Her voice is faint.

I slowly open the door and walk into her office. She is standing by her favourite window – the same window she watches me from during our lunch hour.

“Morning, Ma’am. Uhm, I just got here, and it seems like people are not coming in. Is everything alright?” I ask, trying so hard to not look affected by her sad face. She doesn’t have her make-up on like the other days, but she looks hella beautiful – even though her smile is not gracing her face.

She clears her throat and asks, “How are you? How did the funeral go?”

Shit! She is even sadder as she says this.

I clear my throat and drop my eyes to the floor, not wanting her to see my guilt. I don’t know, but there is something special about this woman. If it was someone else, I wouldn’t give two shits about hurting their feelings.

“The funeral went well, but I am trying to move on from that,” I respond and she nods.

“I am really sorry about your loss.”

“Thank you.”

“Well, you can go home. IT is trying to figure out what the problem could be,” she starts. I listen as she tells me everything that I already know. If the whole enterprise is shaken by this, what more everything that is still to come? I want to tell her to just inform the IT Department that there is nothing they can do about what happened the previous week, as there is no way they can find the bug - I own the most intelligent security company in the fucking country! I dare them to bring in the most qualified specialists, and I’ll bring mine that is working closely with Rhulani in implementing our attack. But, this is nothing.

“Are you well? You don’t look fine,” I say.

“I am fine, thank you,” she says, sullen.

I don’t push - Kingston doesn’t push, but Kingsley can. So, with a nod and a small smile, I walk out of her office. I head back to my workstation, log off the computer, pick my backpack up and head out of the building. I fire a text at Rhulani to meet me at Kings Security after an hour. I know of his few engagements this morning.

I catch an Uber to my apartment to fucking get rid of the fucking gel off my fucking head. If there is anything that pisses me off about this mission, it is this hair I have to keep up with, and the ugliest glasses Rhulani could have ever picked for me.

Nine o’clock, I am turning into Kings Security basement.

If I wasn't smart enough, I would have my name engraved on my seven-storey building just outside Sandton. But because I know better, 'Sizabonke Afri Logistics' is engraved on the board instead, which is stationed right by the entrance. I jump into the elevator that takes me further down into my office that is in the basement. Unbuttoning my blazer, I put in the security code and stand back for the doors to open after authenticating my full body features. Stepping into my office, I pull off my jacket and hang it on the stand. I go through my mission board and accept one mission to eliminate a particular group of businessmen. I open the files and study what the mission is all about, and what the reasons for the eliminations are.

A beep goes off from outside the door and when I notice that it is Rhulani, I allow him in. He grabs a seat from across me and opens his laptop.

"I want a full background on Nonkuleko, Finance Manager of Gumede Enterprise. Full details, please?"

"Uhm... and why are we doing the background check on her?" Rhulani asks. It is a valid question, but too personal.

"Run her cell number and link it to my phone. I need to run into her," I say this while sending him Nonku's number that I saved from Kingston's phone.

"This is a personal mission," Rhulani says again.

"I want this ASAP!" I continue, still ignoring his question. He types away on the computer, but with a wide smile on his face. I clear my throat and ask him, "What?"

“You are in love,” he says. Before I could respond, he jumps in, “But you are going to tell me to fuck off because you don’t want to hear the truth.” He continues typing away without giving me a chance to talk. “You have never asked me to do this on a personal level, and...” He finally lifts his eyes to me and adds, “... you can tail her now.”

I reach for my phone and open the tracking App. The red dot indicates that she is still at Gumede Enterprise. I set a notification for when she moves and thereafter place my phone on the table. Lifting my eyes to my assistant, he has a very wide smile on his face.

“What?”

“Nothing, Boss!”

It doesn’t take long for my phone to ping, indicating Nonku’s movement. Rhulani starts closing his laptop before I even tell him to - he is having a jol with this. We are on our feet at the same time. While I head to my parking in a lift, he takes the one that takes him up to where the teams are set.

I drive towards the dot and zooming into it, I find that it stopped at Woolworths Morningside. I speed up there until I find parking near Woolworths Food, I am certain that she is in here. I pick a basket on my way in and the only thing that is in front of me is toilet paper stacked by the door. I pick a packet and drop it in my basket before I start my search for thee 'Zama Bhengu'.

Right there, in the wine section, is the woman I am searching for. She is reading a label from a bottle when I stand beside her.

“I’d go for Rupert & Rothschild Classique,” I say. A loud gasp escapes her lips before the bottle hits the floor.

“Oh, shit!” she hisses before looking away. Her white sneakers are now stained and I bet you, my pants are going to need a good dry clean session.

“Zama Bhengu...” I say, turning to face her. She doesn’t want to turn to me; she doesn’t look anything like that sex goddess she was – and she knows it. She takes a minute to release a deep sigh, and thereafter turns to look at me.

“Hi!” she says. The bags under her eyes are noticeable; she really looks tired.

“How have you been since you left me sleeping in the hotel room?”

“Why does it look like you are pissed? I thought we were clear about what was happening that night.”

Some guy walks up to where we are and asks if we could step aside so that he cleans the floor. Before we do, Nonku reaches for the broken, now empty, bottle while I reach for the wine I recommended and thereafter, we head down the aisle towards the pay points. She quietly sets her items at the paypoint and I do the same.

“One account, please,” I inform the cashier. Nonku is still quiet, probably too exhausted to put up a fight. Once I have paid for the items, she picks the shopping bag and

I am by her side, carrying the toilet paper I don't even need.

"Wanna grab lunch, and catch up?" I ask, following her to the parking lot.

"I am not feeling well, really," she says and her voice breaks this time.

I feel like shit!

I reach for her hand and she stops on her tracks, then stares down at my hand. She felt that thing I felt, right?

"Thank you for the flowers, by the way," I don't look into her eyes when I say this. Guilt. And when I return my gaze to her, I find her eyes warm.

"I am sorry!" she mumbles.

"It's okay, Zama," I say quickly, wanting to brush this away. "Please have lunch with me? Talking will make you feel better."

"Thank you, but I'll pass today. I just want to drink my wine, and sleep."

"I'll sleep with you," I say. "Well... not literally - or... literally - whatever, but I want to keep you company. I need some company." She stares at me, contemplating her answer. "Call that friend of yours, and tell her that you are inviting me to your house."

"Are you always this pushy?" she asks.

"You are just special," I respond while reaching for her shopping bag. She hesitates at the idea of letting it go, but after a very long staring contest, she lets go.

Chapter 12

Heart of STEEL!

Nonkululeko

Apart from the fact that I am kinda smitten by this man, I don't have the energy to debate with him. Maybe all I need is company, then I wouldn't feel as depressed as I feel right now.

I have Kings walking beside me as I make my way to the parking lot where I parked my car.

"I'll drive," he says when he notices me fishing for my car keys from my bag. I sigh deeply as I have an inkling that I might not win this conversation, even if I tried!

"No one drives my car," I respond anyway.

"Then we are taking mine, and you'll have to return here to pick yours up," he responds, knowing full well that it is not going to happen.

"Why don't you...?"

"Nope!" he says while snatching the keys from my hand.

"Hey...!" is what I manage to only say, while staring up at him; I have no idea how he managed to be that sneaky, that quickly. He drops the car keys into his pocket, defeating me from trying to fight him for them.

"You look like a zombie, so I cannot let you drive us, or yourself, home," he says.

I sigh deeply, acknowledging his words.

I really do feel like a zombie, by the way. I have been on autopilot since the previous week. I hate not having control over situations, because, as a manager, I need to have all, or most of the control.

I quietly lead my way to the car, as he pulls my keys from his pocket and unlocks the car. While I jump into the passenger seat, he opens the boot and throws in our parcels, thereafter, he jumps in the driver's seat. He asks if he could adjust the seat; which takes me by surprise, as I didn't think he could be this polite. I nod at him before he adjusts the seat so that he's comfortable. Then, after he starts the engine, he takes a minute to admire my little machine.

"Nice car!" he compliments with an enthusiastic nod.

"Thanks. But I am quite sure it is nothing compared to yours," I respond. He looks like that kind of a guy – the guy who likes mean machines and all.

He doesn't respond to my comment, instead, he asks me to direct him to my apartment.

When I left for the office earlier, I didn't clean up after myself, but, had I known that my day was going to turn out this way, I would have attempted to keep it as fresh as it normally is.

Well, I already look like a mess, so I bet he won't mind my untidy apartment.

After showing Kings the gate to my apartment, I fish my phone from my bag and text my friend:-

‘Friend, I am having Kings over for an hour or two... So, if you don’t hear from me later, come search for me.’

My phone beeps immediately and I shake my head with a chuckle. This is the content my friend signed up for!

‘Wait! You are inviting him over for another shag? I think that is a good idea. The sex will release your stress.’ – Vule.

‘I am not bringing him over for sex.’ – I send back.

“You are not bringing me over for sex?” Kings voice startles me. I didn’t see him leaning over, reading my texts.

“Jeez!” I call out, hiding my screen away from him.

“Sex wouldn’t be a very bad idea,” he says.

“We are not having sex.”

“Of course we are not,” he says.

He looks straight ahead and only now do I realize that he is waiting for me to show him where to park. I show him my bay number before getting back to my phone.

‘Keep lying to yourself.’ - Vule.

‘Vule, I thought I would inform you that I am having a man over at my apartment. If I disappear, you have my spare key.’

‘I’ll come over in the evening to check up on you, then you’ll tell me all about your perfect sex life.’

Rolling my eyes, I throw my phone in my handbag – not bothering to respond. Kings jumps out of the car first

and I watch as he walks over to my door - oh, he is the gentleman type.

“Oh, thank you,” I respond while jumping out of the car, ignoring the hand he has held out to help me out of the car. I leave him standing beside the passenger door and head to the boot to retrieve my shopping bag.

“You can keep the toilet paper,” he says.

“I have enough, thank you,” I respond, but he picks the toilet paper pack anyway and grabs the shopping bag from my hand before he stands beside me, waiting for me to lead the way. I do lead him to my home.

Walking inside, I place the shopping bag on the kitchen counter and tell Kings to help himself with anything to drink while I try to make my living room decent enough for a visitor. I start by picking my slippers, which are in the middle of the living room, up, also taking a sweater which I left on the couch, together with the empty mug of coffee which I left on the coffee table.

“I love your apartment,” Kings says from the kitchen area. He getting rid of his blazer while his eyes peruse my fridge. He closes the fridge without picking anything from inside, and thereafter places his blazer on the kitchen stool. I have noticed, from our night together, that he is very neat. I am very neat myself, but I think he takes the cup.

I leave my coffee mug and head for my bedroom to throw my slippers and sweater there, and to also check if I need to clean my face or not.

The minute I stare into the mirror, I regret it! The bags under my eyes have never been this huge; my puffy eyes are making my face look swollen.

I sit on the bed, feeling a little exhausted from the lack of sleep. It has been days since I had a good night sleep, I am worried about everyone in the office. The IT guys, together with the auditors, are all trying to get to the bottom of the issue at work, and staff names keep popping up and I fear for their jobs. I am not worried about mine, as I believe I can easily get a job if I am to lose this one, and if not, I can easily start the consultation company I have been procrastinating to start.

I don't hear Kings walk into my bedroom until he standing right in front of me with two glasses of wine. He hands me one glass before he sits on the floor.

“What’s bothering you?”

“Work!”

“What happened? Did you lose a patient? I know doctors never get used to losing their patients.”

I sigh, then gulp almost half of the wine . When I look up from the glass, Kings hasn't shifted his eyes away from me.

It is amazing how his eyes are so warm, just like those of Kingston. I know they are twins, but they look so alike,

nothing, except their style, distinguishes d them, I. can only wonder how their family can tell them apart.

“Didn’t you have a chat with Kingston at the funeral?”

“No. Why?”

“Because you would have known that he is not a nurse.” I take a deep sigh before I come clean:- “I am not a nurse, and my name is Nonkululeko.”

Kings doesn’t say anything, instead, he sips from his glass, his eyes not shifting from mine. I continue, “Look... I didn’t think we were going to bump into each other again after that night ever, so I lied about my name.”

“Do you do it often?”

“Do what?”

“One-night stands?” he questions. I scoff, sip my wine and choose not to answer him. He is bruised that I left him sleeping. Thinking about it now causes a smirk to form on my lips. Then the smirk turns into a smile. Kings clears his throat and asks what is funny.

“Was I the first woman to leave you after a fuck?” I ask, my glass of wine reaching my lips.

Kings watches and licks his lips before saying, “You were my first!”

My smile turns into a laughter. It is the way he said it. I shake my head, trying to stop myself from laughing, before I apologize to him for bruising his ego.

He watches me until my smile disappears. When he asks again what is bothering me, I tell him about the issues at work, without getting into much detail.

“What don’t you just resign and look for another job?” he asks after listening in.

“I can’t just walk out because of a little hiccup. My team needs me right now because everyone is panicking,” I respond and he smiles at me.

He doesn’t have to tell me that I am a good person, I know that I am. There is too much bad in the world, so it wouldn’t hurt for there to be a few good to people. I feel like my team needs me to be there for them; even Ephraim, who was once my enemy ; is scared. Of course when the Risk Management Team was trying to dig the possible causes of the attack, Ephraim’s name slipped up from many lips – too many, that is; many of my team members think that he caused this havoc, just to sabotage me. He walked to my office the other week, before we were excused, just to apologize for being a jerk this whole time. He assured me that he has nothing to do with this whole mess, and to be honest, I believe him. He looked genuine and he is as shaken, just as everyone is.

“Can I fix you lunch?” Kings asks. I am grateful that he is changing the topic.

“Well...” It isn’t every day that I will have a sexy man cook for me in my kitchen. I shrug a shoulder at him, which he takes it as a yes. He stands up straight and tells me to join me in the kitchen. I don’t waste time

jumping to my feet so that I can show him around my not-so-well-equipped kitchen. “Do you want to cook me some salmon?” I ask, but don’t mention that I bought some because of the meal he picked for me at the restaurant and I have been trying to recreate for myself in this house.

“Where is it?” he asks, opening the refrigerator.

“In the freezer,” I respond.

“It’ll take time; it needs to thaw.” When I eye the microwave, he widens his eyes as if I have offended him, then thereafter says, “Never!”

I cross my arms and stare at him – he isn’t kidding. He pulls a salad which I bought earlier during my shopping errand out of the fridge. I am impressed that he unpacked my groceries. He turns and opens my cupboards before asking, “Do you ever cook?”

“Sometimes. Why?”

“Your kitchen is... bare.”

“I stay alone. I don’t have to have a fully-equipped kitchen because I am rarely here.”

“I stay alone, and my kitchen is fully-equipped.”

“Then invite me over, and cook for me there,” I say. He smiles and I realize what I have just said - just invited myself to his house. Before I could tell him that I am just kidding, he tells me that he is cooking for me tomorrow night. I should refuse, but I don’t – it is good to have some company.

He is busy dishing the salad into a bowl when his phone rings from his blazer. I watch as he pulls it out and answers it. He listens in, shoots his eyes to me and tells whoever it is on the line that he is on his way.

“Shit!” he swears as he tries to put on his jacket. “I don’t have my car. Meet me at A3 in twenty.”

As he finishes off on the phone, he pulls some keys from his pocket and puts them in my hand, then jumps for my car keys. Only when he reaches the door does he slide the phone into his pocket and turns to me:-

“My car keys. I need to borrow your car, I’ll bring it back,” he says while rushing out of the door. I am rushing to the door to tell him no, because I don’t know him like that to trust him with my car, but he is long gone when I reach the corridor, and I am only comforted by the fact that I know his brother, and my way to his club.

I don’t have Kings phone number and even in an emergency such as this, I cannot call his brother to find them for me; I am not about to cross that boundary.

It is almost seven o’clock and Kings hasn’t returned. I didn’t nap much, and right now, I feel like I need to go to bed. When a faint knock comes from my door, I immediately know that it is my friend at the door.

Peeping through the peephole, I see her standing outside, and she’s on her phone. I don’t even allow her

in before I ask her to drive me to Morningside to pick Kings' car.

"You are driving each other's cars now?" Vule asks as she reverses out of the parking lot. She likes to exaggerate things, this one. Explaining to her that Kings had to rush to God-knows-where with my car; I just hope that his car is where we are headed to.

"When can I visit you? I don't want to be there when your boyfriend comes back home."

"Really?"

"What? You look so grumpy for someone who just had sex with her perfect sexy one-night stand who gives the best head," she says.

"I am done with you," I laugh. I didn't have sex, and I don't know why I am suddenly wet right now.

It wasn't hard to find a black Jaguar parked not too far to the entrance that leads to Woolworths. Waving at Vule, I jump in and get settled in the driver's seat. I was right about him driving a mean car - the interior of this car is so... him. And it smells like him, too.

At home, I take my usual two-hour bath before throwing on a t-shirt and jumping into bed right at nine-fifteen.

I am woken up by my phone ringing from under my pillow. Answering it, Kings tells me that he is at the door. I throw my phone back under my pillow before dragging my feet to the door.

Through the peephole, I confirm that it is him.

“It is three-thirty. What are you doing here?” I ask.

“My apartment keys are in my car. You have my car,” he says. His eyes scan me to my feet, then he licks his lips before asking if he could come in.

I don't know why I swallowed hard enough for him to notice that his eyes are burning me. He takes a step forward, then another, while I take mine back. When he is inside, he shuts the door behind him and thereafter stands right next to me.

“Uhm...”

“Do you want me to leave?” he asks and I immediately feel his hand on the small of my back. I stare up at him without saying a word. His other hand follows on my other side before he pulls me closer to him. He still smells as fresh as he did many hours ago. He drops his kiss to me and I melt, opening up for him. Right now, I don't want to know whether he ran out of my apartment to attend to a woman, or not. Right now, I want him to take care of this fire burning in me.

In a matter of minutes, we are both panting; our kiss is deep and passionate. Since our night together, I have been struggling to use my toys. My moan is loud when I feel his finger at the hem of my underwear. I gasp louder when his finger, followed by another, slide inside my panties. This time, my kisses are rushed and I am so hot that I might bite him!

He pulls his finger out of my underwear and lifts me up like he did the other night. Just like our first night together, I wrap my legs around his waist as he carries

me to my room. He carefully lays me there on the bed. While he urgently gets rid of his clothes, I get rid of my underwear and the t-shirt; I want his warm body, all of it, on mine. It doesn't take him long to slide the condom on his cock and get to me.

"You are ready for me," he mumbles before flipping me over. I hurry to get on my knees and bend over for him to take me from the back. I grab my bedspread for support and brace myself. He slides his penis into my pussy and I feel like crying; I have been yearning for this feeling. His one hand reaches to caress my breast while the other is on my waist, pushing me back...

I swear my eyes start rolling when he starts moving.

When he starts pounding, I really swear I rolled my eyes to the back of my head.

"I can't fuck any other woman because of you," he growls and continues to pound, as if he is angry at me.

Yes!

Yes!

Yes!

"Don't you dare stop!" Is what I hear myself say as Kings continues to mark me.

Chapter 13

Heart of STEEL

Kings (Unedited)

And indeed, I do not stop until both of us are panting and sweaty and exhausted from the endless orgasm I offered her. By then time I let go of my release, Nonku is fulfilled. Her smile is beautiful and satisfaction is written all over her face.

“Thank you,” Nonku mumbles as she rolls beside me after I have returned from discarding the condom.

“Really, now?” I ask, shaking my head as I relax on her pillow and pull her to my chest. She shifts and get settled before I wrap my hand around her.

“Where were you?” she asks.

“Had to attend to the emergency,” I respond.

“Is another woman an emergency?”

“What?” I chuckle. “Are you jealous?”

“Just confirming what you said.”

“What did I say?”

“You can’t fuck other women because of me,” she says. Ahhh! I said that. Well, it is the truth that I told her. I did not lie to her. But I am not going to repeat those words because they make me feel weak!

Weak for her.

We stay quiet for a little while before I tell her, “I cannot stay the night. I came to pick the keys. I need to take care of something before the sun goes up.

“Stay,” she mumbles.

I stay, contemplating on this. I am fucking exhausted but at the same time, I don't want to invade her space and I am still shaken at how this woman make me feel. It is getting to me.

She is getting to me and I cannot allow that. However, I don't know how to not want her. I mean, after attending to my emergency, I could have headed straight to my apartment. But now, I had to see her. I had to feel her. I had to have her in my arms. I wish I had answers about what is happening to me but noooo, I have no answers.

Now, I am contemplating on staying because she is asking me to.

“How about I leave when you fall asleep? You won't know I am gone until you wake up.”

“Thank you,” she mumbles and thereafter yawns.

“Sleep!”

We go quiet again for a few minutes before she says, “You didn't answer my question.”

“What question?”

“What was the emergency?”

“At the club,” I quickly respond. “I don't want to bore you with the details. Go to sleep.”

I hear her take a deep sigh before she goes quit. I couldn't tell her that I had to head out to kill a man because it was my assignment to do so. Yester morning I received a new mission and accepted it but things didn't turn out the way I expected. One of the three men

we had under the radar was trying to fly out of the country. He heard about our us sniffing around and I had to catch him before he got away. When I arrived at the private airport he was at, waiting for the private jet, things went out of hand and the shoot-out began. If I wasn't armed and had I not met Ace at A4, our secret storage, for a bullet proof, we would have been speaking another language. I was supposed to head straight to my apartment after the mission, but my heart led me here.

It led me here to her.

When I am certain that Nonku is sleeping, I carefully jump out of bed and reach for my phone. She slightly shifts but I am at her side before she notices that I am not beside her. When she is fast asleep again, I check for the messages from one of my agents.

'They are sniffing,' – Ace.

I swear softly before I slowly shift out of bed slowly and make sure that Nonku is sleeping while I head out of the room to make a phone call. It wasn't a very clean job that we did, so I am certain that the dogs might start sniffing.

"Where are they sniffing?" I ask immediately when Ace responds to my phone call.

"Our guy from the private airport alarmed me and it seems a few people are aware of the attack," he responds. "I suggest we stay low for a short while and look into the other targets. I forwarded you the information and location of the two guys."

I sigh, placing a hand on my waist.

I hate it when things don't go according to plan.

"Kings," Ace calls my name, jerking me from my thoughts.

"Yes?"

"Watch your back," he says.

"You too."

"Sharp!"

I need to head out of here. I need to stay away from Nonku for a little while before we clean up this mission. I head back to the bedroom, tip toe in and pick my pile of clothes from the floor and thereafter dart into the bathroom to put the clothes on. When I am set to go, I search the pedestal for my car keys and thereafter drop a kiss on Nonku's cheek. I could wake her up but I don't want to explain myself or lie to her for that matter. But before I walk out of the apartment, I write a note and plug it on the fridge, using a pizza menu magnet. Then, I am out.

It was almost eleven o'clock when I threw myself to bed and fall asleep. It has been one hell of a morning, trying to locate two tycoons I need to eliminate. Money gives power and power is what my next targets have. These morons can disappear to think air and with his own security team like mine, it gets a little difficult to trace them. This is not any different from Ndumiso Gumede, except my client doesn't want him eliminated. It would have been very easy to just finish him off.

My phone vibrates at past one, showing Rhulani's number. I see that he is on his way to my apartment to drop off some papers I need to sign now. I force myself up, and drag my feet to the shower for a very ice cold one. This help with the tension on my shoulders and the fucking dick that hardens whenever Nonku invades my head.

Jumping out of the shower, I throw in shorts and a t-shirt and thereafter start cleaning up my apartment before making myself breakfast. I am very much tempted to invite Nonku over but I don't want to get her tangled in this web. Just for a few days or so.

Rhulani rolls his laptop bag and stops by my dining area. "There is food in the kitchen," I advise while getting seated. He places a file on the table and head to kitchen, returning with the tuna sandwich I fixed for him. He also pours himself the vegetable and fruit juice blend I left on the table and thereafter joins me.

"You are to return to Gumede Enterprise on Thursday," Rhulani says while placing the phone I use when I am there. "They sent out emails to everyone, calling them in to work on Thursday."

"I wanted to fly out to George... and search the little towns there," I respond before gulping down half of the juice.

"Ace and the guys are on that mission. You need to return to Gumede Enterprise because if you are absent when everyone is back at the office, they might suspect you. Just return back to the office and lay low. We are

not attacking until two week later when everyone is trying to move on.” I sigh and shake my head, listening to all the instructions. “Is there any problem?”

“No problem,” I respond.

“The Benz you were driving yesterday. It belongs to her, doesn’t it?” he asks.

“Belongs to who?”

“The girl.”

“Why do you ask?” I question.

Rhulani shakes his head and takes his time chewing the food, making me regret every offering it to him. He swallows hard and continues, “I thought she was one of the girls.” One of the girls I fuck, he means. “But now I have figured it is more than that.”

“Where are you going with this?” I ask, pushing the glass of juice away from me. I have just lost an appetite because the truth is not easy to swallow. I know what is coming next.

“Remember Stephanie?” he asks. I grit my teeth. That is all he needed to say to get my head back in place. I was once in love with a woman and she had me compromise my mission and I almost lost my life in the process. I want to tell him that Nonku is nothing like Stephanie but I know the truth. She is worse than Stephanie because of all the things she makes me feel. I want to be with her all the time and I cannot afford to do that. Just like my family, if I like her the way I claim to, I’d leave her alone for her own good.

“If you weren’t playing family with her yesterday, you would have picked the movements on the radar and we would have attacked on time. But you weren’t keeping your eyes on your work.” I could argue with him right now and tell him to stay out of my business but Rhulani is the only man who can dish the truth and I’d listen. So, I allow him to jump further into my business. I hate to admit that he speaks of the truth only. I accepted the mission but I was busy chasing her.

“Let go of her for now. For her own good. And most importantly, for the sake of your missions.” I get on my feet and walk to the kitchen area. He also gets on his feet and walks to where I am. “You are falling in love.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You don’t have to say it. And you cannot keep sleeping with her and still pretend to be another person. She is not always going to be blinded by love. She is going to know.” He sighs deeply and adds, “Why don’t you invite your regular and get the new girl out of your system?”

I don’t respond. He won’t understand if I even try to make him understand.

And he is very much right.

I don’t fear anything, including dying a cold death, but I worry about those who are close to me.

Things are back to normal at Gumede Enterprise and everyone is working hard since our return last week Monday. I am fucking trying to do my job but Nonku is not giving me a very good chance to do so. I blocked her from my phone and I haven't spoken to her in more than a week. She is her bubbly self and has been torturing me with those tight pencil skirts and dresses she wears to work. I don't know if it because of these foreign feelings I have, but she looks sexier than ever. I always find myself flying out of the kitchen area whenever she walks in, whether there are other colleagues or not, I don't trust myself near her. Not when her vanilla and strawberry scent reminds me of us.

It is almost lunch, on Friday afternoon, when my colleague says, "Wow!" out of the blue. She is very chatty so I don't bother lifting my head to her. It is only when the other two ladies next to her also say the same. Lifting my head, I notice why the ladies are smitten. Fifi is walking from the elevator with a huge pink and white bouquet roses. This time, I follow her, to see where she is going. I swallow hard when she opens Nonku's office door and slide inside.

"That's the most beautiful bouquet of flowers I have ever seen," one of the ladies says.

"Does the boss lady have a boyfriend?" the other asks.

"Not that I know of. I think it is from a secret admirer," the one next to me asks.

I grit my teeth and pull my phone from my drawer. I text Rhulani right away.

Me: 'Did you send a bouquet of flowers to Nonku?'

Rhulani: 'Why would I send her flowers?'

My fingers furiously type on the phone.

Me: 'Maybe to let her know that Kings is thinking of her?'

I swear under my breath, realizing that I was a jerk to just disappear on her. It would have been a very decent thing to send her flowers and let her know that I am out of town but thinking of her. She loves flowers. If she didn't, she wouldn't have sent me some lilies.

Rhulani

All she has is the useless note I left on her fridge, promising to call her when I pick her up for dinner.

Rhulani: 'Stay away from her.'

He says those words again.

I groan, putting my phone away from me.

When Nonku's door open, I turn my head there, finding her on the phone while headed to the kitchen area with a cup in her hand. I hate how happy she looks. I hate how the fucker on her cellphone is making her smile.

"Do you have a girlfriend Kingston," the voice beside me pulls me from my thoughts.

"Me?" I shift my ridiculous reading glasses and shake my head.

"When you do... just make sure to always spoil her," the lady says before we both go back to our computer screens. When I hear Nonku's giggle, I grab my phone

and slide it into my pocket before getting on my feet and make my way to the gents' restroom.

"I am here on a mission," I chant in my head when as I close the door to the toilet cubicle. I close the toilet seat and sit on top of it. I am not even fucking ashamed of myself as I tap into Nonku's phone screen. Fuck, I should be ashamed of myself. I still have her on my tracking APP, I was just keeping myself from spying on her because I thought I was doing a very great job staying away from her. I put in the passcodes before I unblock her number to have access to her phone. Once in, I go straight for the messages, disgusted by the first message I see from the contacts saved as 'Zwano'.

'Thank you for dinner last night. I knew I was going to enjoy your company so much. As promised, I have sent some flowers to your office with the details of our special date tonight. It is really going to be special.'

Special date, my foot.

I cannot risk anyone hearing me, so I send Rhulani a text message instructing him to send a text message to Nonku, to request a dinner date, TONIGHT. He must find a sappy story to tell her about my disappearance.

'NOW. SEND THE REQUEST NOW.'

I walk out of the toilet and head to Nonku's office so that she sees that the text coming in is not coming from Kingston. Can't make things obvious, can I?

I ask Fifi if I could see the boss lady and she allows me in like she does everyone else. I don't even have a fucking story to tell her but I quickly make one up.

"Yes Kingston," Nonku says while placing her cellphone on the table and picking her cup of tea.

"I am sorry but this is not work related..."

"Yes?"

"You said you wanted a dog for your nephew. I know someone who is selling and..."

Her phone pings on the table. I lower my eyes to see my phone number appear on her screen and Nonku's eyes also move to the phone. I swear I see her chest rise and fall. She quickly recovers before she lifts her eyes to me.

"You can attend to your phone, ma'am."

She picks her phone, reads the message and angrily bites her lower lip as she types away on the phone.

"Sorry about that..." she says with a smile. She places her phone back down. "Where were we?"

"The dog?"

"I found a perfect dog. Thank you for your help. Fifi told me you suggested the breed."

"Oh, I am happy. I thought you still needed the help," I mumble, turning so that I leave the office.

Sliding on my chair, I pull my phone to check any text messages from Rhulani. There is one with a screenshot of how the chat went about.

Kings: Hey, sorry for only texting after a little while. I had to fly out of town due to a family emergency. Can we do that supper tonight?

Nonku: No! I have plans with someone else. Delete my numbers because I am blocking you right now.

The text message that follows didn't get delivered.

I am blocked.

I scoff.

She has moved on!

Chapter 14

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU (not edited)

He is a jerk! That is what he is. It has been two weeks since that morning when we made love to each other. I knew I was not to find him in bed when I woke up but I didn't think he was going to block my numbers. I thought we shared something special night and when I walked into the kitchen to make myself some breakfast, he gave me hope when he promised to call and picked me up for supper. I waited for his call until I couldn't keep it to myself. When I tried his number, I realized that I was blocked. I gave it a few days to allow it to sink in. What we had was not as special as I thought. I am just a fuck. I probably am one of his fucks. That thought nauseated me. Even worse, he could be married with children.

I am not made for this sex games. I thought I was but I am not. I easily fall in love. I easily allow myself to be smitten when I wasn't supposed to.

It is funny how Kings' brother is walking out of my office the same minute I am deleting his number. I won't lie, I was once tempted to ask Kingston if he knows about his brother's whereabouts. Kingston is too sweet and innocent and I don't want to tangle him in his bad brother's unfaithful life. They are not close for a reason. And if Kingston didn't work with me and he wasn't much of a junior, I would have picked him instead.

That makes me a pervert, doesn't it? I shouldn't be thinking of Kingston in that way.

Well, I just can't help it. Kings is arrogant.

He really is.

My phone pings with a new text from Zwano.

Zwano: 'I'll pick you up at six.'

Me: 'Let's meet there.'

I wait for the responds, hoping that he wouldn't be offended. I don't want him to know where I stay, for now. I also don't want to be stuck at a boring dinner date with him. So, if I am driving, I wouldn't mind making an excuse to leave.

Zwano: 'Fine. I'll text you the location.'

I smile, grateful that he is not as pushy as many men are. This past weekend I spent it at my sister's place and Zwano was there. When he asked for a dinner date,

I didn't hesitate to give it is shot. This shocked my sister and her husband but I made them understand that I think it is time I consider dating someone. It wasn't a lie. I really thought about this. Kings absence made me realise how much I long for a companion. I have been lonely and it took me to a while to realise it. Last week, when I couldn't bury myself in my work, was the longest. Speaking of work, we are back and running and everyone is at their happiest. We had to write off a huge amount, close to two million rand because of this IT invasion. The IT and the Risk Management and the Auditors are still on the search for the culprit but there aren't winning. We are back at it and work is hectic due to the back lock. My staff almost celebrated when management confirmed that all our jobs are safe.

It is three thirty when I lock my office door and inform Fifi that I am done for the day. She gives me a wide smile as I carry my bouquet of flower and head for the elevator. I have been in the office since six thirty but it feels so weird to leave this early. I am so used to being one of the last ones out.

I think I am in a great mood.

Yesterday, after work, Zwano invited me to dinner date at his work event. He is an architecture – apparently, he is a very famous architecture in his industry. I had an amazing time with him. We have little things in common and he can hold a very decent and matured

conversation. I can only wonder what he has in store for me.

At home, I kick off my stilettos in the bedroom before taking off my dress. The beauty of staying alone – you can parade around your apartment in just underwear. I throw my dirty clothes into the basket before I return back to the kitchen to fill my glass with white wine.

Humming my favourite song, I head to my bathroom to turn on the water for a long bath. While I wait for my bath tub to be full, I pick my clothes for the night. Zwano promised me a dinner date, so I opt for a green semi casual bandage dress that is just above my knees and a pair of my highest black stilettos. I still have a long Brazilian weave installed from last night when I attended the gala dinner, so I am going to take a little short while styling it after putting on make-up.

Relaxing in the bath-tub, I take a very long sip before resting my head on the little pillow. I don't want to but my mind wanders off to Kings. It is normal to miss a man's touch, right? A man who doesn't belong to you, right?

If I make Zwano mine, is he going to be as good as how Kings is in bed? I don't want a boring sex life... I cannot survive a boring sex life after having a taste of the best.

I shake my head, not wanting to compare Zwano and Kings. It really is unfair of me to do this.

At ten past six, I am ready and set to drive to my date. I am slightly late but I am certain Zwano won't mind. I look too beautiful and he is a gentleman, he would know that it takes a long time to look this perfect.

As I finish snapping a mirror few mirror selfies, I hear a knock from my kitchen door. I pick my clutch bag and head to the door. It is a habit of mine to check the peephole before I open the door. My heart flips a little. There, behind my door is Kings. Just like any other day I have met with him, he is dressed in a black suit and a black tie.

I decide not to answer the door. Maybe this way he will leave.

He knocks again, this time telling me that he knows that I am inside. He probably saw my shadow when I was checking the peephole.

I give it a little ten minutes, busying browsing my social media, and when I check the peephole this time, there is no sign of Kings. I switch the kitchen light on, for when I return, and thereafter walk out of the door. Locking my door, I smell Kings before I lift my eyes to see him leaning on the wall just by the elevator. I lift my chin, throw my keys into my clutch bag and parade to the elevator.

“Where to?” he asks, as if he didn’t just ghost me two weeks ago. It is this scent of him that makes me think of him. It is hard and calming at the same time. “Where are you going looking like that?”

“On a date,” I spit, jabbing the elevator with my finger, urging it to hurry. My panties are damp right now and that is just by him staring at me. He touches my hand and it burns where he touched me.

“You blocked me.”

“You blocked me too,” I say but regret it soon after it leaves my mouth. I am not supposed to be answering to this jerk. He is not worth my time.

“Why are you going on a date when I am here to see you?”

“Because I have moved on. Stay away from me,” I say. I don’t mean these words but I am proud for being bold enough to utter them. I need to stay the hell away from this guy. The elevator pings before I jump in. He does the same, invading my space even when there is a younger boy inside. He moves closer to me and I tell him that I’ll scream if he dare touches me. This makes him look down at me while gritting his teeth.

Thank you! At least he is respectful.

The young guy who is in the lift with us stares at me and give him a smile, trying not to make the ride awkward. When we reach the ground floor, the guy jumps off but Kings stay.

“Can I take you out?” he asks.

“No!” I say this at the same minute my phone rings. I pull my phone from the clutch bag and answer it. Kings is beside me as I walk to my car. As I jump into my driver’s seat, he is in the passenger side in a flash. This takes me by surprise so I am not fast to lock before he jumps inside.

“Can you hear me?” Zwano asks, calling for my attention.

“Yes! Yes!” I respond, staring at Kings who is putting on the seatbelt.

“I was checking how far you are. It is almost six thirty and I haven’t heard from you. And I am starting to panic... wondering if you didn’t stand me up.”

“No. I am on my way. I got carried away while getting ready. I wouldn’t stand you up. I am not like that,” I respond, spitting the last part at Kings, who stood me up and blocked my number.

“Okay!” he laughs. “I’ll wait!”

When he hangs up, I turn to face Kings.

“What the hell are you doing?” I ask.

“I came to take you out to dinner,” he says.

“You have lost your mind,” I respond while starting the car. I cannot be late to my date and knowing, just a little about Kings, he is not going to step out of the car until I give him what he wants.

Entitled jerks.

I think I have an idea why Kingston cannot stand him. He is so annoying.

“So, you are going to see another man,” he asks as I reverse out of the parking lot. As I drive to the main street, I quickly check my care-taker’s number and dial the numbers. When he answers, I don’t waste time getting to the point. I want to report the security officer who allowed an intruder into my apartment without letting me know. How can they allow anyone to just walk

into our apartments? All this time, Kings is staring at me with a smile, irritating me some more. The caretaker lets me know that he will handle it.

I follow the navigator, without entertaining any of his questions. I don't want him to get to me. I don't want to be in a bad mood when I meet Zwano, he doesn't deserve this.

I stop at a restaurant which is situated in Randburg. Am I not happy that this place has the valet services?

"Stop embarrassing yourself. I swear if you follow me inside that restaurant, I am going to embarrass you," I say while stepping out of the car. I give the driver my keys and instruct him to get rid of the man in the car. Stepping into the restaurant, I understand why Zwano said it was going to be special. It is very elegant with just a few occupied tables. Giving the host my name, she leads me outside where Zwano have a secluded table far away from everyone and everything. When he notices me, he jumps to his feet to give me a hug before he pulls the chair for me.

"You look so beautiful," he says as he takes his chair.

"The reason why I was late. I am so sorry."

"No, I understand. I was just making sure that you were going to show up. I was once stood up. It wasn't very nice."

"I am nothing like that."

I pick the wine list and browse through so that I decide on what I want to drink. I am packing away my cosmopolitans for now.

“Do you know what you would like to drink?” he asks.

I am still studying the menu when I hear someone says, “I’d advise on a bottle of one of our luxurious bottles. The Black Lion is the best we have right now.”

Really?

“You suggest?” Zwano says to Kings who is standing beside us with a smirk. He places the food menus in front of us and steps back.

You have got to be fucking kidding me.

I frown at him but he doesn’t even flinch.

“Yep!”

“No!” I jump in after seeing Zwano’s awkward smile. I search for The Black Lion on the wine list and almost drop my jaws to the floor. A flipping bottle is over four thousand rands. “No, Zwano! I am not into wine at all. I’d like a cosmopolitan.”

“Are you sure?” Zwano asks.

“Definitely!”

I don’t want to mess this for Zwano by telling Kings off because he looks so handsome, Zwano might have a problem when he finds out I had a fling with him. Kings is suited from top to bottom and Zwano is not much into fashion – I have figured.

“Then I’ll have my Heineken,” Zwano says.

“Are you sure? A beer... during a date? I wouldn't suggest it unless you...”

“A cosmopolitan and a Heineken, please. If you have a problem you can call your manager for us,” I sharply say.

“A bottle of Castle Lite and a Margarita will do,” Kings says.

He is good at pissing me off. I cover my eyes with my hand.

“No, Cosmopolitan and Heineken,” Zwano innocently corrects. Kings nods at him before he walks away.

This guy!

You see this think of having one-night stands with strangers?

Zwano is telling me about his day when I pull my phone, unblock Kings numbers and send him a text to stop being a psycho.

His text comes in immediately.

‘I am not being a pyscho. I am just doing my job.’ – Kings. He also sends five smiley emojis.

I put the phone down, wanting to give Zwano undivided attention. It doesn't take long for Kings to return with a tray of drinks.

Guess what he brought?

A freaking Castle Lite and a margarita.

Zwano wants to complain but I stop him.

“I think he is slow,” I whisper to Zwano.

“Are you ready to order? I can suggest a few dishes.”

“Give us a minute to decide on the food,” Zwano says. Kings nods like a waiter would and thereafter step inside the restaurant.

‘Enjoy your margarita.’ – a text from King.

‘I regret fucking you.’

‘I regret not fucking good enough to ruin it for the other guys. Maybe you could give me a chance to right my wrongs. By the way, I want to peel that dress off and suck your pussy until you cum in my mouth.’ – Kings.

My cheeks blush.

“Are you okay?” Zwano asks. I quickly slide my phone in my clutch, not wanting it to disturb me.

“Do you want to get out of here? I feel like pizza. You can drive us to this nice restaurant. I’ll pick my car later.”

“Uhm... I wanted you to try...”

“We will try it next time,” I say pulling a two hundred rand note from my purse and placing it on the table. As Kings makes his way to our table, we are on our feet. I take Zwano’s hand into my mine. Kings does give our hands a double take.

“Is everything okay?” Kings asks Zwano.

“We are done here. Keep the change,” I say, my underwear very wet from his text message.

I meant it when I said I am done with him.

I am.

Sexy or not sexy!

Chapter 15

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS (Unedited)

I slide my hands into my pocket and watch as they walk out of the restaurant. Just a minute later, Nonku walks back to where I am. I watch those long legs and only when she stands in front of me do I lift my eyes to meet hers.

“Kings, please,” she begs. “I beg you. Stop! Please!”

With that, she turns and walks away before I could say a word. It is those begging eyes that stop me from following them and continuing to be a jerk. Those begging eyes. She needs this date to go according to plan.

Reaching for my wallet, I pull as many notes as I could and walk to where the waiter is standing with his colleagues. I give him the notes and thank him for letting me take his job for a minute. Thereafter I shoot a text for Rhulani to pick me up. He is going to be pissed at me but I pay him more than enough to also run these silly errands like picking me up.

While I wait, I order myself a scotch and sit by the bar.

I scoff. This is not how I imagined my evening to go until that bouquet of flowers arrived at the office. I was

supposed to spend it at the office, working. But here I am.

‘Fuck! Nonku aint good for me.’

Rhulani texts me, telling me that he is outside the restaurant. I throw the remainder of my drink into my mouth and thereafter drop the money beside the glass.

“Track my car for directions,” I say, while jumping into his tiny car. He punches on the APP he has and thereafter starts the navigation.

Only when we are ten minutes into the trip does he turn to steal glances at me.

“Are you going to tell me what’s up? Or you are going to tell me that you are my boss and I should stay out of your business?”

“Well... I just thought I could have a drink in this restaurant.”

“Yeah! And why am I driving you around, on a Friday night like this when I am supposed to be spending time with my girlfriend?”

“You have a girlfriend?” I smirk at him and he laughs.

“I do. And I plan to keep her but you are not making it easy.”

“This is the last,” I say with a deep sigh.

“You were following her, weren’t you?”

“I was.” There is no reason to lie to him.

“I thought she made it easy for you by blocking you,” he says. “Boss, you have...”

“To stay away. I know. I know. Fuck, I know,” I say.

He laughs. I know why. He hasn't seen me like this and it is this woman's doing. While we stay silent on our ride to Nonku's apartment to pick my car, I take a minute to delete Nonku's number from my contacts and from my APP. I block the number too. This way, I won't fall back into this hole if she ever texts me. I am going to do the same on 'Kingston's' phone.

Rhulani turns in the parking lot where my Jaquar awaits me.

“Tomorrow you are spending time with Gumede's son. They are booked at City Lodge and I confirmed breakfast with Theodore at 10h30, Francis Café,” Rhulani says.

“Great!” I respond while jumping out of the car. I tap the roof of the car and he drives away while I jump to my baby.

I respect my job with everything in me. Well, except on days that Nonku has me by the ties, apparently. So, ten thirty I am at a restaurant where I am to meet Theodore and his little family. I slide into an empty seat before I greet them all. The table is empty, so I figure they just arrived like I did.

“Everyone looks happy,” I comment. They have another little boy with them this side.

“Yes!” Abigail says. “Thank you so much for that camp. It really helped us and we are going strong. She turns to the little boy and introduces him as Aluwani – Theo’s son. I am going to need to find something to pin his name to so that I do not forget his name. After Aluwani shakes my hand, Abigail gets on her feet and excuses us with the boys. Only when they are grabbing a seat outside, does Theo asks how the mission is going.

“It is going well. We started small and we intend to go big this coming week,” I respond.

“Thank you. The camp was a great help. The boy is trying to keep his lessons in. He started with martial arts but it is not one-on-one based.”

“That’s where I come in.”

After I down my coffee, I take the boys with me to an old friend’s fighting club. As expected, the boys are fascinated by my car and I sure gave them a good ride on our way there. I see why the family says the boy is trying, he really is. His laughter is as loud as his brothers and I see a young happy boy.

At the fighting club, I get the boys in gear before we get into it.

Half an hour later the boys are panting from the push-ups and the pull-ups I had them make since we started. It looks like I am going to break the boys by the time they return back to Bloemfontein.

Focus! I like that they are focus. Even though Theo is not really impressed with the martial arts school the boys are enrolled in, they have taught them the basics and it makes the job very easy for me.

“Drink some water before we continue,” I instruct and I need not to tell them twice. The boys run to the corner of the room and down their bottles in a matter of seconds.

“Why do you want to do karate?” I ask the new boy as I position them for the ready stance.

“Karate is cool,” he innocently says.

“Ready stance!” I call out, sharply than I intended. Mpho and the new boy get into position. I watch before I correct their positioning. “Mpho, why do you want to do karate?”

“Self-defense, sir!” he says.

I nod.

We do things for different reasons and this, right here, will give this young boy a reason not to fear anyone.

“Did your teacher tell you the rules for karate?”

“Yes!” the new boy says.

“Yes, Sir!” Mpho yells out.

“What is it?”

“Karate is for defense only,” they boy chant. With that, I smile to myself as I go ahead and teach them how to kick ass!!

I survived two weeks without paying attention to Nonkululeko and her business. Flowers kept coming in and I sure gritted my teeth a few times but I am proud that I am not as bothered.

Life fucking goes on. And no men has ever been found dead because of the overwhelming feelings he had for a woman. The way I have survived not bumping into Nonku at the kitchen area was to ensure I drink my coffee before catching my ride to work. The best way to ignore Nonku during the meetings is to takes notes whenever she speaks. And to survive thinking about her when I am in bed is to fucking jerk off with her in my head. Rhulani says it gets better with time. I am waiting for that time.

It is Wednesday, at 15h15 when I notice a woman running, not walking, to Nonku's office. She doesn't wait for Fifi to let her in before she burges into the office. Almost everyone in the floor noticed her before we keep looking at each other and shrug. I am shrugging too, knowing very well why the panic. The door flies open and Nonku marches out, with the lady in tow. My eyes, together with those of my colleagues, follow them. She stops at Ephraim's desk. They have a little discussion before Ephraim jumps up and follow Nonku and the woman to the elevators.

"What is going on?" Sophie asks and I shrug. She gets on her feet and hurries to Fifi for more gossip. I wait, as I

continue capturing a payment I have. I am very good at minding my business and minding my business is what I am doing right now. I don't bother lifting my head when Sophie hurries back to her cubicle next to me.

"Fifi says the media team is booked to fly to East London next Wednesday when the Spectacula Live Show is tonight."

The Spectacula Live Show is an online music gig which is hosted on social media and television. Only A-list artists get to perform there. Since the Covid-19 days, this has been the best online events in the country, hosted quarterly.

"What?" the other colleague shrieks.

"They were supposed to arrive there last night to set up and today is the live show."

"But how did the team miss the right dates if they were supposed to set up yesterday?"

"I don't know."

I know how!

The Spectacula Live Show is one of Gumede Enterprise's biggest clients. They pay millions for live recordings and they have been doing so since last year. During the 'wrong emails' saga, we changed the dates for the show. Any communication sent out by Spectacula Live Show to Gumede Enterprises never reached the recipients. Instead, the emails were reaching my team, who changed the information before directing the mails to Gumede Enterprise. Last night I had a jol, reading the

complaint emails from the managers from Spectacula, complaining that we not set for the test run. Of course, it was my team that assured them that we will be on time. Whoever figured out that there is mess must have reached the cellphone number of one of the team members. Since Monday, the phone lines at Gumede Enterprise are down. No calls are coming in and going out. Of course, IT team is working on it.

Ephraim rushes back to his desk and order a lady next to go to pull the invoice batches for the payments we made to our suppliers in preparation to render the service at Spectacula Live Show. The lady rushes to the batch room while Ephraim punches on the computer. I try to ignore the commotion but when Nonku returns with her hands in her waist, frustrated, I lift my head to watch her. She stands in front of Ephraim before pacing around the floor, waiting for Ephraim to finish whatever he was dishing.

“Payments were made using this week’s dates,” Ephraim sadly says.

“How could we all miss it?” Nonku asks.

“To be honest, it isn’t our business to check the dates. As long as everything is submitted accordingly, we did nothing wrong, really.”

“What is going on in this place?” she asks, frustrated. I hate how sad she looks right now but it is none of my business. I am here on a mission.

“This is bad,” Ephraim says. A ping goes off from Nonku’s phone and she takes a minute to read it.

She thereafter turns to everyone in the floor.

“Guys, please save your work and you are excused for the day. Just watch out for the SMS requesting you to return to the office,” Nonku says. My colleagues mumble while packing away their belongings. I do the same and jump to my feet with everyone. I don’t waste time to leave the building.

“This place is becoming a joke,” one of the guys say as we stand outside Gumede Enterprise. I want to tell him that this is nothing but then it is better for everyone to just watch and see. Today I don’t call for the car right away, not with my colleagues leaving the building at the same hour. I wait at the bus stop for a little while before calling Rhulani for a pick up. He doesn’t waste time before stopping at the bus stop.

“Any update regarding SLS? We are sent home because of this.”

“Spectacula Live Show is not happening this year,” Rhulani responded. “Check the twitter updates.”

I pick my phone from his glove compartment and go through twitter.

It is chaos.

The Spectacula Live Show is not taking place this year due to the disappointment from Gumede Enterprise. The owners of the show are suing the production, which is Gumede Enterprise, and they are also demanding back the millions they paid for the services they have already paid for.

“Good job,” I say to Rhulani, who gives me a fist bump. We are heading to the right direction. By the time we are done with Gumede, his enterprise will be nothing but dust.

“Now, go get rid of that hair, take a long shower and head out to celebrate. You deserve it,” Rhulani says. It has been how long since I have been an employee at Gumede Enterprise? Even today I hate this fucking gel I have to smear on my head to style my hair. But I bet you, it is the only thing that sets me apart from the Kings that I am.

In my apartment, I do take that long shower and take my time getting ready for the night at my club. I haven't been going there and tonight might be a best time to make a round. On the television news, the music channels are discussing the chaos between SLS and Gumede Enterprise. Debates are taking place because nothing makes sense to everyone. I don't bother making myself food, I head straight to my club to check on how things are. It is a Wednesday night, so it isn't as hectic as it is going to be from tomorrow until Sunday. Usually on Monday and Tuesdays we are close unless we are hosting private parties or it is the end of the month.

I receive a glass of whiskey from my bar tender before occupying a stool by the bar. This way I get to see everything, 'in the eyes of the customers'. My eyes wander around the bar until they land on a group of four ladies seated at the corner booth. They might think I don't notice but they are talking about me. It is cute to

watch. I raise my glass to them and they all giggle, looking away.

Hunting for men to fuck, I see. Before I could move my eyes away from them, one of them gets on her feet. She is almost petite, dressed in a black body suit and has this beautiful short hair.

“I guess you are the brave one,” I say while she takes a seat next to me.

“Well... I am the one who lost a dare,” she says. She raises her hand to the bar tender and places a drink order. When he slides a long island cocktail to her, I tell him to put it on my tab. “You are a gentleman, aren’t you?”

“I try.” I take a sip of my drink. “So, what was the dare?”

“Pick a man and dance with him.”

“If you like... we could do more than that.”

“What do you have in mind?” she asks. I know I have won her heart already. I am a game player; I know other game players.

“Dinner?”

I love sexually liberated women. They know what they want and they are not shy about it.

While she goes to bid her friends farewell, I settle my bill – not wanting them to know that the club is mine.

Thereafter I take her to the restaurant for dinner. ‘That’ same restaurant just below my club. The host gladly takes me to my favourite section, but only when I am

closer to my favourite table, I notice Nonku seated alone, digging into my food. I ask my girl to get settled while I take a minute to take Nonku in.

I can never mistaken the dish she is half-way in. I cannot mistaken it because it is my favourite – the same dish I ordered for her when we came to dine together. I know why she is here. Food can be comforting when stressed. I just wonder where her precious man is in all of this. I am not quick to walk away before she notices me. When our eyes lock, she licks her lips and lowers her eyes.

Sighing deeply and not wanting to be rude, I make my way to her table.

“Get a double scoop of Belgian dark chocolate ice cream after that. It will brighten your mood.”

“Do you go around suggesting food to people?”

“Depends who you are,” I respond with a smirk before giving her a nod and making my way to my table.

“Who was that?” my guest asks just when I stand beside her.

“Why don’t we head to the tapas bar at the hotel?” I ask instead, taking her hand.

Some distractions are better off ignored.

Chapter 16

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU! (unedited)

I watch as he guides her out of the restaurant and just when they disappear from my view do I feel more weight on my shoulder. I bite my lower lip, urging myself not to be bothered by this. Why am I bothered? Why am I? I am not supposed to. Before coming here, I knew the chances of meeting him here were 50%. He owns a club in this place and this is his favourite restaurant. Of course, where else would he go to entertain his... women? I can't call them anything else because I am one of them. The thought makes me sick and I pick my glass of water and take a sip.

I hate that I am moved by seeing him with another woman.

'It is for the best!' I think.

It really is.

Even if I wanted, I could not date a man like that. A man who spends his life in a club, because he owns it, and picks women every night. I am disgusted that tonight, his evening is playing out just like how we spent mine. Hook up with a woman, take her freaking hand and leading her to his favourite restaurant... to pick his favourite meal for her before he goes ahead and fuck.

I am pathetic for thinking that I was just a special case. This thought makes me laugh at myself, shaking my head.

Taking a deep sigh, I call for the waiter and what do I do? I order the dessert that Kings suggested.

“I’ll have a double scoop of Belgium chocolate ice cream,” I say to the waiter, showing him my almost plate. If it wasn’t that I have slightly lost my appetite, I would have cleaned the entire thing. I am yet to go to a restaurant where they make a better salmon steak than this.

I scoff, shaking my head. I did not even like salmon before that night. To me, this was just another overpriced fish. But now, it is all I think of. I don’t know if it because of.... you know what? It is because of nothing. It is just nice.

As the waiter change the linen on my table, I ask him why I can’t find this restaurant on the food delivery APPs. All I wanted when I left the office, just two hours ago, was to soak myself in a bathtub, order the supper I just had and throw myself to bed.

I searched and searched and searched until I said, ‘Screw it! I am going there!’

Now I regret coming!

“The owner doesn’t want his food delivered. It is either you come here for a good experience and food or you go elsewhere,” he responds with a smile. “It is exclusive!”

That is it!

From the minute you walk in, you are treated like royalty and the food is to die for.

“It makes sense,” I say. Before I let him go, I clear my throat and ask, “Well, the gentleman who was here earlier. Does he frequent the place?”

“Which man Sir?”

“The one you greeted? Kings. He is friend and he recommended this place.”

“He is one of our best customers.”

I swallow my next question; not wanting to sound like a psycho. I wanted to ask if he bring different women over but then I realise how pathetic I would sound. It is none of my business.

“He recommended the dessert.”

“Ah! He surely knows his way around the question. He sometimes gives tips to our chefs. But that is between us, he doesn’t want anyone to know. He would leave the tips of a recipe on a tip for the chef.”

“Oh!”

“Yes!” He smiles at me and continues, “Allow me to get you your dessert. It must be ready now.”

“Thank you!”

I don’t want to think of Kings so I don’t.

I push my mind back at the office where I left after a management meeting. Apparently, SLS was not the only gig we missed. There were two small projects that did not take place on Monday and since our phones were done, the clients could not reach us. Our emails seem to be hacked and the hackers are posing at our staff. This

seems like something that happens in movies, I tell you. The teams were never prepared for this. As a finance manager, I have to work out the monies we need to pay back to our three clients. One look at my quick workings and I decided to walk out. After losing more than 2 million, and now more millions getting lost, I am worried sick about the future of Gumedede Enterprise.

The waiter places the bowl of ice cream in front of it before he disappears. The presentation is beautiful, I can only imagine the taste.

Taking the first bite, I widen my eyes in surprise before shoving another spoonful into my mouth.

This is foodgasm! I am feeling.

I moan, rolling my eyes and staring up to the ceiling.

I have never tasted a delicious ice cream like this. I slide another spoonful into my mouth and moan while relaxing on the chair.

This is so good.

My eyes are shut and I am taking in the taste when my phone rings. Picking it up, I put it to my ear.

“Mhhh?” I moan on the phone.

“Are you sleeping?” my sister asks.

“I wish,” I respond. “Can I call you in a minute?”

“Sure!”

I devour my dessert and I am so so so tempted to call for another round. The waiter is by my side before I could even search the room for him.

“That was fast, ma’am!” he comments with a giggle.

“Four scoops this time,” I say. He chuckles before leaving my table with the empty bowl. That was amazing and so comforting.

I dial my sister’s number and sit up straight so that I could have a decent chat with her. I haven’t spoken to her in a while.

“Hey sis! I am just checking in on you,” she says.

She is sweet!

“I am good. Just exhausted.”

“What happening at your workplace, I am watching the news.”

“It’s a mess!” I breathe out. “It really is a mess.”

We stay quiet for a minute.

“Are you okay?”

“I feel so so sad. I don’t know what’s going on with me. I feel so lonely. I feel anxious.”

“Please come over. You know Kagiso is away on business, right?” she says. I nod, even though she cannot see me. Zwano works with her husband and he is out of the country. Had he been around, he wouldn’t have mind to keep me company.

What is happening to me?

Since when do I need company?

I am not that kind of a person. I live by myself and prefer it over invading people’s spaces.

“You’ll leave for the office from here. I was going to come but it is a week day and ” And her son is already in bed; I know.

“I’ll come. I am not going to the office until next week.”

“I’ll see you later.”

My sister is a home maker – that is what they call housewives these days. I like it for them. Her husband does all the working and she does the home making and spending his money. I arrived just an hour ago after leaving the restaurant and passing by my apartment for some clothes. I wanted to soak myself in the bath tub so bad but it was getting late and I didn’t want to keep my sister waiting. So instead of taking my ritual baths, I jumped into a quick shower before coming here.

“I have white wine only and strictly for cooking... so I can’t promise a best bottle,” she says from the kitchen. “You know what? Let’s go to Kagiso’s man cave. He should have wine stocked in his bar.”

What did I once say about Kagiso showing off when he designed his house? He has the whole basement to himself and it has a huge bar area, gaming area and huge lounge area. In most families, his man cave is a family room. They have that too – a family room with every family board game and children toys you can imagine. They are living large these ones.

On any other day I would have stopped my sister from searching her house for alcohol but I feel like I need something soothing to make me forget that I saw Kings with another woman and

No. No. No.

I mean, I want something soothing to make me forget the mess happening at work. Yes, that is what I wanted to say.

Phelele goes behind the bar and open the wine rack. Which one would you like? I follow her and stand beside her, checking the labels of the wine. I stop at the one Kings has suggested the day we met at Woolworths. The day we reconnected and the day before he left me hanging. She pulls open the drawer and retrieves a wine opener. While she opens the wine, I grab a bar stool and reach for a clean glass.

“Do you guys have an idea who might be attacking your company?” Phelele asks while filling my glass of wine. She pours half a glass for herself.

“The teams are working on it.”

“Are your jobs even safe? SLS did a media briefing this evening. They are suing you guys six million for their loss and those guys promised a whole fight with a best legal team in town. And you know when they win the case, Gumede will have to reimburse them for the legal fees?!” she asks.

Yoh!

This is a mess.

My fear is working up only to receive a text message that we shouldn't return to the office.

"I think I am taking this burden and making it my own," I respond to my sister.

"Why don't you resign. Your CV looks perfect. Or... you could work on starting that consulting company. It has always been your dream."

"But what about my team?"

"What? They are not your problem Nonkululeko!" Phelele shrieks.

"I know, I know," I say.

Boikanyo is very happy to see me in the kitchen on Thursday morning. I am so used to waking up early, so I was up before the sun was even up. I have been trying to work on the projections needed and it is not really looking nice. The millions I am populating are not a child's play.

"Was I sleeping when you came?" he asks. His puppy happily circles him.

"I was."

Phelele instructs the boy to have his breakfast before she drops him at school. Thereafter Phelele tells me to be ready to walk the dog when she returns from the school.

While they leave the house and the two helpers are busy around the house, I make myself breakfasts and sit by the deck. Going through my phone, I notice a text message from Zwano.

‘I hope you are having a good week. Mine is hectic but I cannot wait to see you next week.’ – Zwano.

‘Nothing I cannot handle. Keep well!’

Keep well? I shake my head after an SMS is delivered. Keep well was too formal.

Zwano and I are getting to know each other. I think that is a way to describe our friendship. We are not yet in a relationship because I don’t want to be too quick to jump into things that I am uncertain about. I cannot seem to get myself to see him as more than just Kagiso’s friend.

As Phelele and I walk out of her gate, she starts complaining about how this dog is hers instead of her son’s. I only chuckle, it is my fault that she is stuck in this dog care duty.

“How are things with Zwano. He told me you guys have been on few dates.”

“Can’t say.” I shrug.

“You are capable of being in a relationship, Nonku. Why are you afraid.”

“I love my independency,” I say and she sighs deeply.

“When you meet the right one, you wouldn’t feel a need to stress that.”

“So you agree that Zwano is not right for me?”

She laughs. “I don’t know. Have you guys slept together?”

“What? No!!” I almost yell at her.

“Nonku! I am glad I didn’t ask this in his presence. Your look disgusted.”

“Come on... I just... it is just... “ I sigh. “I don’t know.” I stop on my tracks and Phelele does the same. “The thing is sometimes I get so lonely and...”

We start moving again. Before I could get an answer from her, my phone buzzes with a text. It is the CFO asking me to come to her office for a meeting in thirty minutes. I show my sister the text message before we both turn back to the house.

I don’t have anything decent to wear so after a quick shower, I go for a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, and then I am on my way.

It is so tense when I enter the CFO’s office. She is seated with three gentlemen and I can tell that whatever they are discussing in here.

“Nonku, thank you so much for joining us,” the CFO says while showing me a chair around the round table. I tip toe into the room, and take the empty chair before pulling my laptop and place it on the table. When I am set, I lift my head to take in the three gentlemen around the room. I swallow hard when my eyes land on the men

in a very exclusive royal blue suit with a crispy white shirt and red tie. He is scrolling through his phone and has a very noticeable frown on his face. We haven't met before there is never a need for us to be in the same room. Before me is Ndumiso Gumede. Everyone in the room is quiet, waiting for him to finish whatever he is busy with on the phone. Once done he sets his phone on the table and now does he turn to see me.

"Who is this?" he asks, directing the question not to me but the CFO.

"Our finance manager."

"Nonkululeko," I add, not wanting to only be addressed as the finance manager.

The man seated beside me clears his throat before he says, "Miss Nonkuleleko, this meeting is between the only people who are in this room. You are not to tell anyone about Mr Gumede's presence in this room, are we clear?"

I swallow hard before I nod.

"My life is in danger. My business is in danger. No one is to know about my presence," Ndumiso emphasize and I nod at everyone around the table. "Now! How much did we lose just this week?"

"I am still populating the data but my latest figure is four million, for the three projects we did not render."

"How can we get the money back?" Ndumiso asks.

"Ahhh!" My tongue is twisted. "I ... we... I don't know how we can get the money back but..."

“Find a way!” he says before shifting on his chair.

“What ways?”

“How I can recover the money we lost. Cut the costs. Cut the employee cheques. Come up with proposals. I need solutions. Not more problems. And you are definitely going to find solutions because I am not going to allow any of you to bankrupt me.”

Any of us?

I turn to face the CFO who is not rescuing me.

How am I going to find ways to recover six million?

“I don’t know why I pay people around here. Everyone around here is useless. How can I have a team who can’t find a simple solution? Do you know how much I am spending to outsource the external services,” he spits while getting on his feet. The two guys also get to their feet. He turns to the CFO and says, “You have until Monday!”

Until Monday to do what?

I turn to watch them leave the room. The thing I hear Ndumiso say is, “Fucking find out what the progress with IT is. This shit show is unacceptable. Find whoever it is behind this and bring them to me.”

CHAPTER 17

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS (unedited)

“It looked like you two had a connection,” she goes on and on and on about my meeting with Nonku earlier at the restaurant.

Fuck!

Are we going to eat these damn prawns or am I going to tell her that the woman we met earlier was just a friend?

“Are we going to talk about her all night?” I ask. We are seated at the tapas bar and it has been a little over an hour after that encounter. And here I am, an old arse man, explaining myself for sharing a minute with another woman.

Turn off! This is an ultimate turn off.

“Well...” she shrugs.

I pull my wallet from my back pocket and pull some money before dropping it on the table.

“I am sorry for wasting your time,” I say while getting on my feet. I button my blazer and head out of the bar without thinking twice.

At the elevator, I press the button for the basement to get to my car is parked. I am certain that Nonku is gone from the restaurant. Also, I need to stay the hell away from her.

I am home, frustrated and fucking horny. Not horny because of the sex I was supposed to be having with that stranger but because Nonku keeps invading my mind.

I groan, heading to the fridge for ice cold water that might attempt to cool me down. Once I have gulped the whole glass, I change into track pants and a vest before throwing myself on the couch. I go for the news – Gumede Enterprise is entertaining us tonight. SLS is angered and I love how armed they are with their legal team. I am going to enjoy this. It is eleven o'clock when I jump to bed. I have fought with myself to keep my fingers away from unblocking Nonkululeko. I want her so bad but I know that I cannot have her.

I just fucking wish my dick could get the message!

Please!

Of course, I toss and turn almost the entire time but when I am up and brushing my teeth, I am proud for surviving yet another day without disturbing Nonku's peace. I can just wonder how things are with her boyfriend. Well, this is not to make myself feel better, but that guy is not Nonku's match. He looks too... boring. Nonku wants fun. Nonku want passion. I do too.

But...

I can't keep on compromising the mission.

Dressed in my black suit – nothing new, really – I head straight to my office. These few days that we are excused from work, I get to catch up on my work. Heading down to my basement office, I go through my text message. One that grabs my attention. It is how Rhulani and I communicate sometimes. If you come across our coded text message, you could mistaken it for something that doesn't make sense. This time, he

has the initials 'NG' and a house emoji. This simply means that the mother fucking Ndumiso Gumede is back in town.

It's about a damn time.

His little company will go down with him inside the building.

I respond to the text with a coffee emoji. I do not need one.

Hanging my blazer onto the stand, I sigh deeply, wondering what it is to become of all the employees. I don't really give a fuck really but the way Nonku stressed that she is stuck at Gumede because of her team... I feel like a jerk destroying their lives.

A beep goes off from the door and I allow Rhulani into my office. He walks in with a coffee flask in one hand and his laptop on another.

Thank you, I needed one.

We need to go back to the drawing board.

"What drawing board?"

I explain. We are going to need to find a way to save the people. I mean, it is the right thing to do, right?

"Why are we changing the plans now?"

"Win win situation," I respond before throwing in my ideas. I am deep in my speech when he smiles while nodding his head. Why I didn't think of this at first makes me wonder. But not much because I know I didn't give a

fuck about anyone. Only Nonku does. And I do give a few fuck about her. Okay, maybe not a few.

Rhulani clears his throat.

“You are smiling.”

“I am enjoying this mission.”

We are going to twist things just a little bit.

After Rhulani gives me the update about the any other important matters I need to attend to, he leaves me alone to work on my reports. A text message from my mother makes me take a deep sigh! She is complaining about my quietness. Getting my chair, I dial her number, making my way to a beautiful black butterfly portrait I have on my wall. It almost takes the whole.

“Are we really that bad for you?” she asks without even greeting.

“I have been busy!”

“We need to talk,” she says quietly.

“What is wrong? Are you sick?”

“No me.”

“The old man,” I say with a scoff.

“Please, he needs you to visit him, please.”

“I am not going there.”

“Please!”

“No!” I roar, not wanting to hang up the phone on my mother. I could but I don’t want to – it would break her heart.

“He is dying.”

“Let him die,” I state the fact.

We go silent for a little while until she begs me to come see her. Without making any promises, I tell that I will make some time to visit.

Rhulani has been keeping me updated about the issues at Gumede Enterprise. There is still no solution and it is a Tuesday of the following week and we haven’t received any communications about returning back to the office. I am spinning on my chair, throwing a stress ball to the air and catching it when Rhulani’s extension flashes on my desk phone.

“What’s up?” I ask, setting the stress ball on the table.

“Did you see the chats going on the office whatsapp group?” he asks.

“What office Whatsapp group?”

“Gumede Enterprise,” he responds.

“Let me take a look.”

“I am coming down,” he says.

Setting the ear piece down, I open the drawer to retrieve the cellphone.

I open the APP to find a chain of messages. I didn't know this group existed until now. scrolling up, I see why. I am just added to the group by Fifi!

I scroll through the messages while other keep beeping in.

Nonku: I hope everyone is doing great. I am keeping up well.

I scroll past the greeting from almost everyone in the group. When I see a long text message from Nonku, I stop scrolling.

Nonku: I wish there was a way we could do this face-to-face but I don't really have good news. The teams are still figuring out what the problem is and until then, you are required to stay home. I wish I had good news to share with you but I don't.

I don't have any other colleagues' number so I have no idea who is texting back, but I read one text message, asking Nonku if our jobs are safe.

Nonku: Again, I wish I had a positive answer to that. I don't know where we stand. Just keep praying that things get better. As for me, I am fired from my job.

A hundred text message followed:

'No ways, Nonku!'

'Are you serious Nonku? Please stop playing around.'

'What happened?'

‘When did this happen?’

‘Now I am worried about our jobs.’

‘Who fired you?’

‘What happened?’

‘What did you do?’

I finally catch up with the latest message and I wait eagerly to hear why Nonku is fired. I know that Gumede is back in town so I am certain it is him who did so.

I can see that Nonku is typing, so I wait!

And wait!

Then her text message telling that about what she was tasked with and how she failed to deliver on the impossible costed her the job.

Just like everyone else, I text my apology to her.

Then the girls start suggesting that those who can, can meet on Friday for a little get-together slash farewell to Nonku. When Fifi asks who is in favour, almost everyone is in favour and when others complaint about it being a short notice, Nonku said that she is cover the bill.

Just when people start suggesting the restaurant, Rhulani buzzes me and allow him in. Taking a seat, he places the laptop on table.

“Gumede fired Nonku,” I say, relaxing on my chair.

“He doesn’t know that she was the glue of that team,” Rhulani says. I give him a brief nod. Rhulani stops

scrolling on his laptop and stares up at me before he says, “Give it a week before you go after her.”

“Who ...”

“I know you!” Rhulani says.

He does. How did he know that I was planning ways to reconnect with Nonku... now that she is no longer at Gumede Enterprise.

Rhulani looks up from his laptop and asks if I will be joining the team for Nonku’s farewell. I pick the stress ball again and start squeezing it. I miss her. I want to see her. “You might want to respond to the WhatsApp group.”

I pick the phone, finding the group chat filled with my name. Everyone is asking if I am joining or not.

I type.

‘Oh I am so sorry. I was walking my dog earlier. Yes, I’ll join the farewell.’

Everyone is happy and Fifi informs everyone that she will send the details of the farewell party.

“You were walking the dog,” Rhulani says while shaking his head.

“What?” I shrug. “I have to stay in character.”

Fifi booked us at a place called Mama's Spot. Apparently, it is Nonku's favourite spot. Scanning the space, I see why she like it. It has a very nice feeling and even though it isn't anything like something I'd fancy, it is not bad. Walking towards a very long table, I notice that Nonku is not yet at the long table set for us. I greet a few colleagues before taking a seat at a very dark corner where I'll stay hidden.

The drinks are called and everyone is in a mood. I ask for a glass of juice, not wanting to bother with cheap beer and Kingston cannot drink a best bottle of Whiskey.

"Oh, he she comes," Fifi happily announces and we all turn towards the entrance where Nonku is making a grand entrance. I stare, but not so much, admiring the short red jump suit she has on and the longest stilletos that makes her leg look longer than they are. I pick my phone and focus on it, not wanting to show how turned on I am about her.

"You guys... this isn't a pleasant time to meet but thank you guys for coming," she happily says, getting on the seat next to Fifi.

She looks fine for a person who just lost her job. I wasn't prepared to see the depressed version of her, so I am very glad that she looks well.

The drinks keep coming and only an hour later do we get the platter on food on our table. I try to engage with some of the guys and whenever I get a chance, I steal glances at Nonku.

This woman has me by the balls.

“Let's get to the dance floor,” Sophie calls out, pulling the two ladies seated next to her to get on their feet. The alcohol is probably kicking in. “Let's drink our problems away for just a night.”

Nonku picks her cosmopolitan glass and joins Sophie and the other girl. I could be wrong, but Nonku looks very fine for someone who is fired. It looks like this is something she needed to be alive. Like, she needed to be fired for her to bring her best out.

I am glad that she is not taking it as bad as I thought she would.

When everyone in the table turns to the dance floor to watch the brave colleagues, I am grateful that I can watch her.

She can't dance!

Fuck, she can't dance to save her life. But her giggles are very contagious.

Two hours later I want to leave but then Nonku has been gulping those cocktails since she arrived here – I am not comfortable to leave her without anyone watching her. I could call one of my guys to keep an eye on her but then again, this might be my last chance to see her since I won't be seeing her at Gumedede Enterprise. Even if Gumedede realizes his mistake and brings her back, the company might be dead by then.

So I decide to stay longer.

I decide to stay and watch Nonku have fun with her team.

It is just after midnight when most people disappear, leaving Nonku, Fifi and three more colleagues. They are drunk and out of their minds.

“Ahhh! My boyfriend is here to pick me up,” Fifi announces and Nonku pouts at her. “I love you boss but I really need to go.” Fifi pulls her boss into her arms and give her a longest warm hug before she promised that she will always keep in touch. They almost cry in each others’ arms.

When they pull out of the hug, Nonku says to Fifi, “Thank you for everything!”

“You were the best boss,” Fifi responds before rushing out to her ride home. Nonku sighs deeply and lifts her hand for the waiter. I could not help it but I raise an eyebrow and she noticed.

“Are you judging me, Kingston?” she asks. The other guys are busy debating about something that I am not interested in so they are not invested in Nonku and I.

“No, ma’am,” I respond.

“What?” Nonku laughs hard. It might have been funny to call her that at Mama’s Spot but I think she is too drunk and in her zone. “Stop calling me that. I am no longer your boss.”

The waiter stops beside her and Nonku asks if he could open a new tab since we just paid for the group tab just a few minuets ago. She asks for another glass of Cosmopolitan and a bucket of wings. When the waiter leaves, I ask her how she is getting home.

“I am driving home,” she slurs.

“Can I drive you home instead?” I ask. “My brother was drunk and driving when he ...”

“Oh, Kingston... I am so sorry,” she says, almost sober.

“The least I can do is to drive you home. I’ll Uber myself home.”

“Yah, its okay,” she responds with saddened eyes.

“Go and have fun!” I urge. She doesn’t hesitate to get on her feet and head to the dance floor.

We only leave Mama’s Spot at two o’clock, and as promised, I am driving Nonku home. I don’t worry about my car, I’ll Uber back here. As Nonku buckles up and directs me where to go, I drive out of the parking lot. I ask her to put her address on the navigator so that she doesn’t pick it up that I know my way to her apartment.

Ten minutes of driving in silence, Nonku turns to me and says, “You so look like your brother.”

“We are identical twins,” I state what is obvious to her.

“You are nicer and your brother is a jerk!”

Ah!

“Nothing new. What did he do?”

“Well... now that I am no longer your boss... I don’t mind telling you this,” she slurs. “He is the best fuck ever! And I miss him so much but I can’t have him.”

My heart leaps.

“Why not?”

“He has moved on!” she says and stares outside the window.

“I saw the flowers you got at the office...” I say but quickly add, “...well everyone saw the flowers. Don’t you have a boyfriend?”

“Nope!”

My heart leaps some more!

I choose not to say anything. Kings will fucking take over from here.

We stay quiet until we arrive at her apartment. She tells me to park just by the entrance and call my ride home.

I do make a request and two minutes later, my ride is by the gate.

“It was nice meeting you ma’am,” I say while opening the door. “And again, I am sorry about the job!”

“Fuck that job! Fuck Ndumiso Gumede,” she says while jumping out of the passenger seat and walking to the driver’s seat.

I let her into the car and watch her drive into her apartment. I am tempted to go home to change out of Kingston’s character and show up at her door but then I convince myself otherwise.

I’ll show up at the right time!

CHAPTER 18

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU (unedited)

I could kill to chill on Phelele's deck every day during sunset. It is so beautiful and very peaceful. We have been chilling here since the sunset hour but now it is so dark and chilly. The music is playing softly from the house as Phelele, Kagiso, Zwano and I enjoy our drinks.

"Here is a glass," Zwano says while handing me a glass of white wine. I give him a smile as he sits on the chair beside me.

"This is a nice pick, Phelele," I comment, and she raises her glass. She is the one who fished for the bottle from the cellar. She invited me over for supper before she flies out of the country with her husband. Zwano is also flying out too. When they returned from their business trip, Zwano and Kagiso decided on taking the international project and it will take them just a few months to complete. I am so relieved that I didn't have to break the news about not wanting to date Zwano. It is just obvious that we could not start a relationship when he will be miles away from me. We spoke about it two weeks ago and we toasted to being friends.

Boikanyo runs to where we are seated and throws his arms around his mother. He has just taken his evening bath. The boy is having it bad. He still has school and cannot travel, so he cannot even fly out of the country to return with his mother in two weeks.

"I'll be gone for just two weeks," Phelele promises, rubbing his back.

“I know,” Boi mumbles.

“We are going to have so much fun together,” I say, trying to make him feel better.

Kagiso gets up from his chair and takes his son’s hand.

“Come! Let me put you to bed,” Kagiso says to his son. Phelele drops kisses on his cheeks before he promises to check up on him before she goes to sleep.

We all watch as Kagiso and Boi walk to the house.

“So, how is job hunting going?” Phelele asks. It has been a good two weeks since I was fired from Gumede Enterprise and it still feels weird to wake up with nothing to do. And to be honest, I haven’t applied for any job. I just feel unmotivated. I hope to get out of that stupor.

“Haven’t applied yet.”

“Why not?” Zwano asks.

“I just don’t know where to start,” I sigh out. I turn my gaze to Phelele and says, “Maybe I could find a husband who has too much money to provide for me and I become a house maker.”

“Not you,” Phelele says without even thinking. I gasp at her. What does that even mean? “You are too strong and very independent to survive it.”

“Well... I can learn.”

“No! You can’t,” she insists before sipping her wine.

“Plus, life is so different from what it used to be.”

“Meaning?”

“You young stars don’t want to get married. As long as you find a partner to sleep with, you are good to go. That can never be me. My heart won’t survive that.”

Well, it isn’t as simple as it is made out to be.

I miss Kings but I know for a fact that I cannot reach out to him because I don’t want to get myself hurt. I thought I could play the ‘no feelings attached’ game but I failed dismally. But truth be told, I could kill to see him and spend just one more night together. However, the question is, will one night ever be enough? The answer to that question is the very reason I stay away from his club and the restaurant he frequents. Kings is not a relationship type – this I am quite sure about; and I am not the casual relationship type.

“Did you hear me?” Zwano says. I turn to Phelele who stares back at me. I didn’t hear a damn thing. I shake my head to Zwano. He gives me a weak smile and says, “If you want to give us a chance, I could get you accommodation and you can leave with us. We could get to know each other and you can get a chance to find your ground once again. Think about it.”

I sigh.

I need not to think about it.

“No, Zwano!” I quietly say.

For all the time I spent with Zwano, I have never thought of us as more than just family friends. He doesn’t soak my panties. He doesn’t make me want to imagine the things he could do to me. He isn’t a misery. It would be

unfair of me to expect him or anyone for that matter to make me feel what Kings made me feel but at least, can you give me just a small friction? We can work with a small friction.

“Travelling abroad has never been part of my plans, really,” I add.

“I see.”

When we are all quiet, I take a chance to check my phone for any new messages from Vule. She was telling me about the tickets to some event happening this coming weekend. Her last text promises to drop by my apartment tomorrow evening.

After dropping Phelele and Kagiso at the airport, I head straight to my apartment to spend yet another day watching movies until it is time to pick Boi from school. This is going to be my life for the coming week – driving and picking up Boikanyo from school. Oh, and I’ll be walking the dog too. After that I do get a chance to live as I wish.

Lying on the couch and scrolling through the TV channels, I try to make a phone call to Vule, wanting to check what time she is coming through. When she doesn’t respond to her text messages, I call her landline – just like how she used to do when I was at work and unreachable.

“Vule, hello,” she responds.

“Hey it is just me. I see you haven’t opened my text messages.”

“Friend, I am so so so busy today. It is chaotic here.”

“I take it I won’t be seeing you tonight?”

“It doesn’t look like it,” she absently said. “I’ll send you through the invites.” She goes quiet for a minute.

“Uhm... can I call you later?”

“Sure!” I don’t waste any more of her time.

I have forgotten how hectic it can get at the beginning of the month. Scrolling through the channels, I finally stop at a new series on MNET.

Just a few hours later, I grab a sandwich before rushing to pick my sister’s son at one thirty. I am spending another night here and will return to Johannesburg after picking Boi from school tomorrow. The best way to do this is to stay in their home until they return back but I so love my space in my apartment. However, I’ll have to spend the whole of next week in Pretoria.

Walking the dog to the dog park, I realise what Phelele was complaining about. When we arrived home from school, Boi insisted on staying home to do his homework. And I have to walk the dog for an hour.

The park is busy and I do notice a few people who seem to be enjoying this task. I am not! But then again, it has to be done and this is a perfect way to exercise. I just don’t feel like doing anything.

Friday afternoon, after dropping Boi home to his nanny, I head to my apartment. I pass by the mall to grab some food for the weekend. Driving into the parking lot, the security guy tells me that he has my parcel that was dropped off yesterday when I wasn't home.

I didn't order anything, though.

I wait for him by the elevator and he hands me a black box.

"Thank you," I say while heading to my apartment. Closing the door behind me, I hurry to check the contents in the box. I pull out a black card.

It is written 'Exclusive Invite' in gold, followed by today's date and venue. Inside the box is a wrist band and a bottle of wine.

I pull my phone from my jean's pocket and send Vule a text message.

'What are we wearing to this thing?'

Her response only follows after twenty minutes when I am done packing my little grocery away.

'Since when do you ask me what to wear to a gig? The usual.' – Vule.

'Okay, I got my invite. I'll meet you there.' – me.

'Later!' – Vule.

The event starts at seven, so I have three hours to get ready.

Knowing that I'd be late if I don't start preparing for my evening now, I make my way to my closet in search of a little black dress I have only worn once. I set it on the bed, followed by black stilettos. I pick a silver clutch bag and silver jewelry. I am going to wear a wig and have it styled in an up do.

I start with a power shower before I install my wig and finish with make-up. It is six thirty when I get into my dress and boy, do I look like a gem.

'How you look like that but you are still single worries me,' my sister's words ring in my head, making me smile. She always compliments me like that whenever we dress up to go out. She has always been big on love and I am the opposite one. She never calculates the risk when it comes to life, I do. I calculate the risks and the solutions to my calculations always make me skeptical to try new relationships.

The event is in a beautiful venue not so far from Sandton City. I am in awe as I drive my not-so-cheap Merc to the parking lot. I have never seen a parking lot area graced with these expensive cars. Putting my car in park, I text Vule that I have arrived. I also ask where she is parked. A gentleman in a black suit is standing by my door. He smiles when I lift my eyes to him. I roll down the window, ready to apologise if I am parked in the wrong area.

"Is this the general parking?" I ask.

"There is no such, ma'am," he responds.

"Uhm... okay... how can I help you?"

“I came to assist you to the door,” he says.

Oh!

I reach for my clutch bag, throw my phone inside and jump out. The gentleman watches as I lock my car.

“Do you have the wrist band?”

Oh, that! I quickly fish for it from the clutch and put it on. Thereafter he ushers me towards the red carpet. The walk is long and when I notice the well-lit glass venue, I ask, “Is this just a wine tasting?”

“More than than that. I thought every attendee was a fan of her.”

“My friend gave me the ticket.”

“She must love you.”

I want to ask why but then we are at the door and another man in a black tux lifts a tray full of flutes of champagne. I flash him a smile while taking one. Both the men tell me to enjoy myself.

I walk further in, meeting a few guests walking around the room filled with art work. It clicks to me. We are in an art exhibition.

Well, I am glad I took time to get myself ready – I fit in perfectly with all these people walking around this room. We can only minus the brands they are wearing.

This is my first art exhibition but even my ten year old nephew knows that all you have to do here is to walk around the room and admire the work.

I do just that but keeping an eye at the door for when Vule arrives. Walking to the next painting on my left, I stop in front of it and stare up at it. It is a portrait of a black woman crying – just one tear falling sliding down her cheek. She looks so sad, it gets me so emotional. I don't know but it is as if I can feel this woman's pain. My phone vibrates and I quickly reach for it from my clutch bag. Quickly cleaning a tear that escaped my eye, I answer Vule's call.

I laugh at myself for crying over a portrait.

"Where are you? I am at the parking lot," she says.

"Just walk in, I'll see you. I am standing not far from the door."

"Not far from the door? What door? You mean the gate?"

"The door..."

"What door? We are at the park," Vule says.

"What park?"

"Where are you?"

"Sandton... some art exhibition. You sent an invite yesterday... the security guy gave me your box."

"What box?" she asks. Now, as she asks this my eyes lock with those of Kings. He gives me a small wave before he starts walking toward me.

My heart starts drumming!

My mouth gets dry.

“I got the wrong invite. Where did you send yours?” I ask.

“SMS!”

“I am at the wrong event,” I say.

“We are in Braam! Are you still coming,” she asks just as Kings stands in front of me. He looks down at me, cracking all the walls around my guarded heart and making me wet in the process.

“I’ll call you back,” I say to Vule before hanging up.

“Hi!”

“Hi!” I whisper back.

Without saying any more words to each other, we both turn to face the portrait I was checking out before the phone call.

“It is not even her best work but it is so bold and it draws you in.”

“Who?”

“The artist. Ntsako!”

“Oh!” I say quietly before we stare back at the portrait.

“Thank you for coming.” I want to say something but he quickly adds, “We need to talk and I owe you dinner!” I don’t tell him that it was a mistake that I am here since I didn’t know it was his invite. Instead, I keep quiet. He places his hand on the small of my back, burning me with his touch before he says, “You look amazing!”

I clear my throat before I respond, “Thank you!”

“Can I feed you?” he whispers.

“Huh?” My voice is stuck in my throat.

“They are serving dinner by the balcony area. Can I feed you first before everything else?” he says.

CHAPTER 19

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS

“They are serving dinner by the balcony area. Can I feed you first before everything else?” I ask.

“Oh!”

She returns her gaze to the portrait which is before her. I do too, not knowing what ‘Oh’ means. We stay silent and after what seems like forever, she slides to her left where the other portrait grabs her attention. She tilts her head with a frown, trying to figure out the new portrait in front of her.

“Can I?”

“Can you what?”

“Feed you first,” I respond. I wait and watch as she takes a deep sigh as if I am irritating her. I did not miss that spark I felt just a minute ago, did I?

“I am not hungry!”

“I’ll order you something to drink then.”

“I don’t...”

“We need to talk,” I say before she could finish her sentence. She crosses her arms and turns to face me.

“Where is your date? The one you flaunted in front of me?”

“I did not flaunt her in front of you.”

“Is that how you live your life? You go around hunting for girls, hook up with them, and feed them before you fuck them?”

“That’s not how I hooked up with you. I remember you walking into my office asking me to fuck you,” I say, and she turns her gaze around us to check if any one heard me. She thereafter returns her angry gaze at me. I raise my hands to apologise before I softly say, “Like I said, we need to talk. I need to apologise and...”

“I don’t need your apology.”

“Fine! But we need to talk.”

“About what? Talk!”

“I miss you. I miss making love to you. And I want to be with you,” I say with a shrug. She has been driving me crazy. “Look, please just have supper with me.”

“Just supper... and that is because I am hungry. After that, I am going home.”

“Sounds perfect!” I say. I try taking her hand but she refuses, giving me a scoff. I walk beside her, leading her to the balcony area. I have reserved our table at a very

secluded corner but only for the reasons that we need to talk and she might need to vent.

Since Rhulani introduced me to his cousin's artwork, I never miss any of her monthly art events. It has been a year and a half since then and I swear, I am a groupie. Tonight is one of her fundraising events and it isn't any different from the other ones. If Nonku knew how much I paid to have space for us here, she wouldn't be this mad at me.

I pull her chair and watch her settle in before I take mine in front of her. Her face is cold but I know deep down, her heart is like that of a teddy bear. The waiter is on our side before we could even call for him. He suggests a bottle of wine for us, from tonight's range, and pour some for us. When he leaves us to decide on the starters, I stare at Nonku until she lifts her gaze to mine.

"How have you been?" I ask.

"Been good."

That is a lie. She doesn't look like she has been good.

"How are things at Gumede Enterprise?" I ask, directing her to inform me that she no longer works there. Things are chaotic at Gumede Enterprise. We are causing havoc and enjoying watching Ndumiso suffer. His business partners are starting to pop up from whichever holes they were hiding in. It is fun to watch. And I am glad Nonku is no longer there to stress over her team.

"I have no idea. I was fired from my job."

"Fired! What did you do?"

“Failed a task,” she says. I can read her by now so I know this is not the topic she wants to unpack.

“Are you job hunting?”

“Nope!” She takes a sip from her drink and turns to face the well-lit garden just underneath our glass balcony.

“Why is that?” I ask.

“Do we really have to do this?” Nonku asks, returning her gaze at me.

“Tell me why you are angry at me.”

“I am not angry at you.”

“Looks like I am pissing you off right now,” I say. “You told me to stay away from you and your boyfriend...”

“He is not my boyfriend.”

“Where is he by the way?” I ask, fully aware that he just flew out of the country. I don’t know the details, Rhulani does. Nonku doesn’t answer my question so I continue, “You asked me to stay away... and I did. And the last time I saw you, I wanted to hook up with that woman and I couldn’t ... because you were fucking in my head the whole time. I wanted to forget about you and she was there... but after seeing you, I just couldn’t.”

“Oh!”

Her ‘oh’ was very inaudible.

“If it makes things better, I haven't fucked anyone since we slept together.”

“That is none...”

“It is your business,” I respond before she finishes her sentence. My response takes her by surprise, so she scoffs and stares at me. I give her a chance to digest everything we have been discussing. In our silence, the waiter takes our starters order and disappears into the darkness.

“I am sorry,” I say.

“For?”

“I don’t know... being a jerk during your date with your boyfriend.”

“He is not ...”

“Him!” I correct. I am not very much sorry for ruining their day but Rhulani told me it is a decent thing to do – apologise even when I am not wrong.

The starters are on our table while we argue about why I shouldn’t apologise. I still insist on apologizing for hooking up with another woman because according to Rhulani, that might have turned her off even when she had told me to stay away from her. Oh, and I don’t forget to apologise for not calling her or reaching out to her even when she blocked me. I was very wrong, because I was supposed to stay away but not stay far away.

“Oh my God, I don’t believe this,” Nonku says, shaking her head. “You are making it worse.”

“Okay, I’ll stop,” I say, to stop her from getting up. I don’t know how to not be a jerk but I try... because I don’t want her to go.

“Let me get this right,” she says. I nod at her, glad that she is ready to talk. “You invited me here to apologise for all these useless things and then try to hook up with me because when you try to hook up with other women, I mess it up for you?”

“If you’d let me hook up with you, well I’d go for it but that is not the reason.”

“That is where you get it wrong,” she says sharply. “I am not for hookups.”

“Anymore...”

She smiles but not as sweetly as I would have loved her to and thereafter gets on her feet. Oh, it wasn’t a smile. I also jump to my feet and say, “I am sorry! I’ll stop being a jerk.”

She slowly sits down and I do the same.

“I hooked up with you then, and that is not something I want to repeat,” she says. I nod because I can see her seriousness. “It was a mistake I don’t want to repeat. It was fun but that is not for me. I had fun with you but that was it. I am staying away from you for a very good reason.”

“What is the reason.”

“I don’t want to get hurt.”

“I won’t hurt you,” I say and she scoffs.

“I want to find a man who is going to love me and be in a relationship with me.”

“I am here,” I respond and this time she laughs. I watch her and when she is done laughing at my face, I ask, “What?”

“Do you even know what courting is?”

Did it once and I don't even know if I was doing it right so I say, “You can teach me.” Her smile disappears as she stares at me. I add, “I mean it!”

Maybe Rhulani is a specialist when it comes to love. He told me that she was going to disagree with trying a relationship with me, telling me she doesn't want to be my guinea pig. Sighing deeply, I swipe for the art work at the reception area and jot down her address for it to be delivered there. I don't forget to write a little message for her.

I am up for the game. And even if it is going to take a little while to win her heart, I am going to give it my all. I swear, I don't want to hook up with her for the sex only. I am fucking obsessed with her. It is a healthy obsession and I am willing to show it to her.

The first thing I do when I get home is jump into the shower for a cold one. I'm tired of jerking off. It should be a fucking crime for a grown ass man to jerk off. I have been over doing it these past weeks and tonight, seeing Nonku in that little black dress and engraving her

image into my head, is going to force me into fisting myself even more.

Monday morning, at Gumede Enterprise, is another chaotic day with everyone running around to Ephraim's orders directed from Ndumiso Gumede and his management team. It is funny to watch but sad at times. The finance team has stopped working because the monies keep disappearing. The teams are still searching and working on dealing with this 'cyber' bully. Secrets are starting to pop up, Ndumiso owes some mafias who invested in his business and they are taking what belongs to them. Well, that is close enough. Ndumiso is paying for every pain he caused my client and his family. And what is a way to make Ndumiso pay than to empty his pocket and take away the power he was abusing? I have told Theo to start drafting a business plan because we are cornering Ndumiso to sell his company to as little as a penny and Theodore and his woman are going to buy it. He needs not to worry about the nitty gritty, I have everything figured out.

My phone pings on the table and I smile at the text that came in.

'You are really making it hard for me to keep you away from me. I didn't want to keep it but I want it so bad and I cannot afford to buy it for myself.' – Nonku.

She is talking about the portrait. I saw how drawn she was to it. Even when we were done with supper and were making the rounds across the exhibition area, she

kept going back to that painting. When she lifted the price tag, she almost choked on her saliva.

‘Keep it, please!’

‘The answer is no! I don’t want.’

This is the answer she is giving me for the question I asked on the note that accompanied the painting.

I sigh before sending her my next text.

‘Give me only two months to court you. Put me on the test. No sex involved!’

‘No sex involved?’

I grit my teeth as I send, ‘No sex!’

It is going to be very difficult because my balls are already blue. But I am willing to give it my ‘everything’.

‘We can start with a coffee date. I need to know who Kings is.’

‘Let’s do it this evening.’

‘Spending my week in Pretoria. I can only make it next week.’ – Nonku. I know she is baby-sitting her cousin.

‘I have a kiddies karate class with my two clients. You can come watch me kick some ass... maybe you’ll amend the ‘No sex’ rule. Bring your nephew, he’ll love it.’

‘Send me the details. I’ll drop him off.’ – Nonku.

I smirk! What a polite way to refuse to amend the ‘no sex’ rule. I stop myself from teasing her and only send her the details of the fighting club. I am training Mpho

and his... what is that little boy's name again? I snap my finger when I remember, 'Alu!'

'Thank you. And thank you for the painting. I love it.'

I saw her fall in love with it; so I know.

There is progress!

At 09:30, Theodore drops the boys at the fighting club. He greets Rhulani who is seated at a table, on his laptop. We were going through some reports together before he takes a week off to himself. And I promised not to bother him for a good seven days.

The boys are warming up when Nonku walks into the club with her nephew. She had to be in biker shorts and a tight gym bra, huh?

"Thought I could join," she says while trying her hair. She introduces her nephew and am I not glad his name is Boy? Makes my life very easy.

Rhulani clears his throat as he gets on his feet, packing his items into his laptop bag. I instruct Nonku and Boi to warm up as I join Rhulani.

"She is not to know about the mission, am I right?" he says.

"Yes! I know."

“Do not invite her in your house. We don’t want her to stumble across Kingston’s things.”

“Of course!”

“No! Give me access, I’ll go clean up and move everything to my apartment. I thought you said no sex for two months.”

“Yah”

“I don’t trust that... with the way you two are eyeing each other, I don’t trust you a bit.”

I know what he means and I trust my assistant more than myself, so I pick my phone from the table and program a visitor’s pass for him to access my apartment.

“Enjoy your holiday,” I say.

“I sure will. Try to survive a week without me.”

Returning to where everyone is, I introduce them and instruct Nonku and Boi to stand at the back, watch and learn while I get into it with Mpho and Alu.

I am impressed with the boys’ improvements. Their moves are technical now.

We are forty thirty minutes into the training when Mpho gives me a slooping kick. Just when I raise an eyebrow he starts laughing. Aluwani follows before Mpho gets on the floor, laughing his little lungs out.

I know why but I still command, “Care to share what is funny?”

“They are not doing it right,” Mpho is in stitches but is still trying to stop himself from laughing. Alu sits beside him and they get into fits of laughter.

I suppress my smile. Placing both my hands on my waist, I turn my gaze to Nonku and her nephew. They are both getting to the floor to take a breather.

“We are trying here,” she says with a shrug. I nod, still trying to suppress my laughter but Mpho and Alu’s laughter push me to the edge. I let it all out and Nonku joins me, together with her nephew.

These two are fucking terrible at this. I noticed it when we started and because I take my job seriously, I shifted my focus to the two boys who came all the way from Bloemfontein for this training.

It takes a while for the room to get quiet and when it does, I say, “Okay! Let’s take it to the top!”

When Nonku and her nephew are the first to jump to their feet, I lose it again, contaminating the whole room with laughter!

No, this is a rap!

I wait for the laughters to die before I say, “Come on! Let’s take an ice cream break.”

The boys run for their shoes while I walk to where Nonku stands.

“You did great,” I say, suppressing a smile.

“Yeah right.”

“You teach me how to court you and I’ll teach you how to kick ass,” I say before dropping a quick peck on her lips and walk past her to my sneakers.

CHAPTER 20

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU (UNEDITED)

Kings hands me a cone ice cream before stealing another quick kiss. This is not new but I have butterflies in the pits of my stomach. This man makes me feel things I don’t even understand.

As he leads the way back to where the boys are seated, I cannot help but wonder how a man like him is so great with children.

Kings and I share one side of the booth while the boys take the other one. They all busy watching some karate lessons on Youtube, in the hopes of getting my nephew on track with today’s lessons.

“So you own a night club and a fighting club?” I ask. This could be our very first date.

“I own a night club and my friend owns the fighting club.”

“How are you the one teaching these kids?” I ask and we both lift our eyes to the three boys.

They are all in heaven - all drunk in laughter.

“I... conduct boot camps for kids... and Mpho needed help with martial arts.”

Hmmm!

I lick my ice cream and I don't miss Kings's eyes on my lips.

I smile at him and lean in closer, and ask, “What boot camps?”

“For teenagers,” he says with a sweet smile as if he knows that he has all my attention.

He explains to me all about the camps he hosts and if I don't find this man interesting, I never will. He tells me how he struggled to deal with his anger when he was a teenager and how he needed this kinds of camps to help him navigate his feelings. Now he does them to help the younger kids to be the better version of themselves. When I take a glance at Mpho, I see what he means. He tells me how closed up he was before he met him, and I really dont believe him.

“So, are you ever going to find ways to reconnect with your twin brother?” I ask and he looks away. I really dont want to impose but I really want to know what happened between the two. Two brothers cannot hate each other and write each other out of each other's lives like this. How do they even survive? I wouldn't survive if my sister doesnt want anything to do with me.

“You just had to, huh?”

“Kingston is a very nice guy and I dont understand what could make ...”

“Is it okay to leave that part about my life out?”

“I want to get to know you.”

He sighs deeply.

“Look... Kingston and I will talk things out like adults.”

“That’s better.”

“Sir, we are done,” Mpho says, showing off his empty ice cream cup. His brother and my nephew do the same.

“He calls you ‘sir’,” I mumble while hiding the smile.

“Cute, huh?” He asks while jumping to his feet. I do the same and I don’t miss that something shifted and I am worried that I might have turned him off by asking about his brother.

The boys lead the way back to the fighting club and when we reach the door, I announce that Boi and I have to leave. I don’t want to worsen things and spoil things before we even start trying things out. Also, Boi and I are just terrible at this thing and it is kind of unfair of us to take up their time.

“Can we stay longer?” Boi asks.

“No baby... we have to go but I promise to bring you again,” I say.

“Drink water and warm up, I’m coming,” he instructs the two boys. Then he turns to me and asks where I am parked. I lead the way to the parking lot and let Boi jump into the back seat so that we could talk.

“Thank you for this ... and the ice cream,” I say when he looks down at me. I continue, “I am sorry for spoiling it. I shouldn’t have brought Kingston up.”

He takes my hand and kiss the back of it and says, “I wish I could tell you some family secrets but I dont think it would be very wise to do so. I’ll tell you when the time is right.”

“Okay,” I respond.

“Can I take you out tonight?” He asks. I swallow hard and stop myself from melting in the middle of the parking lot.

“Not tonight.”

“Tomorrow? Lunch? I could cook something for us,” he says.

“No!” I quickly say, and he raises his eyebrow.

“Let us do movies,” I respond. He frowns slightly. “I am teaching you to court me, remember?”

“Right!” He sighs.

Looks like it is going to be a very long two months for him. He quickly steals a kiss and opens the door. If only he knew that he doesnt have to steal all these kisses! My mouth want his. My body wants his so bad, I can only wonder how I am going to prove a point to him for two months.

He closes the door for me, waves before he walks back towards the fighting club. I watch him until he disappears. I watched him so that I could imprint this

imagine into my head. It is not everyday that Kings is wearing shorts and a tight fitting sport shirt. His legs!! Jesus!

“Aunty, where are we going?” Boi asks from the back seat, jerking me off from my thoughts.

“Are you hungry?”

“No!”

“Home?”

“But you said we are going somewhere that is why I can’t do karate?”

I have no plan. All I wanted to do was to run away from Kings, thinking that I have pissed him off.

“Let’s go get cleaned up and I’ll take you to Magic World.”

That works because Boi immediately drop his head to his tablet as I drive us out of the parking lot.

I am resigning to bed at 20h30 when I notice a message on my phone. I put away my gown and get into my sheets before scrolling to the message.

Kings: ‘Thanks for joining us. You looked beautiful.’

I smile as I type my response. I did put on my favourite gym wear for him.

Me: 'I had fun.'

Kings: 'What time am I picking you up for the movies.'

Me: 'Five!'

Kings: 'Can we it make earlier so that I get a chance to see? Unless we are spending a night together.'

Me: 'We can do lunch.'

Kings: 'I am cooking. Come over!'

I sigh deeply, contemplating on this. This is a test I might not pass.

Me: 'Send me location.'

Kings doesn't waste time sending me the location to his apartment. Thereafter he tells me goodnight.

Could things work between us if we start on a clean slate? I know I have millions feelings for him but am I ready to offer my heart to a man like him?

I call Vule who doesn't waste time answering my call.

"Hey friend..." she says but then gets quiet.

"Are you busy?"

"Just trying out this new skin routine," she says. I roll my eyes at her even though she doesnt see me. I am so jealous of how perfect her skin is but I know it is all the effort she puts to take care of it. I hear the water run before she says, "Yes, we can talk. I am going to take a longest bath ever."

"How was the shopping?" I ask.

“I came home broke,” she says. It is her and twin sister’s birthday in a few weeks and they are doing a photoshoot together for the invitations. I am looking forward to it because I know that my friend does know how to organise a great party. After telling me all the items she bought, as if it was her who made this phone call, she then asks, “What’s up?”

“I think I am falling in love.”

“Are you not already in love?” She asks.

“I am, right?” I say before we both laugh.

“Listen to how sweet your voice? You are in love and there is nothing wrong with that. You are supposed to be happy about it. You have been single for so long.” I stay quiet, drinking in his words. “But you are worried, huh?”

“He is too perfect and that scares me.”

“Everybody have skeletons... but you wouldn’t know until you are in.”

“I have never felt this way about a man,” I confess.

“I have been your friend for ages. I know that ... hence i am saying he is perfect for you. He is rich... he is sexy... he gives you million orgasms... he makes you smile. What else is missing?”

“I am going to his house tomorrow. He is cooking for me.”

“And he cooks! Your kids wont die of hunger,” she says.

“Really Vule? Really?” I ask while laughing but cannot help but reminisce about today’s ice cream date. He was so perfect with those kids.

“Go for it! Go all in!”

“Listen to you.”

By the time she hangs up, I am beaming from ear to ear. I am going to push away all these bad thoughts that keep creeping into my head.

Immediately after church, I drive Boi home before I change into a very casual dress and sandals. I check with his nanny if everything is set for his week and when she gives me a thumbs up, I run out of the house to Kings’s apartment. I send him a text, telling him that I am on my way. He sends me a code to use for access.

I have no idea why my hands are sweaty as I turn into this luxurious building. The security official by the gate receives my security code and instructs me where to park and how to get to Kings’ apartment. At the elevator, there is another officer waiting for me. When I show him my pass code, he checks something on his device and when he is convinced, he presses the elevator for me.

I give him a sweet smile before stepping into the elevator. When the door closes, I quickly check my face on the mirror - I am happy that everything is in check.

The door pings after a short while and I step out of the door.

A door from down the corridor opens and out steps Kings. He leans on the door frame and watch as I walk towards him. I watch him watch me. I didn't know he could get this laid back. He is in a black t-shirt and black track pants.

"How did you know that I am stepping out of the elevator?" I ask.

"I know everything," he says while standing up straight and opening up his arms for a hug. I get into his arms and immediately wish I could stay buried in them for long. He breaks the hug and leads the way inside.

WOW!

I take in the apartment.

It is as I have stepped into an luxurious show room.

"Do you even live in this house?" I ask, not tracing anything that looks out of place. Everything is neat and the apartment smells so clean.

"This is my home. Welcome!" He says, turning towards the kitchen area. Now i get what he meant by equipped. It is fully equipped.

He asks something from the kitchen but I don't hear it as I am making my way to the four paintings on the wall.

"These are by Ntsako, right?" I say.

"The one and only."

I am in awe!

I stand in front of the portraits and try to study them. They are the only things that bring colour into this apartment.

He stands beside me and hands me a glass of wine.

“Thank you,” I murmur while taking the glass from him. Taking a first sip, I widen my eyes while lifting my eyes to him.

“The one I recommended your ex boyfriend to buy you,” he says. I give him a straight face but he only laughs, leaving me standing in front of the portraits.

When I am satisfied, I turn to the kitchen where he is busy chopping some veggies.

“What are you making?”

“Lamb shank,” he says.

“Do you need help?”

“No, please,” he says.

“Please?”

“I am cooking for you. You’ll help me tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” I laugh.

“If we are courting, dont we see each other every day?” He asks.

“We don’t have to.”

“I want to.”

I sigh, urging my heart no to fall deeper than it already has. A part of me wants to believe that he means it and

a part of me tells me that he is just saying the right things to please me.

“What should I do?” I ask.

“Watch some TV,” he says. “The remotes are on the table.”

Taking a sip from my glass, I make my way to the black leather couch, and throw myself there. Pulling the remotes from the table, I switch the television on.

When the television lights up, it is in some business channel and on the screen is Ndumiso Gumede. I am wondering how he is now showing his face to the world when he made me promise not to say a word. Things must be really bad.

“No... no... that is not what I am saying,” Ndumiso argues from his seat.

“Then what are you saying? That your teams cannot figure out what the hell is happening and money keeps disappearing?” The presenter asks and scoffs.

“I said... we cannot report on anything as yet. But... yes... we have had instances where we have picked up the cyber attack...”

“My question at the beginning of this interview was... who do you think is attacking you? There are so many conspiracies going on and we called you into the studio to clarify and correct us.”

“Okay...” Ndumiso shakes on his seat.

The presenter continues, “Do you or do you not have a relationship with a drug lord from Spain and were you not laundering money with your business friends?”

“No!”

“We all know that is a lie,” the presenter says.

“Then why did you call me here if you have all the answers? Why am I here if you are not accepting my answers?” Ndumiso asks, agitated. I turn to Kings, who has stopped chopping and just staring right into the television, gritting his teeth.

I reduce the volume and ask Kings, “What do you think about this case?”

Only now does he snap back and turn to me.

“What case?”

“Gumede enterprise?”

“I just feel like that guy is a greedy business man and his sins are catching up with him,” he says. I agree. Kings continues, “How is the job hunting?”

“I haven’t started.” I sigh. “I am thinking of starting my own thing but I am scared.”

“What are you scared of?”

“If I can do it.”

“I can be your first client.”

“The Club?”

“Yes!”

“I’m sure you have a better team.”

“But I want to keep you forever... either as my girlfriend or my accountant... or both.”

How do I not melt to that?

I don’t respond. I increase the volume instead.

“Yes... the rumours are true... but we have measures in place,” Ndumiso says and the video zooms in to his face. He looks a little shaken.

“So the retrenchment rumour is true.”

“But we have measures in place,” Ndumiso adds.

“What measures?” I mumble to myself, rolling my eyes at him. Ndumiso Gumede has no plan!

His ship is sinking.

And it is sinking real fast.

CHAPTER 21

Heart of STEEL

KINGS (unedited)

I like Nonku in my space. She fits just like a glove. Placing the serving bowls on the small dining table, I call for her to join me. She happily places her phone on the table and jumps to her feet. She looks too excited for food, you’d swear she is not fed wherever she came from.

I watch as she washes her hands in the kitchen basin before she walks up to where I am. I pull the chair for her and wait for her to settle before placing a napkin on her lap. I do notice her thighs but I force myself not to react to them. I am trying to be a decent man and so far, so good.

But this is hard.

Before taking my seat, I pour more wine into her glass.

“You are a very good host.”

“I am aim to impress,” I respond with a smile.

She reaches for her plate and pile it up with food. I dish for myself too, just to be polite.

“Where did you learn to cook?”

I smile.

“I grew up amongst girls,” I respond... but then I add, “They tried teaching me and my brothers how to cook but I was the only one interested.”

“Don’t you miss your other brother? What was his name?”

“Anthony,” I say and clear my throat before dropping my eyes to my food. Nonku has an effect on me and I am getting to understand why my assistant didn’t want her near me until we are done with this mission. I can lie through my teeth and get away with it. I lie for a living. But when it comes to her, I feel so fucking guilty and I can attest to you, I dont easily feel guilty because I have zero fucks to give.

“Why are you never comfortable to talk about your family?”

“It is a very broken family.”

“Maybe you guys should go to a family therapist.”

“Right!”

“This is good...” she groans after taking her first bite.

I know it is good.

“I have always loved cooking and at some point in my life i wanted to be a chef.”

This is the truth. If everyone around me didn't discourage me, I would have been a chef and I probably wouldn't have chosen to kill people or get people drunk.

As we continue with our lunch, Nonku doesn't stop with her questions. If she was anyone else but her, I would have her shut her down by now.

But i guess this is what she means by courting!

A knock interrupts us and I immediately know who it is. If it was any other guest making their way to my apartment, I would have know when they reached the gate.

“Excuse me,” I say while getting on my feet. I wipe my mouth with the napkin before dropping it to the table and making my way to the door. I do take a second to check the screen on my phone to confirm the guest behind the door.

There is no way to handle this other than answering the door.

Opening the door, the girl from down the corridor jumps into my apartment like she always does.

“Where have you been hiding?” She asks and stops on her tracks when she notices my guest at the dining table. “Hi!”

“Hi!” Nonku says before scooping more food. She surely loves her food - I am going to enjoy feeding her.

“Are you in a middle of something?” She asks.

“Yep!”

“Should I come back later?”

“Ah, no!”

Can't she read the room?

“Oh!” She says.

“Are you going to introduce us?” Nonku asks while placing her silverware on the plate. She just lost her appetite.

“Nonku... meet her... she stays just down the corridor.”

“You don't even know my name,” the girl says before she swears under her breath and walk to the door. She doesn't say anything else before walking out of the door.

“You fuck her,” Nonku says while reaching for her glass of wine. She doesnt move her eyes from mine when she takes a sip.

“Used to,” I confess.

The room goes quiet.

After what seems like forever, she says, "Do you need help with the dishes?" She jumps to her feet and starts clearing the table. I pick the salad bowls to the kitchen and walk to the kitchen basin where she is washing her hands. I stand behind, sandwiching her with the basin.

"I meant what i said the other day. I haven't fucked anyone since us," I mumble to her ear. She wants to shift away from me but I dont allow her. "Are you jealous?"

"Just a little," she says before I allow her to turn to me.

"You don't have to be," I mumble, staring down at her lips. I drop my lips to her and surprisingly, she doesn't refuse to kiss me. When an moan escapes her lips, my dick grows, ready for action but she pulls away.

"Fix it!" She says.

"Fix what?"

"The girl from down the corridor and all your other fuck buddies," she sternly says. "If we are going to do this then we have to be exclusive.

I want to tell her that I no longer have fuck buddies but she twirls and escapes away from me. I turn to watch what she is doing.

"Are we still catching that movie?" She asks while reaching her phone and handbag.

Shit!

I had other ideas.

I hate movies but I survived one with Nonku for one reason. I had her hand in mine the whole time. These little things we do keep making me fall harder for her.

She just left for her apartment and I am left, once again, with bloodily blue balls. But what I know for sure is that Nonku is on the same dilemma as me. Her kisses are very hungry and damn doesn't she melt when her lips are on mine.

Monday morning, I drive to Rhulani apartment to get ready for my Kingston character. I cannot wait to finish this mission so that I can have my life back. This is not how I plan to live my life but then again, I want Nonku in my space.

Gumede Enterprise is sinking and everyone is aware. What everyone is waiting for that email confirming the retrenchment plans. Before Nonku arrived at my apartment yesterday, I was catching up on that discussion. The social medias are buzzing and all the newspaper are fighting to have an exclusive on this story. Well, we are the ones who leaked the news about money laundering and that is according to the file Theodore submitted to us at the beginning of this mission. We had a team follow the traces Theodore

made and BINGO! The allegations came true and one by one, we are to expose them.

Fuck, this is fun to watch!

And it is hilarious.

“Kingston, did you also watched the talk show,” Fifi asks when I step into the kitchenette to make first cup of coffee for the day.

“What show?”

“The Biz Hour... Mr Gumede was interviewed,” she says.

“What did he say?” I ask.

“That the management is in talks with Business Rescue practitioner,” she says. “Things are not looking good.”

“I hope our jobs are safe.”

“I wish Nonku was here,” Fifi says, making me miss the woman that stole my heart. I don't comment. The last thing is to look smitten when I respond back.

Just when I finish making cup of strong black coffee, Ephraim walks into the kitchenette area and tells us about the meeting that is to take place in the Auditorium. The team doesn't waste time heading down to the auditorium where we find endless photographer and media personnel.

I do take a seat at the back, watching like a hawk.

It after we are settled when Ndumiso takes the podium. He has a man that looks like his body guard. It a man like Ndumiso who needs protection in his own company.

“I won't take much of your time. This is the first and only brief you are going to get from me,” he says. This man is arrogant and pathetic. “It is always better to fight but it is best to accept defeat. Gumede Enterprise is going on a business rescue.” People start mumbling around the room, probably wondering what ‘business rescue’ is. Well, a business applies for a business rescue when it is in the pits. It is when things are fucked up to no return. In simple finance terms, business rescue is done to rescue financially distressed businesses to avoid company liquidation. Well, there won't be any business rescuing because I am ready to disarm the whole team before it even gets to start working.

I don't waste time pulling my phone from the pocket and sending my team member the text message.

‘Phase 2!’

We knew that it was going to get to this, however, I didn't think it was going to be this soon. Once I see that my message is read, I slide my phone into the pocket and listen as Ndumiso tries to calm everyone and try to explain, in his terms, what business rescue is.

“I cannot guarantee that all your jobs will be safe...” he tries to continue but the room erupts into noise. I don't bother listening as he tries to make his explanations. I am already brainstorming for the next move.

While at it, I text Nonku.

‘Dinner at my place tonight?’

The response beeps into my phone immediately.

'Who is cooking?' - Nonku.

'I am. I told you that I don't mind feeding you in any way.'

'Fine!'

'Can you stay the night?' - I try my luck.

'That is not how courting works.'

'I'll behave.'

'Just dinner!'

I sigh deeply.

'Just dinner it is.'

As I jump into Rhulani's shower, I laugh at how dedicated I am at this. Knowing that Nonku is coming to my place in a few hours, I am no longer grumpy about this whole procedure. Thinking about how free I was when Nonku was in my space yesterday, I am glad Rhulani moved everything out of my apartment.

It is four thirty when I drive to my apartment. While I wait for Nonku who will be arriving after helping her nephew with homework, I take some time to prepare something for dinner. Tonight I settle for my favourite salmon steak because it is her favourite as well.

I am going through some emails from the club when I receive a text from Rhulani.

'Looks like you are surviving without me.'

The man is too dedicated to his work.

'I am doing just fine. I bet you know about the rescue.'

‘It is everywhere on the socials.’

‘Jay will handle it until your return. Switch that phone.’ - me.

‘Catch you later.’

My phone vibrates, notifying me of Nonku’s arrival at the main gate. I pack away my laptop into its drawer and clear the search history - yesterday was very close when she switched on the television and finding it on the channel where Ndumiso was interviewed. I know she didn’t read much into it but I don’t want to give her ideas.

We are close to getting to the bottom of this case, and I cannot afford to slip up. I am going to let her know the truth - only when the time is right.

I follow her movement and before she knocks, I am opening the door. Her smile is bright when she sees me. I drop a kiss on her lips before opening up for her.

Tonight she is in a short leather skirt and a white vest and flip flops. Very, very simple but not to me. To me, this feels like torture. I love every bits of her.

“You can grab something to drink from the fridge,” I offer. She is going to need to get used to the place. I plan to keep her for long.

She heads to my fridge and takes a little while deciding what to have. With her hands on her waist, I watch as she frowns a little. Thereafter she pulls a bottle of wine I was chilling.

“Don’t you have cocktails?”

“We should go shopping for your favourites,” I respond while placing a glass on her table. She doesn't respond but she just smiles at me.

Fuck this no sex bullshit!

I take her hand and pull her to me. She doesn't fight back.

“This is torture,” I mumble as i kiss her lips.

“Whats torture?” She whispers.

“Having you around and not making love to you.”

“We still have eight weeks to go,” she mumbles back but I deepen the kiss which she gladly receives.

“I know....” I respond before sliding my tongue into her mouth. When she moans and starts sucking, I pull her even closer to me, rubbing my erection on her stomach. She cannot be this perfect and expect me not to want a piece of her. As the mother fucker, the mighty Ndumiso Gumede, said, it is always better to fight but it is best to accept defeat. I accept defeat!

It is in days like these when I appreciate my studio apartment. We can easily get to my bed right about now.

I don't break the kiss when I slowly direct Nonku to my bed. She knows what is coming because her moans are louder and her kisses are hungrier. At my bed, I pull her vest off, followed by her white bra. Fuck, I have been craving for this plum boobs. I drop my mouth to one breast and start sucking. Her hand lands on my head as she continues to moan. I move to the next breast and suck the life out of it before returning my lips to hers.

“Fuck! I keep falling in love with you each time I do this to you,” I hear myself confessing. This is Nonku! She has possessed me.

Her skirt is on the floor before I snatch her lace underwear. I let her sit on the edge of the bed before I part her legs and burry my head in between them, reminding her what I am capable of. It doesnt take long for her thighs to start shaking. And it doesnt take long for me to fuck the life out of her before the condom is filled with my semen!

Of course, my release was accompanied by a loud cry. This was the longest I had gone without fucking a woman and it was all her doing!!

As we slide inside the sheets, she says, “we were supposed to wait for two months.”

Resting her head on my chest I say, “We did try to wait for two days...”

She cracks up!

“What does this mean? Are you officially my girlfriend?”

“You are officially my boyfriend,” she says.

This makes me grin like a fucking idiot!

CHAPTER 22

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU

Two weeks in and I am so deep in love with this man, it is not even funny. Each time we have to be apart, we find each other extending our plans. I have been housing Kings in my apartment these past weeks and I am enjoying each part of it. But the part I enjoy the most is his cookings. The man can cook – that waiter I once met wasn't lying about this. And the other part I like the most is him pushing me for morning jogs before he leaves to start his day. I need a push when it comes to this and he does a very good job at it.

He starts his days very early and I am forced to start my days with him.

It is 05:00 and he is tying his sneakers while I groan from the bed. I don't feel like jogging today.

"Can I skip today?" I ask while pulling a duvet and covering my head with it.

"Ah... nope!" he says while snatching the duvet. I know, even if I try, he is not going to let me pass because he didn't wake me for a morning glory and he enjoys spending his mornings with me. I normally see him in the evenings as he is working during the day.

While I drag my feet to the bathroom, he makes the bed – even though he knows very well that I will take a nap after my jog.

In the two weeks that we have spent together, I haven't gotten used to how neat he is and it freaks me out. He is totally the opposite of me and even though they say 'opposites attracts', I feel like my habits would turn him off. He doesn't sleep before the house is spotless. He

doesn't order take-away! It is either he cooks or we go out dining – of which he prefers the latter. I live on take-away. When I walk back from freshening up, I find my biker shorts, a gym bra and t-shirt laid on the bed. This, again, is one of the little things he does to make me fall in love with him. I thought we were going to start by taking things slowly but it is not the case here. Kings is in this relationship more than I am and unfortunately, he cannot help himself. I don't know him much but he loves to serve; and this is so new to me. I did the serving in my previous relationship so it feels awkward to be served in this way. Kings find joy in making my life a little easier.

“You have five minutes left,” he calls out from the kitchen.

I get into my gym gear before joining him at the kitchen area. He is leaning on the wall just by the door while going through his phone – probably planning his day ahead. When he notices me, he places the phone on the little table I have by the door.

“How does your day look like today?” he asks as we ride the elevator down.

“I am going to finalise my proposal,” I proudly respond. I thought he was lying when he said I should put my things in place and take him as my first client. After that evening, I thought hard about starting my venture and I think the more I work on my business proposal, the more I am starting to gain confidence.

I am still working on it though and I still have a long way to go because I don't even have a name for it.

The street is quiet, just like any other day and we quietly start jogging down the street. Of course, he starts by sprinting up the road and waits for me as he stretches or throws in a few pushups by the side of the road.

Showing off much! I try to keep up and I do manage to keep up.

By the time we return home, I am finished.

"I'll see you after work, huh?" he says before dropping a kiss to my lips.

I think I like the fact that he doesn't shower and get ready for work in my house. He prefers to do it in his apartment. Imagine having his suits in my closet? It is too soon for that. We are already going fast as it is.

"Yeah! But I have to do a little shopping later," I respond while pulling a t-shirt over my head.

"Are you seducing me?" he asks, dropping his eyes to my heaving chest. I giggle. No, I wasn't seducing him. I want to jump into a shower so that I get straight to my business proposal and setting up a company before I go shopping and catching up with my sister over lunch.

He kisses me again before saying, "Don't leave the house before your parcel arrives."

"What parcel?"

"The one that's coming later," he responds before heading out.

After a long bath, I make myself breakfast and sit by the balcony. Vule always looks forward to my updates of how it feels like to have a sexy boyfriend who feeds me and eats me and spoils me. It feels like a dream – I'd say that.

Sitting in front of my laptop, I am cracking my head, trying to think of all the services I want my business to focus on. Should I just jot down everything and find ways to figure it out when a client is in need of my services?

I broaden my bookkeeping services description because apart from being an accountant, I am a very great bookkeeper. At eleven forty, when I am refilling my coffee mug, I get a buzz from the reception. Picking it up, the security guy tells me about a delivery. I allow the delivery guy up, wondering what Kings got me. He hasn't bought me anything since that portrait he got me from his favourite artist. I am still in awe by the way. So, yeah, he hasn't gifted me anything but I haven't spent a cent since then. Whenever we pass by the shops and I am ready to swipe, he always refuses, telling me to keep all the cents to myself because I am jobless.

A knock erupts on my door, breaking the thoughts in my head and I hurry to the door. The delivery guy hands me a velvet box before he asks me to sign. I excitedly sign on the dotted lines and off he goes. Setting the box on the table, I smile at how perfect the gift wrapping is. Opening the box, I almost choke on my saliva.

How the hell?

What the hell?

I slowly pull the dress up. The very dress I have been eyeing since last week. It is this perfect metallic leopard clip jacquard dress. It is perfect! More than perfect. Next to it is a pair of glitter chain-mesh boots that matches perfectly with the dress. The small shoulder bag almost has my jaws on the floor.

‘How?’ – This is the only word I send to him.

His message doesn’t take time to chirp in.

‘How what?’ – Kings. Before I could respond, he sent another text message saying, ‘Oh, you mean the gift?’

‘YES!’ – me.

‘I saw you browsing through that online store and you kept going back to the dress. The boots will match perfectly with the dress – I hope you love them. And the bag will be the cherry on top.’ – Kings. I want to respond but he sends another text, ‘Look babe, I’ll call you in two hours or so. I am stepping into a meeting.’

I stare at the items.

Kings pay too much attention. I have been eyeing this dress since my friend sent me an invitation to her birthday. I loved it but there was no way in the world I was going to swipe twelve thousand rands for a dress. I wanted something similar to it and I wasn’t winning. I already know how many thousands the bag costs because I have vowed never to find myself in this shop until I make triple of what I used to make. Now that I am starting up a company, all these things are unreachable.

My phone beeps, and this time it is Phelele asking if we could meet in an hour because he needs to take her son to his first martial arts class. Boi caught the bug – he begged for his mother to enroll him. I send her a thumb's up emoji and the name of the restaurant we are meeting at.

Phelele is already seated when I arrive. Grabbing a seat just next to her, she frowns a little while reading me.

“What’s with that look?”

“You are glowing,” she says.

Pssshhh! I laugh, while settling in and taking my glasses off. I put them on the table and search around for the waiter.

“You are glowing,” she repeats and this time she laughs.

“Well, that is because I found a man.”

“Hmmm! The karate guy...” I laugh. But yes, the karate guy because that’s how she knows him. My nephew excitedly told her about my cool friend who trains karate. She sips her drink before she continues, “I thought you said you want a guy who is more than settled. Well, in your words, rich!”

“I did,” I say. I did speak out those words to the universe and the universe is now showing off.

“Can the karate guy...”

“He is rich, okay?” I say. The waiter is by my side and before I place an order for a cosmopolitan, I confirm that it is indeed lunch hour. It is just after one thirty so I tell him to bring one.

“Can he afford to pay your monthly bills if you decide to be a housewife?”

“Well... let me explain it in this way. Before we made things official, he got me a portrait worth a little over three hundred thousand. Now, I am supposed to go to my friend’s party dressed in an outfit that costs more than someone’s salary. So yeah, I think he can afford to pay my little bills.”

Phelele stares at me. She looks... pleased. Well, I cannot expect her to be shocked – well, her husband has more than enough too so she is used to this kind of life. I know I said I want a rich man... but now that he is here, I don’t know how to not be shocked about how much money people have.

“You look like you aren’t so sure about this relationship,” Phelele asks just the same minute the waiter places my drink on the table.

Taking a sip, I say, “he is too perfect!”

“Haibo! Nonkululeko. What is wrong with perfect?” she asks and I shrug. “You think you don’t deserve him, right?”

“Right!”

“He probably doesn’t deserve you.”

My sister knows how to melt my heart. I swiftly change the topic, telling her all about my new venture. Just like I expected, she wants to invest in my business but I tell her I already have Kingsley as my client, so I am going to be sorted.

When I was parting ways with Phelele, Kings told me that he is stuck in a meeting and if I don't mind, he could pick me up later to spend the evening with him. I told him not to worry. I told him that I'd drive there if he could give me the security codes to his apartment. Right there, without wasting time, he sent me the codes.

After my lunch with my sister, I passed by the stores and buy fresh salmon and some ingredients for a stir fry – then I head to Kings' apartment because I want to cook him dinner and thank him for the gift. This advice, I got from the happily married house wife.

Strolling around the kitchen, I realise that I shouldn't have tried this. It would be very difficult to please Kings. But then again, this might be small gestures he would appreciate. I mean, I am going to cook at some point in this relationship, right?

I have been watching Kings in action, so I start with the veggies because I know that he is on his way home.

I am patting the salmon when the door opens. First he smiles at me and then he shuts the door. I stop... just to

admire him walking towards me. I never get used to this – we are an item.

“Hey... how was your day?” he asks while dropping his lips on mine. He smells so... fresh. I look up to him, not understanding why I smell a scent of a shower gel. I know so because I shower with him. When he walks to the fridge to grab a bottle of water, I watch him. I watch and I cannot help but notice how crispy his white shirt is. It is seven o'clock and there isn't way that his shirt didn't wrinkle a bit. Just a bit.

“Are you okay?” Kings asks from where he stands drinking the water.

“Yeah!” I say, shifting my focus back on the salmon that I am getting ready to prepare. My mind is going crazy and I hate that my doubts are going to destroy my relationship.

“You know you are going to need to talk to me if you are not fine, right? This is a relationship.”

I sigh deeply and turn to him.

“Did you just take a shower?” I ask.

He opens his mouth but close it again before he says, “Yes! I had to pass by the fighting club for an training with a client.”

I let out a breath – happy that I wasn't crazy. He did take a shower; hence he smells fresh and clean.

He turns to the fridge and pull a bottle of juice, thereafter he walks up to me. He steals a kiss before he smiles widely.

“What is in your mind?” he asks.

“I am cooking dinner just to say thank you for the gift,” I respond while focusing on my salmon.

“Are you going to keep up? Because I plan to spoil you?” he asks while taking off his blazer and making his way to his closet. My eyes follow him and when he catches me staring, he smiles.

“You know there is no other woman, right?” he says.

“Why are...”

“I have a feeling you doubt my love for you.”

“It is too soon for you to love me.”

With a smirk, he says, “You have no idea how crazy you drive me. I am in love with you.” He is right. I really don’t have any idea. “So, did you like your gift?”

“Should I get used to such spoils?” I ask.

“That was small waters. I haven’t started spoiling you,” he responds while reaching for the plates before he starts setting the table.

CHAPTER 23

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS

“Thank you for cooking.”

“How can you rate my cooking?”

“It wasn’t bad. I like it,” I respond, not wanting to lie and discourage her.

“You didn’t like it.”

“Babe... you did great,” I say.

“But there is a lot you could have corrected.”

“I correct the chefs, my love.” I prefer cooking my own food and I truly appreciate this gesture for sure.

“I am no longer cooking. I’ll do the cleaning,” she whines.

Fine by me. Cleaning is a chore I hate but cannot leave without. I am washing the dishes while she sips on her wine by the couch. She has confessed that before coming to my house, she wasn’t big on wine but my wine collection is bomb. While I dry the dishes, after mopping the floor, Nonku heads to the shower for a quick one. I take this chance to text Rhulani, instructing him to get two sets of clean clothes and a toiletry bag to the fighting club so that I take Nonku there during the week and prove to her that I do take my showers there.

The things I am fucking willing to do to keep this woman?

I like how I don’t have to explain myself to my assistant. He gets me. He gets me more than I do myself. When I get his confirmation that he noted my instruction, I clear the text messages and put my phone on the charger and prepare the bed.

Walking back from the shower, Nonku only has her towel wrapped around her body. I lose my clothes

immediately and she giggles, knowing that she has got my attention. These past two weeks have been a fucking bliss. Man, this woman has me by my balls and the funny part is that she doesn't have any idea.

I am not this kind of a man. I am not this crazy over a pussy. It is as if she has put a spell on me. If I dig deep, I might find out.

I am tugging her towel while dropping kisses on her neck.

"You are going to be the death of me," I mumble to my ear. She moans and fuucckkkk... her moans are too damn perfect. When our mouths meet, I almost explode. She drops her towels to the floor before pressing her body on my naked one. My dick shoots up. Well, we are forever excited when she is around. Nonku breaks the kiss and before I could pull her in for more of it, she goes down to her knees.

I slightly tremble when she wraps her fingers around my dick and moves her mouth there. I grit my teeth and land my hand on her hair. Fuck! I don't care if I'll destroy her wig, but I fist her hair and brace myself for her lips.

When she swipes the tip with her tongue, I groan!!!

Then she fucking wraps her lips around my cock and I almost confess all my sins. My hand is tight on her hair but she doesn't mind. She starts sucking and when she starts choking on my dick, I feel my body tremble.

I am going to come.

She is on her knees, and her nails are digging my butt cheeks as she tries to stabilize herself. Nonku has given me blow jobs before but tonight, she is showing off.

“I am about to ...” I groan loudly and do not get to finish the sentence before I release my semen in her mouth. I fucking released in her mouth and she receives it with love. She waits for me to become empty before she pulls her mouth out, swallows and licks her lips.

“Fuckkk!” I hiss while sitting on the edge of the bed. My eyes don’t leave her as she gets on her feet and fixes her hair. Thereafter she picks the towel and throws it on an occasional chair next to my bed. I stroke my dick, edging it to come back to play. With Nonku patiently standing in front of me, strumming her clit with her fingers, I do not waste any minute. When she notices my readiness, she moves closer and lands her hands on my shoulders so that she could sit on it.

And she does sit on it.

“I love you,” I mumble while dropping kisses on her shoulder. She is so sleepy but is trying to pull up a smile. This is after endless rounds of sex and my dick hasn’t stopped twitching, begging for me. I like how she matches my appetite.

“I love you too,” she breathes out, her eyes closed. I know I am not supposed to be happy about this, because she might be sleep talking, but her words do something to my heart.

I let her sleep, and I only manage to fall asleep maybe a good hour after her. I don't sleep this early but the thought of leaving her sleeping doesn't sit well with me.

“You do know that you can still be in a relationship and not see your girlfriend for two days, right?” Rhulani says from the opposite side of the counter where he is brewing two cups of coffee. I just told him that Nonku picked it up and that I took a shower before going home last night and if I wasn't good at lying, I would have been busted or she would have believed that I passed by another woman's house.

This morning I did take a shower before leaving Nonku in bed but I still have to smear this stupid gel before I style my hair and change into Kingston's attire.

“How am I supposed to survive?” I ask, while buttoning this hideous shirt and tucking it in. Kingston had to have a very bad sense of fashion. I shake my head at this.

“Like you did before,” he says while handing me a cup of coffee.

“What's happening today,” I ask while Rhulani sits in front of his computer. While waiting for him to go through my calendar, I take a sip of the coffee. He stops typing and turns his eyes to him and says, “D4 Execution is tonight.” I place the coffee on the table and wrap my hands over my chest and wait for him to continue. “The

confirmation of his landing happened just an hour ago. He is going to be in a meeting with JP. If we are to conclude the D4 mission, it has to be done tonight during the meeting at the Mark4 parking lot.” I stare at him without saying a word. He continues, “You are going to Gumede and spend a day there ... and the team will have you ready after work.” He drops his eyes to the laptop and types for a little while before he lifts his head. “Cancel the plans for the rest of the week. You are not seeing her.” I have no room to contest. With these little slip ups, I cannot have her over. I need to be in my game from tonight and a few days that follow. “Make up a story.”

It is seven thirty when I step out of the elevator at Gumede Enterprise. The floor is almost empty as most officials were trenched just last week. Most of the old employees are gone as Gumede cannot afford to pay them. Well he confessed that the compensation bill for the skeleton staff made of new bees and low paid officials can be afforded by the company. Most employees lost their jobs and the ones that are here are panicking and working a little harder than usual.

“Welcome to yet another hell day,” Fifi says as I meet her on her way to the kitchen area.

“What’s going on?” I ask, knowing that she has news for me. News I already know.

“Apparently, we cannot afford to maintain this building. Ephraim just got a call from the CFO. We need to

search for small affordable work spaces and also do a feasible study on how much it would cost to have employees work remotely. They want to rent out the workspace to make little money,” she says.

“Things are bad,” I comment. Things are really bad. The team is now squashed in this other corner of the floor since they had to sell the equipment and furniture just a week ago. Now we are crowded in one area.

I get settled in my corner and go through my emails before capturing some payments that I have. Business is very very slow here. The only clients we have are the ones bound by long term contracts. New new clients are coming to a sinking sheep.

It is almost lunch when Fifi calls out to the team and says, “Look who is here?” Before I could even lift my head, I hear three ladies shriek excitedly while jumping to their feet. Shifting my gaze to where Fifi stands with our guest, I immediately drop my eyes to my keyboard. I did not know that she was heading here today.

“Oh nooo... you guys... I miss you,” Nonku says as she hugs the colleagues. I am the only one seated and it is going to be very awkward if I stay seated while everyone is standing around her. I quickly pick my wallet and jump to my feet. I hear her say, “Fifi’s number is not going through and I need to talk to her. And your landlines are dead...”

Everyone tries to explain, all at once, that the lines and internet are not working in this place. Since her sense of smell is out of this world, I don’t dare get closer to her.

“Hi!” I loudly say when she turns to my direction. Thereafter I announce to Ephraim that I am heading out to collect a delivery downstairs. I don’t wait for anyone to say anything as I head straight for the elevator. Luckily, it is still on our floor.

Phew!

I fucking need to conclude this damn mission now!

I step out of the elevator, pick a newspaper and head to a sitting area by the corner. I am going to sit here until I see Nonku walk out.

While I wait, I go through tonight’s instructions. I still need to find a way to avoid Nonku for a few days. I compose a text message and program it to send after an hour or so... telling her that I’ll give her a call when I get a chance but I need to fly out of town for three days for a business seminar that I am invited to co-host.

Twenty minutes later, Nonku steps out of the elevator while chit chatting to Fifi. I take a minute to admire how perfect her dress hugs those beautiful thighs and firm butt. The butt I’ll be missing for a few days. I wait for them to head out while I wait for the UberEats to deliver the food I just ordered. My phone vibrates and pulling it, I find a text from Nonku.

‘You are so quiet today.’ – Nonku.

I quickly unprogram the other text, edit it to explain that I am having a very busy day and will not be seeing her for a few days.

‘I am sad that I won’t get to see you before you fly out.’ – Nonku.

‘I’ll make it up to you. What are you up to.’ – Me.

‘I am driving to my apartment from my old job. I had to see my ex PA. I need help with something.’ – Nonku.

‘Did you see Kingston? I believe he still works there.’

‘I did but it was almost lunch so I didn’t see him much. Did you guys fix your issues?’

‘Soon we will.’

‘Great. Don’t let me keep you. I’ll catch you later.’

‘I love you.’ – Me. But I don’t get the response back. She’ll tell me when she is ready to. Apparently you don’t just say these words.

Rhulani throws me an ear piece immediately when I am done typing my black boots. I put the earpiece on and light it up.

“Can you hear me?” Rhulani says from his little microphone.

“I can.”

“Great!”

We are in my office, waiting for the right time for me to drive to the location of the secret meeting. I tightly wear

my gloves and thereafter walk to my table where my sniper rifle awaits me in its case. I pick the leather jacket from my chair and put it on.

“Set! Location confirmed,” Rhulani says the same second my watch vibrates with a target map. I tap on it. They are twenty kilometres away.”

Without waiting any more time, I lock the case before throwing it to my back and sliding my phone into my pocket. Thereafter I am headed to the basement where my MTT 420-RR awaits me. I haven't used this baby in ages but it is the fastest thing on earth and it can get me to the location at the speed of lightning.

I secure the clip on my helmet before roaring my beautiful beast to life.

I love the freedom when I ride this damn thing. I love how the wind moves me and how I get so intoxicated with the speed.

In no time I am turning into an old building and parking at the far end in the dark. Taking my helmet off, I take a second to breathe in fresh air. I am one with the shadows as I click my glasses and put them on to give me the night vision.

“I swept the place. It is clear to go up,” Rhulani says in my ear. I notice the stairs to take me to the top so that I have a better view of where the target is having his meeting. I tighten my grip and jog up the stairs until I get to the rooftop.

It always has to be the roof top.

I set my rifle up in just a minute. It is easy to work when the target is underneath you and doesn't expect the ambush.

I take a minute to zoom into my target and once I am confident, I aim rifle at him.

My phone vibrates but it doesn't disturb me from my mission. I slowly press the trigger.

Just one shot.

Just one shot changes everything.

His life.

His family's life.

His everything.

The target falls to the ground and the two men he was standing with jump into the car and speed away.

I wish Gumede's mission was this simple and straightforward.

My phone vibrates as I am disconnecting the rifle and packing it away.

"Hey babe," I say.

"Did you land in Durban? How is the weather there?" Nonku asks.

"Uhm... you know how Durban is. Always hot?" I leave it at that.

"Look... I have been thinking hard since the SMS you text in the afternoon."

“I sent many texts, which one are you talking about?”

“That you love me?”

“Yeah!”

“I am in love with you too,” she says.

“Do you know what I want to do to you right now?”

“What?”

“I want to bend you and make love to you all night.”

“Sorry you can’t! Let me jump into the shower, I’ll call you before I sleep,” Nonku says before hanging up.

I slide my phone into my pocket and continue to pack away my rifle.

“Really?” The question comes from my ear piece.

Rhulani!

“What?”

“You just killed a man and now you want to bend her and make love to her?”

“It is the truth,” I say with a shrug he doesn’t see.

“You can be human, just for a minute, and mourn the death of a poor man,” Rhulani says.

“Not when he deserved it.” I throw my rifle bag onto my back and head down the stairs.

“Mission complete. I am heading home,” Rhulani says.

“Book me into a hotel. I need to video call my woman.”

Chapter 24

Heart of STEEL! (unedited)

NONKU

I roll on the bed to get to the other side before picking my phone which I left on the pedestal last night. I don't even remember why I placed it on the other side of the bed since I was on the video call with Kings before going to bed last night. Checking the time, before answering Kings' video call, I notice that it is still very early.

"Hey..." I respond, resting my head on the pillow and lifting the phone to the air to give him a better view.

"Are you up?" he asks. He is also shirtless and still in his white duvets.

"Not before you called," I respond.

"Thought I could wake you up for a jog?"

"At five o'clock? All by myself?"

"Okay, I was just missing you."

"We slept just two hours ago..." I say before yawning. He kept me up almost the whole night. We also slid in a show for each other and I like how much of sex freak Kings is. This is only know by me because I bet you, he isn't the same with everyone else.

We stay on the video call for another thirty minutes as he walks around the hotel room, cleaning after himself.

“Do you really make the bed when you are in a hotel?” I ask. I hardly do. Not making the bed or cleaning the hotel room is part of the things I like the most when I travel. Speaking of travelling, I crave it so much.

“I do all the time. It might not be as neat as I want, but I always prefer leaving it decent enough for the cleaners.”

“I miss travelling. The last time I did it was on my birthday before I met you. Maybe I should book myself somewhere for just a weekend.”

“If you invite me, I could make it memorable for you,” he says.

I bite my lips, not doubting his words. This man has taste for days and has the money to match it. I haven't been to a bae-cation in ages, so this could be cute.

“Do you have anywhere in mind?” I ask.

“Do you love a cabin life?” he asks. “I own one with friends and I could take you there. It is a very beautiful place.”

“I am in.”

“I'll work something out.”

“When are you back?” I ask, pulling my duvet so that I could cover myself and get ready to sleep when he hangs up. I am not going to jog today. I haven't jogged since Kings flew out of town. I plan to resume when he returns.

“Hopefully tomorrow. If not, then it'll be on Sunday.”

“I am spending the weekend with my friends. Tomorrow we are celebrating my friends’ birthday.”

“What do you have planned?”

“Nothing. Just a celebration in one of the hotels in Joburg and we are hitting the club afterwards.”

“My club.”

“The one and only. Did you know it was our favourite spot before I met you?”

“Ah!!!”

“I am serious. We love the vibe there. You have a beautiful place.”

He allows me to hang up only because he has to jump into the shower and get ready for his day. I go back to sleep because I have no plans for the morning. I plan to continue working on my business before leaving for Vuledzani’s house in the evening. I am spending the weekend with the girls and we are going to have a jol. That – I am quite sure of.

It is eleven thirty when I finally wake and jump out of bed. After getting myself cleaned up, I drag my feet to the kitchen for a strong cup of coffee. While blasting my speakers with music, I dance around my apartment, putting things in place and cleaning up. I think I am in a great mood. No, I think I am happy. With a wide smile on my face, I stand in front on the portrait that Kings bought for me and wonder how life is going to be in a coming year or two. I am always going to be this happy and this fulfilled. The other night, when we were on the video

call, I wanted to ask him if he ever sees himself with a family of his own. Maybe a family of five where it is him and I and our three children? I don't know what was pushing me to ask such a question, but I stopped myself from asking. It is too soon to be discussing such curious things. Maybe in six months or so. Yes, six months is decent enough to go all serious in a relationship.

“You really do not have to tell us that you are in love. It shows,” Bonolo says just when I roll my luggage into Vuledzani's apartment. Khodi smiles at me before she joins her friend in mocking me. Only when the girls are almost done making a fuss about how happy I look, my best friend walks into the room with a margarita in her hand. She gives me a longest look before she nods and agrees with her twin sister.

“This man is for keeps,” Vule says as she walks to me and gives me a hug. I haven't seen her in ages and part of the reason is Kings. He forever wants me in his space and I want him in mine.

Vule takes my luggage and roll it to her room with me in tow. Once in her room, I drop my handbag on her bed before sitting on the edge.

“Are you guys not exaggerating?” I ask.

“Believe me, we are not,” she says and I cannot help but blush.

“Okay, I am happy. I think I am.” She hands me her drinks and I take a sip. “It feels good to be in love.”

“I miss that feeling,” Vule says. Her relationship ended like a joke and at first, I thought she was just kidding. She is a lover of love and amongst all of us, she is the one who believes more in love.

I drift her mind to tomorrow’s celebration. Unlike me, who celebrate birthday each year, Vule and her twin’s birthday is on a Saturday and for that, they have no excuse but to celebrate it. She tells me that the event planner has everything set up for tomorrow at the boutique hotel and I take an opportunity to tell her that all is set for her after party. I did call in at Kings’ club to book for a table of twenty people just like how my friend suggested. Vule is a people’s person and so is her twin sister. They make friends with almost everyone they meet.

“What are you wearing tomorrow?” I ask before sipping more from her glass, which I still have in my hands.

“Ohhhh... I have this beautiful dress... I took the gold and sisi took the silver one,” Vule says, dancing towards the closet. I love how excited she looks. I watch as she pulls a suit cover, unzips it to reveal a beautiful ball gown.

“This is so beautiful,” I say, receiving it into my hands. It is smooth and velvety; I cannot tell what fabric they used. I am super glad that they put some efforts on their dresses for the birthday. The last thing I want is to overdress on someone’s birthday. Of course, I am

freaking out. It is not every day that I have to wear a dress worth the many thousands it costs.

There isn't any other way to celebrate pre-birthday without champagne and shots. I even told Kings not to call me because I wanted to give my friend undivided attention until the end of the day. As the perfect boyfriend that he is, he tells me that he loves me and that he will check me after the party. Immediately when he hanged up, I missed him but then I had to remind myself that my friends do deserve my undivided attention.

"What would you do?" Khodi asks this while staring at me, pulling me from my thoughts.

"When?" I ask, placing my glass of champagne on the table.

"She was day dreaming when you were explaining the scenario," Bonolo says.

"What scenario," I ask. I truly was day dreaming when she did.

"I asked what you would do if your partner doesn't want children and you do?" Khodi asks.

"Uhm..."

"It is easy for men, right? Because they can have secret children with other women?" Bonolo asks and the girls nod. I don't know the answer to this and this is so weird because I was thinking about this just this morning.

"What would you do?" Khodi insists.

I sigh deeply, taking a minute to think deep. I want children and I do see them very much in my future. Dating a partner that doesn't want one would be the death of me.

"Well... it'll depend on how far I am in a relationship with that person," I safely respond.

"Let's say you have been dating for over a year," Khodi adds.

"That's hard," I say and everyone laugh. It really is a hard one because at that point, you are already in love. And that point, you can easily look over your needs to please the next person. But if I could be honest to myself, I'd break things up. I wouldn't want to be miserable in life with someone who doesn't share the same dreams with me. This takes me back to Kings and I. We are too different and I accept that. With all that, I think it would be the end of us if he doesn't have the same vision with me. I live for love but I wouldn't compromise if he doesn't want the same things as I do.

I really wouldn't!

Well, we spent the whole evening emptying the champagne bottle but luckily, we are fresh as we step into the boutique hotel, sobered up. Everyone in here went all out in complementing Vuledzani and Khodani's birthday. The décor is out of this world with almost all

types of flowers in each corner of this room. I love how everything compliments each twin in a very unique way. I am in love. And even though Vule and Khodi have different tastes, the planner complimented their styles beautifully.

It is the twenty of us, so Khodi and Vule take the end of the table. I am seated next to Vule, for obvious reasons. The room is filled with both the sister's friends. There are a lot of people that I don't know but since both of them are a vibe, the party is going on perfectly.

My phone buzzes in my clutch and I don't waste time fishing for it. I also miss Kings as much as he has missed me.

'Are you rocking the attire? I wish I could see how perfect you look.' – Kings.

'I am. And I must say, I have been turning heads since I got here. Thank you once again.' – me. This is the truth. When we were getting ready, everyone thought I was aiming to compete with the birthday girls. It wasn't the plan but with the dress and shoes to match like it, it seemed true. The dress looked perfect when I held it up to air, but once I got into it, with my perfect make-up and hair, I also didn't believe it was me standing in front of the mirror. I looked very beautiful. I loved how perfect I looked.

'I am jealous. – Kings.

'I don't blame you.' – me.

Just after sending the text, I slide my phone into my clutch bag and give the lady who is giving a toast some attention. We are all taking turns sharing the wishes we have for them. When it is my turn, I do get on my feet and wish them the happiness they both deserve. Turning to my friend, I share with her what my prayers are upon her life. I wish for her to be prosperous always. I wish for her to reach for the stars. I wish for her happiness. I wish for all her dreams to come true. Thereafter we all toast, clinking glasses to a perfect future.

My friend deserves every good thing that is coming her way. She is one loving human being and I wish for her to be blessed in all way possible.

After the dessert, we all head straight to the club for the after party. My dress is fit for cocktail and everything else. Vule and her sister had to change into something simpler for the club. As promised, we find a long table reserved for us and to my surprise, it is set sat the VIP area. I didn't think they werr going to allow us to use the best part of the club for a party... but they did and I am grateful when I see the look on my friends.

We call for the ten champagne bottles to fill the table before we are all standing in our feet and enjoying the DJs playlist.

We are now already having our cocktails, dancing to a hot playlist of amapino when two of Vule's colleagues start whispering to each other.

"What's with you two?" Vule asks one of her colleagues.

“That hot guy right there has his eyes on me,” one of them says. Vule and I turn towards the direction of the hot guy. My heart almost skip a beat when I notice the man who has his eyes to where we are standing. No other than Kingsley. I sip from my champagne flute, my eyes locked with him. I don’t know what he has bewitched me with, but I am instantly wet just by staring at him.

“Oh.. you are wrong. He has his eyes on someone else,” Vule corrects.

“Who?” the lady asks.

As if Kings can hear our conversation, he asks his friends to excuse him before he starts making his way to where we are standing.

“Wow, he is coming to us,” the other girl says. As if to show off that I belong to him and he belongs to me, he stops in front of me and drop kisses to my lips. When he deepens the kiss, I find myself melting.

When he breaks the kiss, I ask, “What are you doing here?”

He takes my hand and spins me around, making me shy as everyone’s eyes are on me.

“I couldn’t miss this for anything,” he says as he runs his eyes from my head to toe. He knows how to make a woman feel good.

“I would have sent you pictures,” I mumble.

“Pictures wouldn’t have done justice to how perfect you look,” he whispers before dropping more kisses to my lips.

“People are watching,” I mumble only to him. Only now does he stand beside me as we both turn to Vule, who is now standing beside her sister. I take a minute to introduce him to my friends because that is what he wants, right? He wouldn’t be here if that is not what he desired.

“Nice to meet you ladies,” Kings says, shaking Vule’s hands. Thereafter he takes Khodi’s hand and shake it too. “Happy birthday to the both you.” They both nod with wide smiles on their faces. I forgive them, Kings has this thing that makes everyone around him, including my friends, blush.

“Thank you,” Vule is the one to respond.

“Everything you order tonight is on the house. I’ll take care of it,” he says. Before my friends could say a word, he takes my hand and says, “I’d like to steal my sexy woman for a little while. She will be back before in no time.”

Vule nods and tell him to take all the time in the world. With this, Kings leads the way to his office.

“You know it is a twenty of us there, right?” I ask as I walk beside him.

“It doesn’t matter how many you are,” he responds. “As long as I can have you to myself for a little while.”

“Ahh!”

“They get to drink up... and I get to eat you up,” he says.

I smile.

Smitten!

He knows how to get to me.

He really does... because I am captured, whole heartedly. There is no turning away from this.

Chapter 25

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS

I button my shirt, my eyes fixed on her as she tries to iron her black straight weave with her palms. Her cheeks are blushing after the endless orgasms I gave her.

It had been a while and I wasn't going to survive another night without her. Thank goodness, she has an appetite to match mine. I can never be luckier to find a very compatible partner.

I rest on the table and pull her in, between my legs and kiss her passionately because this woman has made me fall in love.

She is still trying to fix her hair.

“You look perfect,” I comment. Taking her hands into mine.

“I don't trust you.”

“What?” I faint surprise.

“You might want to show everyone what was happening here.”

I laugh. She speaks the truth. I kiss her lips and say, “well, they already know... without me saying a word. They probably noticed how hungry I was.”

“Yeah right,” she says. “When did you land?”

“Just a few hours ago. I had to be here for this birthday after party.”

“So you are one of those...”

“Which ones?”

“They over protective types,” she says.

Well, I can't tell her the truth, can I? I don't know enjoy keeping tabs on anyone but sometimes situations force me. Just like the recent case; the reason I had to stay put for a few days was to allow the fire to die down. Rats might be sniffing the whole town in search of the culprit and it is best to stay clear until the next thing pop up and grabs everyone's attention.

“Not always,” I respond. “I was just missing you so much and you kept teasing me with your little videos.”

“Did you enjoy the show?” I ask.

“I did.”

She turns around and I help her zip up the dress. Thereafter, she turns once again to gave me.

“I am going to see you on Sunday, right?” she says, reaching for her clutch bag and retrieving a cosmetic bag. She pulls what I believe is the powder and starts tapping her face with a sponge.

“You are not spending the night with me?” I ask.

“I have neglected my friends so much and I don’t want to be that kind of a friend.”

I understand her and it would be unfair of me to expect her to neglect them for my sake. She belongs to them first and it would be wise to understand that fact.

“Fine! But I am going to stay around with my friends until you guys leave. Just to make sure that you ladies are fine.”

“Please tell me that you aren’t keeping tabs on me.”

“Nope I am not,” I respond, dropping kissed to her mouth. I have my reasons and she doesn’t have to know them.

When she tells me that she needs to head to the ladies room to get cleaned up, I show her the black door which leads to my restroom. While she makes her way to the restroom, I pull my chair and settle in before reaching for my phone and checking for any messages from Rhulani.

None!

I slide my phone into my pocket and switch the computer off before getting on my feet to tuck in and putting on my blazer. By the time Nonku walks back to my office, looking nothing like the girl I had bent on my table, butt naked, she smiles at me and tells me that she

is ready to return to her hands. After locking my office, I take her hand and lead her back to the club. Her friends are in cloud nine and their tables are filled with all kinds of booze. I am glad I'll be here to keep an eye on them. She reaches for a kiss before crossing the bar to where her friends are.

"She must be very special," Lungile says just when I slide on the booth next to him.

I don't respond, not wanting him to see how much Nonku has an effect on me. I pick a clean whiskey glass and fill it with ice before pouring some cognac. I cannot help but keep my eyes across the room where Nonku is now dancing with her friends. It is only when a group of guys try to grab the ladies attention that I feel sick in my stomach. Luckily, Vule calls for the bouncer to handle them. I am glad I am not the one to do it.

It is after two o'clock when Nonku texts that they are leaving for Vule's apartment. Luckily she is the one driving, so I'll be able to tail her car until I know that she is safe at the friend's apartment.

I do tail them to an apartment in Rosebank and only when the gate closes after Nonku drives in, do I accelerate and head to my apartment. The streets are dead quiet and the only car I come across is one Corolla parked on the side of the road just across my gate. Pressing the remote to close the gates behind me, I check the review mirrors for any movements and I only relax when there is none. It could be a guy making out

with his girlfriend on the side of the road but I can never be sure.

Six thirty, Sunday morning, I plug my ear sets into my ears and pick a bottle of water from my fridge before heading out of my apartment for a jog. I haven't been jogging, and even though I did utilize the hotel gym, it can never match the thrill I get from sprinting up the street in open air. The minute I close the gate behind me, I notice the white corolla which looks very similar to the one I noticed last night.

With my watch, I snap a picture of the registration number and thereafter sprint up the street. When I up the hill, I lift my hand to snap a video without turning back in case I draw the driver's attention. The car is still parked outside the gate. Really, I could be just paranoid because I have to be very vigilant but it is always best to be sure. I quickly send the picture to Rhulani and instruct him to run the data on the registration number. Only ten minutes later, when I am stretching at the next street, does Rhulani send back the details of the owner of the car.

Mrs. J Kotze!

Fuck, I have no business with a Kotze!

Sliding my phone into my pocket, I jog back to my apartment, eyeing the inside of the car as I enter the

apartment's gate. There is no one inside, so this could be just an abandoned car.

After a long cold shower and breakfast, I throw myself on the couch and catch up on the news. I would love to check up on Nonku but I am certain that she might be nursing her hang-over. I wish to be the one to help her with all sorts of concoctions to drink after a heavy night, but then again, she needs space.

It is at eleven thrity when Nonku texts me, telling me that she will only be home in the evening so I could pop by to see her if I want.

If I want?

I can be in her space all day if she could allow me. Or if it were ever possible.

'We need to discuss something.' – Nonku's texts continues.

What the fuck?

'Talk about?' – me?

'Nothing serious. Just things about our relationship.' – Nonku.

'You do know that I am going to be unsettled the whole noon. You don't just pull the 'we need to talk line' and disappear the whole day.' – me.

'Relax! It is nothing serious.' – Nonku.

'Give me a hint.' – I insist.

'Oh my goodness, I forgot that you are very persistent. Well, I didn't want to discuss this over the phone but

then... if you insist... well, we didn't use the condom the other night. Also last night. This cannot continue unless the both of us decide otherwise.' – Nonku.

This time I call her and ask her to step aside to talk.

"Let's chat about this tonight. It is a full house here and these are the kinds of things I cannot discuss in my friends' house."

"But you take morning-after pills, right?" I ask.

"Yeah, but I cannot rely on them all the time. Look... lets chat later. I should be home at seven," she says and thereafter tells me that she loves me and then hangs up.

It is not noon yet but I head to my little bar and pull a bottle of whiskey, which I pour a shot into a glass and throw it in my mouth.

Jeez! I curse under my breath as the whiskey burns my throat.

'I am home.' – Nonku.

I am not quite looking forward to this chat but it has to be done. I jump out of the couch and put my t-shirt on and thereafter put on a pair of sneakers. I was relaxing in a pair of shorts and seeing that it is already seven thirty, there isn't any need to look any more decent than this. I throw my gym gear into an overnight bag, knowing for sure that chances of coming back tonight are very slim.

Picking up my phone, wallet and car keys, I head out of the door.

Closing the gate behind me, I scan the road before taking a left. It is just after driving for just a few kilometres before I notice the headlights behind me. I immediately take a left, so that I am certain that no one is following me. The headlights follow me.

I quickly press the camera button on the screen of my car and the only letters I notice is JZ, just that the letter from the white corolla that was parked outside my apartment. I take another turn and this time the camera gives me a very clear view of the car. It is indeed the car that I have seeing on the side of the road. I reach for my glove compartment and press a small button on top to open a gun safe I have there. I quickly pull my gun and place it on my lap before taking another turn. The streets are dark and quiet on this part of town. Knowing that the road is clear, I put my foot on the accelerator and my Jaguar roars before speeding up. The highlights are still behind me. Without a warning, I remove my lights from AUTO to no lights. Thereafter I let go of the steering wheel and hold tightly to my seatbelt so that it locks before I hit the dead breaks. My jaguar comes to a halt and in the minute that follows, the car behind me hits the back of mine. The impact is massive but my seat belt is tight and the airbags surround me in an instant.

Fuck!

My head is going to hurt from this.

With a pocket knife, I stab the airbags to deflate and thereafter I open the door and step out. I hear the driver's cry as I circle my car to get to the Corolla's passenger door. I quickly pull my phone from my pocket and shine it to the shuttered windscreen.

The driver is alone.

I quickly get to the passenger side as he whimpers and swears quickly. His legs are stuck. I hit his shutter his window with the back of the gun.

"Who the fuck are you?" I say this, pointing my gun to his forehead. Flashing the light to his face, I don't recognize him. He doesn't answer. I repeat, this time throwing a fist to his face. "Who the fuck are you and who sent you?"

"You killed my brother," he hissed.

"Ahh!" I say, cocking my gun.

"Wait, wait, wait," he begs. "JayQ told me he hired you to kill my brother."

"Then why are you after me and not JayQ? I was doing my job," I say this while placing the gun back to his forehead.

"Please..."

"This is to send a message to your fucking friends," I say before pulling the trigger and watching him take his last breath.

Pulling my phone, I send Rhulani a location and instruct him to get me a car and the clean-up team. While I wait,

I quickly check my car for any valuables and throw them into my overnight bag. Looking down at my chest, I notice the blood so I quickly pull the t-shirt off and throw it into my car before putting a clean one on. Thereafter I walk up the street, just a little further away from the incident while I wait for my team.

It takes them twelve minutes to locate me. I don't waste time jumping into a black BMW 5 series from my office.

"Hey, I thought you were not coming anymore," Nonku says when she opens the door. She frowns before she says, "You are bleeding."

"Where?" I ask, quickly cleaning my nose with my thumb. This is what happens when I get headaches.

"Your nose," she says, opening the way for me.

"It was pretty hot today..." I say, marching to the bathroom to get cleaned up. I take an opportunity to check if I look decent enough to face Nonku!

"Do you bleed a lot?" Nonku asks from the bathroom.

"It hasn't happened in ages. It usually happens when the temperature is too high or if I overwork myself."

"I wanted to say... you need to rest."

"I do!" I wash my hands before walking to where she is.

"Maybe it is time we take that vacation, what do you think?"

"Seconded!" She leads the way back to the kitchen where she continues to make a Greek salad. I am glad I ate before coming here. I grab a seat after filling a glass

with cold water. Nonku looks up to me and says, “Do you want to have an early night? You look... exhausted.”

Like hell I do. I am trying to figure out how that fucker got my address. Before leaving the scene, I instructed the guys to get me every little information they can get about him. Also, the mother fucker who called for the mission needs to be found and dealt with. I am a professional. I don't deal with mediocre clients.

“About the issue I called you for,” Nonku starts. “I want us to discuss what the best plan for the both of us is. It is either we stick with the condoms or we go get checked up and I choose a contraceptive method that's best for us.”

“Okayyy...” I drag the word, leaving room for her to add what she still wants to say.

“With the contraceptive... I need to choose depending on when I want to have children,” she says. I quietly stare at her because I have no comment to make.

Nonku stares back at me. “You do want children... don't you?” she continues, “Obviously not now... but they are part of your future plans... right?”

“Of course!”

NOT!

Nonku breathes out, looking like she is relieved.

“I was so worried that you wouldn't want children,” she says.

I laugh, take a sip of the water, “Was it going to be the end of us?”

“Well... I guess so... at some point,” she says with a shrug.

I walk up to her and hug her from behind.

“You are not getting rid of me that easily,” I say before kissing her neck and making her melt in my arms.

Chapter 26

Heart of STEEL!

Nonku (unedited)

It is rare for Kingsley to stay up until this time, but as I tip toe out of the bedroom, I drag my clothes with me so that I do not wake him up. He seems to be extremely exhausted. Since we have been together, he is the first to wake and the last to fall asleep. Not the case, today.

After putting on my biker shorts and a t-shirt, I open the curtains and the windows before making my way to the kitchen to fish for something to prepare. To be honest, I have nothing fancy to feed this man. As I pull the last four eggs from the egg basket, I make a mental note to do a little shopping when I get a chance.

I settle for preparing a full omelette.

Kings walks into the kitchen just when I am dishing the food into the two plates that I have placed on the table.

“It smells nice in here,” Kings say while looking over my shoulder to the fry pan. I don’t like it when he does this because, obviously, he has seen something wrong with

how I prepared the omelette. But, he doesn't say a word about it.

"You should have stayed in bed, I wanted to bring you breakfast in bed."

"Aw! What a beautiful surprise," he says while kissing my cheek and passing me to get to the fridge. Pulling the bottle of juice, Kings turns to steal a glance at me.

"What?" I ask with a shrug. Kings smiles at me and shakes his head. He pulls two glasses from the cupboard and pour the juice. His phone rings when he is putting back the bottle of juice back into the fridge. He gives me a once over before putting the phone to his ear.

"What did you find?" He asks, making his way to the bedroom. I don't know but he looked pissed when he answered the phone. What ever it is he has to attend to must be very serious for him to excuse himself. While I wait for him, I set the table and grab a seat before digging in my plate, not wanting the food to get cold. It takes about fifteen minutes before Kings walks up to me with his overnight bag in hand. He drops the bag on the floor and grabs a chair.

"And then?" I ask, scanning the bag which is on the floor.

"I need to head out for an hour or so," he says.

"Oh.. okay."

“I was on the phone with my assistant, I cannot fly out of the country but I could book us into a hotel and pretend we are on holiday,” he says.

“What? You don’t have to, really. It isn’t like I was planning and looking forward to a vacation before you suggested it last night.”

“But I was looking forward to it,” he says.

“So, you just want to book us into a hotel for how long?” I ask, sipping my juice and shaking my head at him. He must have so much money to waste. I can wait for the right time for us to go on vacation. I mean, he just decided on a vacation just last night before bed.

“Maybe a week.”

“A week... in a hotel... just a few kilometres from my and your apartment,” I ask.

“Well... I cannot be in my apartment this week. They are fumigating it and making little maintenance and I am not going to have you house me for a week.”

“Why not?”

“Babe... I am a guy. I cannot stay in your apartment for that long,” he says. I take a deep sigh, shaking my head at these ‘nice life problems’ of his. It must be nice to him.

He is a little distant than he is on other days but I don’t dwell on it. Whatever business call that was, ruined his morning.

“So, when do we go? I need to meet a friend for ...”

“I don’t think that is a god idea,” he says.

“What?” I laugh.

“I mean, I just need to get to my apartment to get a few clothes while you also pack and we will be on our way.”

“What’s the hurry?”

“Let’s just say... I have something special planned for us a little later...we need to be at the hotel in two hours,” he says and I blush, knowing what Kings is capable of.

“Just pack your laptop and disappear with me; I plan to make worth your while.”

“When did you get a chance to plan all these things?” I laugh.

“Well, life is so much easier with cellphones,” he says. He is sneaky, very sneaky. It means all this time when he was hiding in the bedroom, he was planning our week together. I can get used to this kind of life.

He does not get to finish his food before he jumps up from his chair, picks his overnight bag, kisses me passionately and thereafter heads out of the door. I don’t waste time cleaning up the place and emptying the dustbin. As I pick clothes to wear, I dial my friend’s phone numbers and put the phone on speaker before throwing it to the bed.

“Hey you...” Vule says. “What are you doing calling me when you should be making it up to your man for making my and my sister’s birthday a bang?”

“Doesn’t he go to work?” I ask.

“Doesn’t he own the club? He doesn’t have to be at work so early. It is only nine thirty now,” she says. I bother

telling her that my man is not a typical business man who only shows up at work when he wants. My man wakes up earlier than everyone I know to get to attend his business.

“Well, I already thanked him and I have the whole week to do that because he is booking us into a hotel for a few days.”

“What? Where is he taking you?”

“I don’t know but it is somewhere close by.”

“You lucky girl,” she says.

“And come to think of it. I might be going there to pay back for all that money he spent on you guys.”

“Well, are yo complaining? You are going to experience endless orgasms while at it,” she says.

That is for sure.

“So I was giving you a call to cancel our lunch date.”

“It’s okay... I understand. Go and enjoy yourself... and please ask him to hook me up with someone like him?”

“I’ll do, so that we can do double dates, huh?”

“Yes, please.”

Not knowing what to pack, I pick all my best underwears, three casual dresses and two pairs of jeans. Thereafter I pack my laptop and files, just in case I get a minute to work on my project. After a shower and while waiting for kings to pick me up, I make an

appointment with my doctor and to be honest, it would have been great to go now so that we could have all sorts of sex this coming week. Dr Noxolo is one busy doctor and the only available slot I get this week is tomorrow at 15h00, just because someone cancelled their appointment. Either that or I wait for another week. Not wanting to continue risking falling pregnant, I take the spot - knowing that we can still make it if we are going to be around town.

Half past 11, Kings walks into my apartment dressed in a black suit. I shake my head at him, I thought we were getting rid of the suit this week.

“I was just in a quick meeting,” he says while taking my luggage. I follow behind until we stop by a black BMW.

“Where is the Jaguar?” I ask as I watch him load the bags.

“Some idiot knocked me at the back.”

“What, when?”

“At the parking lot. The insurance company will take care of it.”

Our drive to our destination is just thirty minutes but as we drive into this boutique hotel, I am in awe. It is just outside the city. Driving into a long drive way, with roses on either side of the road, I smile at how perfect it is for us. I keep my gaze outside the window, admiring a huge fountain in the middle of the rose garden.

“You sure take the cup in the romantic game,” I say to Kings, who steals a glance at me with a smile.

“Do I even have competition?”

“No whatsoever!” I respond with a smile.

Our luggage is taken to our room while Kings takes my hand and asks that we take a walk. He opens the door for me and takes my hand, before leading me towards the garden. I don't know if I am reading too much into this, he looks unsettled. I squeeze his hand, trying to calm him or ... just letting him know that I am here for him.

“Is everything okay?” I ask as we walk further down into the garden. We are surrounded by all sorts of flowers and if my boyfriend was tense beside me, I was going to ‘literally’ take a live video for my Instagram.

“We need to talk,” he says.

I don't know why but my heart skips a beat. There is no reason for me to think the worst—I mean, he wouldn't drive us all the way here to breaks thing with us, would he?

“What's up?” I ask.

Just when he is about to give me the response, his phone vibrates in his pocket. He pulls it from his pocket and stare down at it. He lets go of my hand and types away on his phone before sliding it back into his pocket with a deep sigh. He takes my hand once again and kisses it.

“I have been stressed so much these past day,” he says while taking my hand and leading me to the bench just by the fountain. He allows me to sit first before he joins

me. “I thought I could bring us here to unwind and recharge.”

“I love it. I am glad you brought us here,” I respond, honestly. When he spoke about booking us into a hotel, I thought it was just a typical one he spoke of. I am well-travelled, this place beats so many places I have been to. We both go silent so I ask what he wanted to talk to me about and what is stressing him.

“That can wait... it is some business proposal I have for you,” he says. He had me worried for a minute. “It can wait until we go back. I just want us to enjoy ourselves.” He turns to me and says, “I love you. No matter what happens, just know that I love you very much.”

“You are not dying, are you?” I ask with an awkward laugh. It is the way he is declaring his love for me. He pulls me close for a very passionate kiss. I melt in his arms because he drives me crazy this man. I moan loudly, kissing him hungrily. When he rubs my thigh with his warm hand, I tremble and my moan is louder.

“Let’s get you naked and take care of that hunger, shall we?”

I was so worried that Kings won’t to spare some time to see my doctor. I thought he was going to talk me into changing it, not wanting me to go. He is sitting right next to me at Dr Noxolo’s practise. Again I thought he was

not going to ditch his suits; well, he managed to and he is dressed in a pair of black jeans and a black t-shirt. I ask him why he likes black so much and he joked, telling me that he is in mourning everyday. He then tells me that it was the only colour he could wear when he was in boarding school and wasn't allowed to get his clothes dirty. He got used to it so much that he cannot see himself in anything other than black.

"You are so boring," I say said, mocking him.

"You know that is not true," he had responded back, stealing a kiss in front of people. I notice the lady sitting next to us blushing.

When the receptionist calls for my name, he takes my hand and we follow her to the consultation room. I better die old with this man because I cannot imagine leaving my life with another man who doesnt take my hand and lead my way. Imagine getting married to a man who doesn't steal a kiss in front of people?

Since we are here for the blood tests, Dr Noxolo sits us down to give us a brief HIV counselling before taking the blood for the rapid test. I am glad that Kings doesn't seem bothered or uncomfortable about this. I am used to my quarterly check-ups so if I am infected, then it can only be him. The tests are negative, which gives us another reason to ditch the condom. She does take our blood to send off to the lab for other infections. When we get to the contraceptive chat, she gives me a lecture that I already know and when I tell her my pick, she says

while handing me a little container, “Go to the bathroom for a urine test.”

I get on my feet, and dart into the cubicle which is just outside her door. Returning back to me seat beside Kings, he asks, “What is the test for?”

“Well, we cannot give her the contraceptive if she is already pregnant, can we?”

“Already pregnant?” Kings asks, but the way he panicked doesn’t sit well with me.

“If you two have been sexually active, then yes... there is a high possibility.”

Kings gets from his seat and paces to the window. Exchanging my gaze with Dr Noxolo, I get on my feet and make my way to where he is standing.

“Are you pregnant?” He asks.

“Not that I know of,” I respond. I fold my arms and watch him. “You don’t want children, do you?”

He takes a deep sigh and says, “It is just not the right time.”

“Hence we are here to make sure that we don’t fall pregnant,” I say.

“Yea! Sorry.”

“Ready when you are,” Dr Noxolo says as she places the pregnancy test on the table.

“Shall we?” I ask.

“I’ll wait outside,” Kings say, kisses my cheek and walks out of the room.

Chapter 27

Heart of STEEL!

Nonku

Walking out of the consultation room, I find Kingsley seated at the reception, phone on his hand. When he sees me, he jumps to his feet and slides his phone into his pocket. If only he was not panicking, he would have given me a kiss before taking my hand. But because a mere word as simple as ‘pregnancy’ freaked him out, he is rooted in front of me, waiting for me to make an announcement in front of everyone. I walk past him, leading the way to the parking lot.

“Nonku, are you going to tell me what the results are?” he asks as he walks behind me. I do not stop until I reach the car and facing the door, waiting for him to unlock the car. He places his hand on my shoulder and spins me. “Why are you mad at me?”

“I am not mad at you.”

“Then why are you acting like this?” he asks.

“Because I need to get to the hotel, get my stuff and Uber home.”

“Why is that?”

“Please unlock the door. I cannot be discussing my issues in front of everyone... in the parking lot.” Only now does he unlock the car, open the passenger door for me and watches as I slide into the seat. Thereafter he hurries to the other side and jumps in. Once settled, he turns to me and takes my hand. This is what he does to capture my heart. This is how he melts my heart. I don't mean to throw tantrum, it is the things I feel like Kingston is keeping from me that has me acting like this.

“Be honest with me, what made you panic? That was not normal what you did in there.”

“I just don't plan to have children now.”

“What are your reasons?” I ask. It cannot be finances. Kings is more than financial stable. Is it that he doesn't see me in his future? What could freak a man like him like that? I am interested to know his reasons.

He clears his throat, “The timing is just not right. I am working on projects that might see me travelling abroad and I don't think that would have been fair for you to be pregnant in my absence.”

He is supposed to be easing things but here he is fuelling the fire. What projects are these that have to see him out of the country?

“When were you planning on telling me?” I ask. “You never mentioned anything about travelling abroad. And what projects are these? Are you not supposed to be managing your club and God knows what else?” He takes a deep sigh!

Wow!

I wait but the response do not follow, giving me an indication that I might be a string along for him. If I wasn't, he wouldn't keep crucial things from me. I shake my head, trying to shake off these bad thoughts. We stay in silence for a little while until I say, "I am not pregnant so you do not have to stress." He doesn't want to show but I see relief when I see one. "She is out of stock of what I want so she requested that I see her on Friday. Until then, I am not having sex with you." Kings doesn't respond but just sighs. "I do not want to waste your time or to tempt you, so you can drive me back to my place."

"No!" he says.

"You don't get to decide for me. To be honest, I think I just want to be by myself. Take me home."

"I can't," he says. I turn to him angrily but he quickly continues. "Please Nonku. I'll be the one to leave but you stay at the hotel for the rest of the week. I paid a lot of money and I wouldn't want it to go to waste. I'll excuse myself until you are ready to see me."

I stay silent. I could take this week to polish my business proposal while being spoilt.

"Fine," I mumble and only now does he start the car. Our drive to the hotel is silent and I do regret including him in this. At our room, he doesn't waste time packing his items into his overnight bag. Before walking out of the room, he walks up to where I am seated and takes my hand to help me stand. He pulls me into a very warm

hug before kissing my cheek and promising that this little fight doesn't change anything about how he feels about me. He tells me that he is excusing me because he is respecting my wishes and doesn't want to worsen things between us. He tells me that once he is certain about the detail of his projects abroad, he will tell me all about it and figure if we could move there together or if he could cancel them to save our relationship. All these things, he said them while looking deep into my eyes, making me tremble at how I feel the love he says he has for me.

“Can I come by and have breakfast with you tomorrow? Or supper?” he asks. Now when he says this, I feel like I over reacted but then again, I am saving myself from falling pregnant by a man who is freaked out by the thought. He kisses me and I do allow him to deepen the kiss. Unfortunately, we might have things we are going through but our connection still stays. And it is still as strong.

The minute he walks out of the hotel room, I miss him. But I do get a lot done and the week goes by like a blur. Well, I kept my underwear on until Thursday night when he stormed into the room and kissed me until I melted in his arms and made love, making it up for the two days. Friday afternoon we do check out before he drives me to Dr Noxolo.

I am glad to be in my apartment on Friday evening and Kings tells me of a hectic weekend he has since they are hosting a few events at the club.

First thing, Monday morning, I head to the shopping centre to grab a few items for my house. My grocery cabinet is empty and so is my fridge. I am pushing the trolley into Woolworths Food when a familiar face stops in front of me.

“I thought it was you... hi...” she says.

“Hi!”

If there is one thing I hate about relationships is meeting the previous partners and confrontation from the bitter exes. And before me stands Kingsley’s ex or whatever he calls her—the one from the apartment.

“Sorry... can I have a word with you?” She asks and I shake my head, walking past her and picking the eggs from the shelf.

“Look... I wouldn’t be coming to you like this if I wasn’t curious about something. You are the only person who can tell me the truth about Kings.”

What the hell?

“How did you get to where I am.”

“Coincidence, believe me but a few things have been bothering me...”

I think hard about this. If Kings had not been acting weirdly these past few days, I would have been

dismissing her right now but I am more curious to find out more about what she wants to ask.

I sigh deeply, thinking if I should do this.

“Please... I’ll grab a table at the restaurant and you can join me when you are done shopping. I give her a brief nod before she leaves me to my shopping. I try hard not to overthink. To be honest, I am too anxious and I don’t know if I should do this.

Abandoning the shopping trolley, I head straight to the lady’s table. There is no point in trying to shop while I am this anxious.

“Oh... you are done?” She asks as she sips from a cup of coffee.

“Yea, I’ll do it later,” I respond.

“My name is Nomah,” she says.

One of the reasons I hate meeting your partner’s ex is comparing them to you and wondering what made her very special for him to date her. She is beautiful but overly chatty, and I can only wonder how those two heated it off.

“So what is it you wanted to ask?” I ask. The manager is by our side, asking if he should get the waiter to get me a drink. I refuse, stating that I am not staying that I am not staying.

“Look... someone was at our apartment this past week looking for him and the next day that guy was found dead at the basement,” she starts. “It could be a coincidence but then ... it got me thinking about the

times I met Kings neh? Okay, it feels weird now that I am chatting up with his new girlfriend because I used to stalk him on our building security cameras that we all have access to. Does he role play?”

“Role play?”

“The thing is...” she laughs and shakes her head. “The thing is... I used to watch him change into different characters... eish I don’t know if I am making any sense. But... I once met him dressed in a cleaner’s uniform but that was a while ago before you showed up. The other time he had this other long Rasta wig...” she giggles, “At first I thought it wasn’t him but when he looked at the camera, I noticed it was him. But this was a year ago. Does he kill people? I mean at first I was just curious to know about role playing until we heard of a man killed in the basement... a man who was looking for him.”

“When was that?”

“His body was found on Thursday morning,” she says.

“I don’t know what you want me to confirm.”

“Do you know why he dresses in these costumes? Well... haven’t you noticed or snooped? I would have snooped if he allowed me in his space often. He didn’t.”

“No.. I haven’t noticed.”

“Maybe it really is nothing. Well.. in that case.. I am sorry for wasting your time.”

Making my way back to the shop, I retrieve my trolley from where I left it. Instead of continuing with my grocer shopping, I find myself standing in front of the bakery

section, my mind wandering to all the things the lady said. This time I push the trolley to the gentleman who is packing stock on the shelves and apologise that I have to leave without paying. I'll have to try this shopping again.

I try to shake these thoughts off and I am failing to. Making my way to the apartment, I give Kings a ring.

"Yes, babe?" He answers. "Missing me already?"

"Do you have a minute? Can we meet for coffee?" I ask.

"Ah... can we make it at around 17h00?" He asks.

"Can't you squeeze me in an hour?" I ask.

"Ah, I have a hectic day..." He clears his throat and continues, "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah!"

"Should we do supper?"

"No, I am meeting a friend later tonight," I say. I shake my head and let out a scoff because I cannot believe what I am doing. I am insane. I take a deep sigh and ask, "Can we take a drive tomorrow morning? There is this place I want to visit."

"Tomorrow? Let me work something out."

"Are you at the club?"

"Yes, but I might step out to a meeting shortly," he says.

"Babe... is everything okay?"

The hoot coming from the car which is behind me startles me, jerking me out of the reverie. I can hear

Kings saying something but I hang the phone up while making a U-turn in the middle of the road—it was safe for a U-turn.

I might be going crazy, but unless I do this, I am not going to let go of this. Stopping at Gumede Enterprise, I jump out of the car as soon as I put it on 'park'.

Thereafter I make my way to the reception to request for Fifi. Since the receptionist behind the desk is new, she asks that I take a seat instead of going upstairs on my own. I don't bother taking a seat, I anxiously wait for Fifi to make her way to the reception.

"Hey... Nonku... how are you doing?" She happily says when she steps out of the elevator.

"Is Kingston in the office?"

"Ah... yah...?" she says, but her response is a question.

"I need to see him," I say while walking into the elevator. While she joins me, I am already jabbing the button to take me upstairs."

When the elevator stops at the finance floor, I am first to jump out. As usual, my ex-colleagues are happy to see me and the commotion as I walk into their space jerks Kingston from his seat. He stares at me while I read him. As I greet back my ex-colleagues, I notice Kingston gritting his teeth, staring right back at me as if is a contest. I pull my phone and dial Kingsley's phone and the phone on Kingston's desk rings. Kingston doesn't drop his gaze to his phone, he just stares at me as if challenging me. I don't think twice before charging

towards Kingston. All I hear is gasps as I snatch his white formal shirt and tear it apart.

“Nonku!” Kingston warns as I fight him so that I pull his t-shirt to reveal the part I want to see. “Nonku!”

“Let go of me,” I yell while fighting him. He tightens his grip on my hands.

“Nonku,” he warns again. Tears sting my eyes because I need no more proof. This is the man who has been fucking me this whole time.

I stop fighting because he is too strong for me and I have no air left in my lungs.

“Nonku,” this time he is more gentle. It is only now when I lift my gaze that I notice everyone staring right at me. I lift my chin up, turn on my heels and drag my feet towards the elevator. I am jabbing the elevator button, when I smell him next to me.

“Stay the fuck away from me,” I slowly say.

“Stay.the.fuck.away.from.me.”

Chapter 28

Heart of STEEL!

Nonku

It is as if the gods, including the God I believe in are against me. The elevator is taking forever to reach us, and Kings or whoever this man is breathing down at

me. I am fuming, facing the elevator door, waiting for it to open so that I can throw myself in.

“I did not sleep with her,” Kings blurted out, loud for everyone to hear. “I did not sleep with that woman and I have no idea what she told you.”

My nose flares, as I look up at him. Only now do my prayer get answered as the doors ping, open and reveals a group of people heading down. Without a word, I step inside and occupy an empty corner. Kings, who ever this man is, steps in too and quietly greets. All eyes land on his torn shirt but he doesn't seem to care and he keeps his gaze at me. The ride to the ground floor is quiet, but when the cart stops and every walks out, Kings is beside me. I don't know which part of 'stay the fuck away from me' did he not get.

“Nonku... I need you to listen to me,” he whispers as he walks beside me. I don't stop walking and he doesn't stop following me. Not wanting to open my mouth, because I am certain that I will yell at him, I pick up my pace until I get to my car. There isn't anyone paying attention to us at the parking lot, so he takes my hand and spins me.

“Nonkululeko,” he barks. I startle at the way he called my name, also considering that I haven't heard him say my name in full. He stares deep into my eyes and tells me, “We need to talk and I want you to keep this thing... whatever the fuck you think you know to yourself, do you hear me? I cannot go with you right now because of the

damage control I need to do... but I want you to listen to me. Wait for me to get to you and we will talk... please.”

I don't have an answer for him so I angrily jump into my car and lock the doors. I haven't said a word as I drive away. I still haven't processed this properly because my lungs won't allow me to breathe.

What the hell?

Who is this man?

I drive into the main street, careful that I concentrate on the traffic lights. By the way I am feeling, I might need to park on the side of the road and take a few minutes to breathe.

I need air.

I do manage to stop on the side of the road, kill the engine and fish for my phone. I absently call my friend but her phone goes straight to voicemail. I realise that my hands are shaking when I dial my sister's number. Fortunately, she answers and I swear I made her panic when I finally let out all the tears I had been keeping in. I sob hysterically when I ask, “Where are you?”

“I am home. What is going on?”

“Can I come there?” I ask, rolling down the windows because the air from the air-con is not enough.

“Yes, of course,” she urgently says. “What is going on? Are you okay?”

“No!” I whisper. I feel like the road is spinning before me, so I grab the steering wheel tightly and try not to close

my eyes. I tell my sister that I am on my way to her then start the engine.

The road is blur but I manage to drive slowly back into the main road and join the light traffic. I am turning towards the off ramp to join the N1 when I notice a car speeding behind me. I am not fast enough to get out of the way when I hear a loud bang behind me and I start losing control of the car. My scream is loud, but it won't help me with anything so I try to steer the car back to the road. Luckily, I have the control of the car, so I fight until it spins and comes to a halt. My heart is on my throat as I pat myself, confirming that I am in one piece.

"I am fine, I am fine... I'm fine," I mumble to myself as I try to control my breathing.

A bang on my window makes me jump, before noticing a man behind the door. He is dressed formally as if he was on his way to work. I glance in front of me, noticing the car that is now in front of me. It makes sense now when I notice the driver's door open and a messed up bumper. He is the one who ran into me. I slowly roll down the window, only to half, so that I could converse with him.

"Are you all right?" he asks, punching on his phone.

"Yah," I mumble, and only now do I feel a sting on my forehead. Running my hand on it, I notice the blood on my fingers.

I am not fine.

“You are bleeding,” the man says. “I am calling the ambulance and the police... they should be on their way.” I nod at him before he asks, “Are you able to walk? You need to come out of the car... the petrol is leaking.”

My heart jumps at this revelation. Petrol cannot be good. I urgently open the door, and jump out of the car, only for the man to catch me.

“Careful, ma’am... careful,” this is all I hear, before I feel a sting on my forearm. Thereafter I am collapsing on the stranger’s arms.

KINGS

I am welcomed by deadly stares when I step out of the elevator. My eyes meet those of Ephraim as I make my way to my table. Before anybody says anything, I turn towards the restrooms, to get a little decent and catch up with Rhulani who has been texting me non-stop.

I almost break the mirror, as my fist is tempted to punch the wall.

How the fuck did she find out?

I splash my face with water before getting rid of the shirt she has torn apart. Discarding it into the bin, Rhulani’s text pings on my phone.

'I am not disclosing the location.' - Rhulani.

'What the fuck?' - Me.

'I have warned you all along. It wasn't safe to fall in love with her while you were on that mission. We spoke about this but everything fell on deaf ear.' - Rhulani.

'The last time I checked, I am your boss.' - Me. I wish I could call him and bark my orders at him but I cannot risk some more.

'And I am your employee who knows how to do their job.' - Rhulani.

'I didn't approve this. I want you to send me the location of her whereabouts right now.' - Me.

'I have Stone taking care of it.' - Rhulani.

My fingers have never fly on the phone keys like right now.

'I don't want Stone taking care of this.' - Me.

'Then I am out.' - Rhulani.

'What the fuck do you mean?' - Me.

'I quit. When you hired me, I promised to do my job with integrity. What you have been subjecting me to, is nothing like it. If I give you the location, then I am handing my resignation. I am done policing you on how you want to live your life and compromise this mission. But I am not going to be part of this failed mission' - Rhulani.

He fucking knows how to get to me. He knows very well that my love for Nonku is very important, but our

missions are important'er. Mostly with how our other mission is compromised. My assistant is dealing with a lot, including hiring a new clean team after our clean team failed to do its job. I hate these hiccups and I swear, I can do everything to make them go away.

'I take it you are now calm and back to your senses. I am not giving you any information until we close this mission. Before we do, she doesn't exist anymore.' - Rhulani.

I don't response but angrily slide my phone back to my pocket. This time, I fail to control my rage and I do land a fist on the wall just the same minute Ephraim walks into the restrooms. I see him from the mirror, noticing that he has his brows furrowed at me.

"Sorry," I mumble, rubbing my fist.

He clears his throat, walking further into where I am rooted.

"Do you want to tell me what is going on?" he asks.

I want to tell him to go fuck himself, because none of this is any of his business, when I remember that Kingston would never swear at his boss.

"Am I in trouble?" I ask, turning to face him. He doesn't respond, but stares at me so that I give him an answer to his question. "Well... Nonku and I had a fling after she left the company... and my ex-girlfriend fed her false information about me." I stare at Ephraim, pretending to be worried sick, "My job is safe right? I mean she was no longer an employee here, right?"

“Right!” He says. “It is just best to keep your business out of the office.”

“I know. I know,” I say.

He drops his gaze to the bin where I have discarded my shirt, thereafter his smirk grows on his face before he says, “I didn’t think you were capable of this.”

“Capable of what, sir?”

“Driving a woman crazy,” he says before a chuckle. My eyes do not meet him, because the fact that my actions drove Nonku that crazy doesn’t sit well with me. I saw how hurt she is. I hate I am the one who made her look that way. I need not to lie to her anymore, she knows the truth; what I am trying to figure is how.

I clear my throat, give Ephraim a small smile before walking past him. At my workstation, my colleagues are staring right at me, offering me sympathetic smiles.

As hard as it fucking is, I try to finish the task that I was busy with. I also do get a chance to instruct Rhulani to wipe out today’s camera feeds. He responds to tell me that he has shut the camera feeds down and is wiping out everything from Saturday afternoon, so that no one suspects the connection.

A day has never been this long. At five thirty, when I get to my apartment, I snatch my clothes off and throw them into the bin. I didn’t bother doing this at Rhulani’s apartment. After a quickest shower, I get into a pair of comfortable jeans and a black t-shirt, before making my

way to the office. Rhulani is unavailable and the guy who jumps in his shoes when he is unavailable is standing beside my table, typing away on his tablet, trying to get hold of Rhulani.

“Didn’t he tell you where he is going?” I ask.

“He said he is taking care of business with Stone,” he responds.

“Find him,” I order.

NONKU

My hearts is at my throat when I open my eyes. It doesn’t even take me long to realise that I am taken by the stranger. It was a given. I mean, I am not one to faint, so when I fell in his arms and felt myself shutting down, I knew what it is was. The room is well-lit, and I am sleeping in the middle of a well-made bed but that is all there is in this room – just a bed dressed in white linen. I scan the room, searching for my handbag or any of my items. There isn’t any. I carefully drop my legs to the freezing tiles and scurry to the door. When I find it locked, I bang on it, yelling for someone to come to the door. There is no movement on the side of the door, so I keep banging on the door. I am almost ready to give up when I hear the foot steps, then the door unlocking before the door flies open. It takes me just a second to

notice a gun which is pointed to my face. I quickly take a few steps back, away from the door, my hands on the air.

“Please don’t shoot,” I beg, squeezing my eyes shut, just in case I am not allowed to look at this giant of a man.

“Look at me,” he demands. I slowly open my eyes, finding the gun still pointed on my face. My body is trembling at how close the gun is. I keep blinking, not wanting to bore my eyes in his cold ones.

“Someone keeps calling you. I want you to tell them that you are fine,” he says calmly, as if pointing this gun will not have me faint. I nod, licking my now dry lips. My eyes follow his one hand which slides into his pocket and return with a phone. I slowly receive the phone from him, scrolling through to get to the phone numbers. My heart sinks when I notice a hundred missed calls from Kings, including a text message asking me where I am. Isn’t he supposed to know where I am? Is it not him who got me kidnapped? “Don’t try to do anything stupid. I won’t hesitate to blow your brains.”

I believe him. The way this man looks, with two scars across his face, I believe he could blow my brains if he wants.

I nod, dialling my sister’s number and bracing myself to lie to her.

“Nonku... what the hell?” Phelele shrieks on the phone. “I have been waiting for you since noon. What is happening?”

“Oh... sorry,” I say, and swallow hard. “I am sorry... I got caught up.”

“What is going on? Are you okay?”

“Yeah!” My voice is breaking and I know for a fact that my sister is going to pick it up.

“No, you not,” she says.

“Just... something my boyfriend and I are going through. I’ll tell you everything when I see you,” I say.

“I am coming there right now.”

“I am not home.” I swallow hard and take a deep breath. The guy hasn’t moved his gun away from my face and his deadly stare tells me that he is waiting for me to make a small mistake for before he pulls the trigger. “I am with him. We just need to talk things through.”

“Are you sure?” This time, her question forces a tear to escape.

“Mhh!”

“I don’t know why I don’t believe you. Please come see me when you come back?”

“Yeah!” I softly say. The guy lists his finger and indicates for me to wrap up the call.

“Don’t force things if they aren’t working, okay?”

“I know.”

“Okay, I’ll hear from you,” she says and after she tells me that she loves me, she hangs up. The guy snatches the phone from me and slides it in his pocket.

“Sleep,” he says, pointing at the bed with the his gun.

I turn towards the bed and sit on the edge. He walks to the door but before he could close it behind him, I ask, “Where is Kings? Is he coming?”

“Who the fuck is Kings?”

His response takes all the air in my lungs.

“Kingsley... Kingston,” I say but he quietly turns to the door and shuts it behind him.

CHAPTER 29

Heart of STEEL!

KINGS

The minute Rhulani strolls into my office, I am fuming and almost losing my mind. These stunts that he thinks he can pull, are pissing me off. Mostly because I can't afford to fire him.

“Before you go all crazy at me, I was busy running errands and not once did I ignore your calls, he says, pulling the chair and placing the laptop on the table. It is already nine thirty and I have been seated here, waiting for his ass to show up with the information about my girlfriend.

“Where the hell is she?”

“Relax! Stone is taking care of it.”

“Stone?” I narrow my eyes at him.

“Yes, the very same man who has a cold heart like yours ... except... he is not in love. Yes, that man is handling the situation.” He gazes at me and continues, “I was not joking.” He types away on his laptop before he says, “He knows not to mess with her. He promised.”

“So what’s your plan and who is the boss here?”

“For the Gumede mission, I am.” He lifts his eyes to meet mine. “I had to clean up your mess. If I remember very well, I warned you about getting into a relationship with her. She is a huge threat to this mission. I need to know what she knows and where she got the information from. And the best way to remedy this was to stop her from spreading the information.”

“Let me interrogate her,” I offer. I owe her a huge explanation.

“Nope. I’ll handle it.”

“What the fuck?”

“Let me be frank with you. You have become soft and it is very pathetic to watch. She knows how to mess with your heart.” He clears his throat, “My offer still stands. I can hand her over to you the same minute I hand over my resignation letter.”

“You know there isn’t anybody who is irreplaceable,” I spit.

“I am fully aware of that. I am just done working overtime,” he responds before typing away on his laptop. I let out an angry huff while resting my back on the chair. I am fully aware of all the things he is talking

about. This little lovey dovey relationship has shifted my focus a little bit. I didn't have to kill two men in a matter of a week. I should have noticed any slips up, if there were any. But after my jobs, Nonku is all I was thinking about. Rhulani takes a minute to rub this little hiccup on my face. And it really is unfair for him to be cleaning all the mess after me. The reason he is my right hand man is because he is too good for his job and letting him go before the end of the mission is out of the question. Any other time, maybe!

“No one suspects anything at Gumede Enterprise,” I advise, slightly relieved that Nonku didn't say a word and I was able to make everyone believe that the whole mayhem was because of our little secret relationship. Well, all I had to explain was that we started dating after she left the company. That dust is settled, the only thing that I have been trying to crack my head about is how Nonku found out. I mean, everything was perfectly fine until the odd phone call she made to me before storming to the office. I have been scrutinizing her call log and messages but nothing shows. Of course, Rhulani blocked the tracking App to get to the location of the phone, so I could not access the data to trace her movements. As if he could read my thoughts, Rhulani says, “Whatever meeting she had with anyone who fed her the information happened at the Woolworths Food. I'll have Kayise pick any footage from there.” He doesn't shift his eyes from his laptop when he said, “Gumede is meeting the new investors on Friday afternoon.”

“Of course, the finance team has been putting together reports for the same meeting. As planned, I am going to manipulate the numbers on the reports just few minutes before the presentation. And we are indeed going to give the investors a little show.”

“I am glad you are still following,” he says while shutting his laptop. He jumps to his feet and grabs his laptop. “I think I’ll be heading home to sleep. I have taken care of everything and I wish you could stop messing things around.” He walks to the door but stops and turns, “I’d advise you take this time to detox her out of your system. You are going to need to let go of her. She is not safe with you.”

I swallow hard, and forcing myself not to drop my gaze to my hands. I hate looking defeated. I fucking hate looking vulnerable and right now, he has me by the balls. There is a reason I don’t visit my family often. There is a reason why she found me single. There is a reason I used to vow not to fall in love. And the main reason I cannot start a family, with anyone, including her, is because ‘no one’ is safe with me. I knew that before I stupidly fell in love with Nonku. I knew it very well.

“Fine!” I hear myself say. He gives me a brief nod before striding out of my office.

I never thought love could turn me into this pathetic human being. I cannot even recognize myself as I stare at my face on the mirror.

‘The sooner this mission comes to an end, the better.’

NONKU

I barely slept and as I lie on this bed, I can hear the birds chirping - indicating the start of a new day. Since the scarred man ordered me to sleep, he hasn't shown his face ever since. I also had to figure the door which leads to the bathroom. Even though I tried looking outside the window and only saw a white wall, I haven't tried pulling a stunt or anything of that sort. All I did was to return to the bed, curl myself into a ball and tried to force myself to sleep. All tricks for me to fall asleep did not work. Not when I was trying to make sense of this whole mess that I am in. If this man doesn't know who Kings is, then who is he working for? And I have been trying to put two and two together about Kingsley and Kingston. Everything makes sense now – why they could never be in the same place. This makes so much sense. I got Kings into my life because of that one night stand that I dared myself to. If I remember well, the day I asked him about Kingston, he tried to dismiss me but my offer to sleep with him changed everything.

I gasp, realizing that he is behind Gumede's fall.

Who is this guy? Could he be one of Gumede's enemies? Ndumiso Gumede is part of the dark and twisted world – everyone knows it.

I almost jump out of bed when I hear two voices behind the door. I move to the corner of the bed when I hear the key turn. The scarred man walks in first and behind him is a guy – a much normal looking guy – holding two cups of coffees.

“Hi Nonku,” he says before shifting his reading glasses. I don’t take a minute to wonder how he knows my name when he stops at the edge of the bed and hands one cup to me. “It is just coffee.” One look at the scarred man, I take the cup. The normal looking guy continues, “I apologise for my friend here.” I nod. “Why don’t you have a cup of coffee while we wait for your belongings and breakfast?”

My belongings?

“Okay...” I mumble.

“I’ll be in the other room,” he says.

“What is your name?” I quickly ask. Catching his name will help me ask for him when I need him.

He gives me a smile and mumbles under his breath before he says, “Rhulani is my name.”

“Please don’t leave me with him...” I quickly say when the scary man stays rooted by the door.

“He is leaving with me,” Rhulani says while stopping by the door. I only relax when both of them walk out of the room. I stare down at the coffee and hesitate to take one sip that I need. I didn’t get to eat the whole of yesterday and I am truly famished. I take the cup to my lips and the first sip invites more until the cup is empty.

It is after a little while when I hear the key on the lock and Rhulani walks into the room with a luggage and laptop bag. It only takes me a few seconds to notice that all these belong to me. My laptop bag was a gift from my sister, so it isn't very ordinary. He places the bags on the bed before he says, "I got you a few things you might need during your stay." He points at the laptop bag, "Just in case you are in need of it." He also pulls my phone from his pocket and hands it me. "You can use it for social media. Unfortunately I'll have to approve any texts you might want to send out. Calls are offline for now." He gives me a small smile before turning for the door. I am no longer as scared as I was last night when a gun was pointed to my face so I call his name. He stops and looks over his shoulder, "Yes?"

"What is going on?" I ask.

He slowly turns to me and now when I scan him thoroughly do I notice how much he has Kingston's taste.

"Why don't you freshen up, and come out for breakfast? I'll fill you in." With that, he walks out of the room, closing the door behind him. I unzip my bag. Whoever packed this bag did so diligently and even though I am concerned that they were in my space, I am a little relieved that I might not be dying anytime soon. If that was the case, they wouldn't have bothered getting my things to make my stay here comfortable. By then again, by the look of things, I am stuck here for a little while. I would have loved to take my usual long bath, but I am eager to know what the hell is going on and who the hell

these people are, so I settle for a quickest shower ever known to man. Thereafter, I get into my pair of leggings and the shirt I come across. Sliding my feet into my slippers, I rush to the other side of the door. It is a very small apartment – a one bedroom apartment I suppose, because the only entry way that I notice is the door by the kitchen and sliding door which seems to be leading one to the yard.

The guy with the gun cocks it and it is the only warning he gives me.

“Could you stop playing with the gun?” Rhulani says, lifting his eyes to the armed guy. Then he shifts his gaze to me. “Your breakfast is the microwave.”

“I am not hungry,” I say. “The coffee was good enough.”

He nods his head towards an empty chair next to him. He is seated on the dining table, a laptop in front of him. I pull my legs and drag them to where the chair is.

“I am sorry about this whole thing,” he says, almost sounding sincere.

“Who do you work for?”

“With!”

“Who do you work with?” I correct myself.

“Your boyfriend... who might not be your boyfriend anymore,” he says. Kings. I don’t know but this makes me feel just a little better. I mean, it is better than been held by total strangers. He is a stranger but one I know a little. Rhulani continues, “He didn’t send me to take you against your will... but we had to.”

I am tempted to ask where he is at, because it would be good to have him tell me what the hell is going on here.

“Why are you keeping me here?”

“Because I want to keep you safe. I also want to know what you know... and who is your informant...”

My informant? He makes it sound like something serious. I shake my head, not wanting to reveal what Kings' girl told me about. I don't know how safe she is - that is if Kings killed the man found in his apartment. It hasn't sunk in yet - Kings kills people. Rhulani's question jerks me out of my reverie, “Who else knows about this? I cannot risk anyone knowing about anything that you know about Kings.”

“No one. I just realise that Kingston and Kingsley are the same person,” I say with a shrug. He is no longer paying attention to me as he is busy on his laptop. I clear my throat and ask, “When am I going home? I want to go home.”

“Just give me a few weeks to close off a mission that we are busy with and you'll have your life back,” Rhulani says, not lifting his head.

Weeks?

Weeks?

“That's if you are still alive,” the armed guy says.

“He is joking,” Rhulani dryly says, his head still buried in his laptop. “He is just fooling around.”

I choose not to say anything because I am shit scared, pissed and regretful. I should have trusted my guts in the beginning - my relationship was too good to be true.

My life was just so perfect when I was single

Chapter 30

Heart of STEEL

KINGS

My five o'clock alarm goes off on my pedestal. I sway my head towards it and watch it ring a few times before reaching for it and switching it off. I have been laying here, awake for hours. Wanting to make it for my run before getting ready to work, I get up from the bed and pull the curtains open.

'What a fucking good morning,' I mumble to myself while making my way to the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. 'What a fucking good morning.'

It is a Thursday and if I wasn't sulking, I would be pretty excited about tomorrow's meeting where Ndumiso is having a meeting with the new investors. It is fucking going to be a ball.

Stepping out of my apartment and turning towards the elevator, the girl from down the corridor waves at me. She is dressed in gym wear and I can tell she was waiting for me to step out of my apartment.

“Yesterday I was late,” she says when I stand beside her by the elevator. When I was returning from my run yesterday, she was only going out for hers.

“Told you to use the gym downstairs. It isn’t safe for you to jog by yourself at this time of the day.”

“More especially after they found a dead body in the basement, right? At least you are here,” she says with a smile. “Doesn’t your girlfriend join you?”

I grit my teeth. I was doing a very good job trying not to think much about Nonku but all forces are against me. If it isn’t my neighbor here reminding me about her, it is all the memories I hold dearly to my heart that torment me. It is me cooking my favourite meal, which is now her favourite too. It is me holding my phone and expecting her text message. It is her smell on my clothes that torments me almost daily since the beginning of this week.

“I have never...”

“Fuck off,” I say, the same minute the elevator doors open. “Stay the fuck out of my business,” I add as she drags her feet into the elevator. Thereafter, I turn towards the staircase and jump two at the same time, angrily starting my jog for the day.

People have a fucking way to ruin your already fucked up day.

Sprinting up the street, I give myself to the wind. This is what I have been doing this past week, running myself to death to get rid of all my anger. It has been working –

NOT. Well, it does help to make me feel better for ruining Noku's life. I manage a young kilometres run before getting ready for work. On my ride to work, I pull out my laptop and check on any traffic in Ndumiso's network. I am scanning every communication he is having so that I continue to sabotage him with ease. I scroll down to a new email that I haven't seen. A plane ticket out of the country.

"What do we have here?" I mumble while opening the tickets and checking the destination. Ah, one way ticket for three to John F. Kennedy International Airport. I pull my phone from my bag and dial Rhulani, who is also online with me according to the system beep on my laptop.

"Good morning boss," he answers the phone immediately. I ask Charlie, the guy who is driving me to Gumede Enterprise, to connect my phone to the Bluetooth speakers so that I can quickly run some data on my laptop.

"Why is Gumede flying out of the country?" I ask as I pull Ndumiso's phone data so that I can pull any communication regarding New York. What is happening in New York?

"This is new," Rhulani says. "I am glad you picked it up, sir."

"Don't start."

"What? It is a compliment."

It isn't like I haven't noticed that my fucking assistant compliments me each time I contribute new information to my job. It is very obvious what he is trying to say. And I am not denying any of it. Ndumiso's phone is on my screen in no time. I search the keywords to pull the most relevant data that might be useful.

"Sneaky snake," Rhulani says.

"The motherfucker," I say, realizing what all this is.

"Do you see it?"

"Yep!"

There is no thread on the text that both Rhulani and I are reading but it all makes sense what this is.

Tomorrow's meeting has nothing to do with the business rescue plan. He is getting new investors and once these guys sign on the dotted line, he is heading out of the country and leaving them with a sinking ship.

"Glad we are saving some idiots from making wrong business moves tomorrow, huh?" Rhulani asks.

"Yep! Flag his travelling documents. He ain't going nowhere," I respond while closing the laptop and placing it into its bag.

"I am doing that right now. So, everything is as planned. Tomorrow morning during the meeting, we are publishing the news. My guys are ready."

"Roger that!" I respond.

"Welcome back boss," Rhulani says.

“Fuck off.” We go quiet but Rhulani is still on the phone as I can hear the keyboard keys. I swallow hard, contemplating if I should ask him. By now Charlie is parking his car just by the bus stop near Gumede Enterprise. I clear my throat and ask, “How is she?”

Rhulani goes quiet first and then says, “She is fine.”

“She hates me, doesn’t she?”

“That’s the plan, isn’t it?” Rhulani asks.

“Damn right, it is.”

I owe her an apology for putting her in all this mess and for how I am going to have to break her heart.

I still get the eyes from my colleagues but I have gotten used to it. I hate that I portray Kingston as this humble and quiet guys and it fucking kills me that I can swear at everyone to mind their business. I am heading to my desk, from the kitchen when Ephraim hurries to one of our colleagues and yells at her to open the presentation that we worked on.

Opps!

I walk past them to my seat but just like everyone else, I keep my eyes on Ephraim who is shouting at....

“Glenda... how many times did I say we must check this report before submitting to Ndumiso?” Glenda is her name and our manager is on her neck because she was

the last person to save the document yesterday when we last worked on it.

It is Friday morning, nine twenty and Ndumiso and his shareholders are about to meet the new investors in exactly ten minutes. Well, I am not worried about Gumede picking the mistake early, I am about to send the reports to all investors tagged on his meeting invite.

“What is going on?” I ask the lady who sits next to me as I sip my coffee.

“I think the reports are wrong,” she responds. We both turn our gaze back at Ephraim who is snatching Glenda out of her seat so that he seats and makes amendments. I am glad that Nonku is not here to play Gumede’s puppet who cooks the reports to lie to investors. I slide into my seat before pulling my phone from my pocket and getting ready to send an email using a ghost account. We are still paying attention to Ephraim when the elevator doors open and out walks Ndumiso Gumede and a guy following behind him. Gumede angrily scans the area and spots Ephraim before making long strides to where he is. The man is angry and cannot hide his face even if he wanted to.

“What is this? Where is my correct report?” Ndumiso yells while leaning to check the screen where Ephraim is making the changes.

“Sir, I checked the reports and I personally approved them yesterday before we knocked off. I don’t know about the changes she made.”

“Don’t you have a freaking report of the figures I want? I didn’t put my eSignature on this nonsense.”

“We work on the server, sir. So when the changes are done, the changes are done to all of us.”

“This is ridiculous. This is ridiculous,” Ndumiso roars. “Call IT and instruct them to pull yesterday’s report before all these new changes are done.”

“Yes...” Ephraim chokes on his words. Fifi rushes to where they are with an open file.

“I don’t know if this could help but we did make a print out of the report yesterday. We could scan this to your email and you could use it for the presentation.” I nod slowly, admiring Fifi for trying to save the day. I get why Nonku wants her by her side.

Ndumiso is disturbed by a phone call. I must say, the horror look on his fucking face just brightened my day.

I take another sip of the coffee. I am enjoying this. I am enjoying this so much.

I see his shoulders sag when he drops the hand that is clutching the phone and twirls around the room.

“Who the fuck sent the report to my invitees?” His voice is breaking when he says this. Just like everyone else, I look at my colleagues and shrug. Ndumiso turns to our other colleagues and raises his voice, “Who the fuck sent this damn report to my invitees?” He turns to Ephraim and Glenda this time, before asking the same this. At this point Glenda is trembling. The floor is silent when Ndumiso resigns on the chair next to Ephraim and

buries his head in his hands. It is his electronic signature he is worried about. It is a bad report. Let's just say, the report shows the dead end. There aren't any chances of rebuilding this baby. Well, Ndumiso and his business rescue team worked on something that looked promising but then when you base the facts on these new numbers, there isn't saving it unless one is interested in making a loss.

Ndumiso's phone rings in his head. One look at the screen, and he takes out a deepest sigh.

"Go back to work," he roars as he gets on his feet. His, well - it must be the bodyguard, follows him as he makes his way to the elevator.

The minute the elevator shuts, Ephraim turns to Glenda with his bloodshot eyes. "What happened to the report?" Glenda shakes her head and cries.

"I don't know. I saved it here after Mr Gumede signed it yesterday."

"What do you mean you don't know? You are the last person to log into the folder," Ephraim says. "Do you know that if those investors don't take the deal, we are all going to lose our jobs?"

Oh, well!

"But it wasn't us. It was Glenda," one guy says from his seat.

"Well... maybe you don't understand," Ephraim says, placing his hands on his waist, "You are not going to be fired. This is the end of Gumede."

Well, he summed it up. This is the end of Gumede because it is going to take an Angel from heaven to want to be associated with this name. Gumede is almost dry and with the little he has, even if it is a few millions, he cannot save his sinking boat unless he is ready to start over. Gumede is too stingy to spend his last cent on this, Well, even his advisors will tell him to sit down and apply for voluntary liquidation. The only thing he can do is to sell his empty shell and that is where phase two begins. The room is silent as everyone digests this revelation. I am silent and sad too - I have abandoned my coffee.

Just a few minutes later, I receive a text message from Rhulani.

‘Headlines!’ - Rhulani.

I clear all my messages and settle back on my chair. Opening the pop up link I got from Rhulani, I have a wide on my face as I distribute it to the company’s contact lists.

First the girl who seats next to me gasps. Followed by the other. Then the whole floor is in chaos after realising the link.

This is definitely going to make headlines for the next weeks.

‘Ndumiso Gumede of Gumede Enterprise is seen in an illegal sex club in North of Johannesburg.’ That is the caption of the clear picture of Gumede and four of his business associates seated in a sex club they own. I

don't have time to read the damn whole article but the names of all the business tycoon and politicians who are part of the money laundering company, MOPG Global are clearly listed. Rhulani and the journalist who ran this story are fucking geniuses. I scroll down to where it is mentioned that Gumede was trying to escape the country, a few days after cashing a fat cheque from a number of investors who were ready to rescue his sinking ship.

"Haa... so his side chick was also laundering money for him?" my colleague asks. She is clearly reading the article.

"Huh? What?"

"The boss's side chick. He bought her Miss Sweet Delectables a few years ago. I think her name is Kim."

"The one that was killed by his wife?" The other colleague asks.

"It was a rumour," she corrects.

A list of the connected companies is long. Very long.

I read along, impressed with each paragraph. The article indicates that a group of women who were rescued from MOPG Global trafficking are ready to give their public statements.

Someone from three workstations away calls out that the boss is trending on social media. When we hear the police sirens from outside, everyone rushes to the windows and the floor balcony.

While my colleagues take videos of the police cars parked outside Gumede Enterprise, I pull my phone and text my assistant.

‘Phase 2!’ - me.

It is indeed time to get ready for the best part.

‘I’m already on it.’ - Rhulani.

Chapter 31

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU (unedited)

“Go to hell mighty Gumede,” Rhulani types away on his laptop. After promising me that Stone is not going to shoot me, Rhulani disappeared on me until this morning when he showed up with another good cup of latte macchiato. Today he is accompanied by another guy who is standing in for the scary guy. Rhulani just walked into the apartment, pass me a cup of coffee and thereafter he set his station on the dining table. He had been buried on his laptop ever since then. When his phone pings, he picks it and types something before setting it back on the table.

“What did you say Ndumiso Gumede?” I curiously ask from my chair. I am also behind my laptop because he advised me to bring it to him so that he could help set up a website for my business. I had a choice to refuse, but

knowing that I am stuck here, I decided to let him help me.

“I said he can go to hell,” he says while standing from his seat. He walks to a little coffee table in the dining area and picks a TV remote. He switches it on and scrolls through the channels until he is happy with one. He places the remote on the table and walks back to where I am seated.

“What is going on?” I ask. He hasn’t said much about Gumede Enterprise but from his reaction, I can tell that something happened this morning. Before he could even explain anything to me, the news updates soundtrack goes off and a newsreader appears on the screen. I listen attentively as he reads the news and for a good five minutes, there isn’t anything interesting that he is discussing other than the upcoming elections. When I notice that Rhulani is glued on the screen, I keep my attention there.

“On our business segment, a business mogul Ndumiso Gumede....”

“Ex business mogul rather,” Rhulani says with a shake of his head and a scorn on his face.

“...of Gumede Enterprises was arrested today. Gumede, together with a number of business associates and politicians, is accused of human trafficking and money laundering through a company called MOPG Global...” the newsreader continues but I am stuck at MOPG Global. The name sounds very familiar. Trying to recall, it does not take me long to remember it. We used

to receive large sum of donations in the name of social responsibility. I remember the CFO instructing me not to disclose the donation amount on our financial statements once upon a time and it was her decision, together with the big boss, to write it off. I don't recall how this issue was resolved because I was not part of it. At the time, I didn't put too much thought into it because we did the same with some other reputable companies and the auditors never had an issue with it.

Unless...

"... the owner of Gumede Enterprise was set to lure in investors before eloping," the newsreader continues.

Was this bust done by Rhulani and Kings?

There on the television, Ndumiso is dragged out of his fancy building by a number of police.

"That's for show. He is probably going to buy himself out of this shit," the new guy says.

"Not under my watch," Rhulani says while getting back to his work-mode. I return my focus to the television where there is now a debate about what is going to happen to Gumede Enterprise now that no investor would want to be associate with this scandal. After his business associates and politicians were listen on live television, I also don't think there is anyone who would want to be associated the enterprise right now. My heart goes to my ex colleague - what is going to happen to all those hundreds of people? The debate goes on and on, and by the time this discussion is over, my jaws are on the floor. I didn't think I was working for such a monster.

Money laundering?

Illegal sex club where they force trafficked girls into pleasuring old men?

Oh, my God.

“Is that why Kings was there? To dig all this dirt?” I ask, flickering my gaze to Rhulani.

“Something like that...”

I spend the day following the case and all the scandals that are brought out to open. Ndumiso was a big shot and he is one of those people who put the world to a stand still with each and every move he makes. I thought the rumour about his side chick faking her own death to get Ndumiso’s wife in prison wasn’t true. I am still focused on the television when Rhulani turns his laptop screen towards me. My blood freeze and my throat goes very dry.

How do I explain this?

“I thought you said you just figured Kings up,” Rhulani says calmly. I cannot even deny the video that is playing because I am very visible on the screen, dressed in the same clothes I had on when I was kidnapped. Nomah’s face is very recognisable.

“I ... I...”

“How do you know Nomalizwe?” He asks. Realising that he knows her name, I swallow hard.

“What are you going to do to her?” I ask.

“What did she tell you?” Rhulani curiously asks. When I notice how unhappy he looks and how the other guy is standing from his seat and making his way to where I am seated, I tell them about my meeting with Nomah. I tell them all the things she mentions.

“What are you going to do to her?” I ask.

“I don’t know yet.”

“Please don’t kill her?” I beg. Rhulani stares right into my eyes until I drop them. I mean, these guys don’t have guns for nothing, do they?

WEEKS LATER!

I have been locked up in this foreign place for three weeks now. I have gotten to know the armed scary guy with a scar on his face is Stone. He lives up to his name - the man is cold. I still fear him with everything in me, even though Rhulani urges me not to. I fear him because he has his gun with him every minute of the day. The other guy who comes by when Stone is not around, is not as bad as him. Rhulani on the other hand is totally different from all of them. I can only wonder how he got to work with these men who kill people for a living. To be honest, Rhulani is the one who keeps me sane around here. It is only on Wednesdays and Fridays where he comes by, plug his laptop and bury himself on

his laptop until the end of the day. He tries to keep me company whenever he gets a chance and thanks to him, I got two clients to kick start my business with. I don't know what he did with my website but it attracts so many businesses I had to refuse to do business with a few, so that I start small in launching my baby.

I inhale before raising my arms to the front over my head while standing up on my knees. I am on my yoga mat, attempting the kneeling forward bend sequence. I have been practicing it for the past two weeks since I started attending the yoga classes on YouTube. Rhulani had advised that I consider Yoga since I cannot go out for a jog. I am glad I listened. I can say, it keeps me sane. It has been the only thing that relaxes me and helps me to sleep better.

On the second week of lock down, I almost lost my mind when I realised that these guys were serious about keeping me locked up. But now, even though it is still hard, I am getting used to loneliness. Even though I ask Rhulani and Stone, every given chance, they have no idea how long they are to keep me here.

I attempt the Downward-Facing Dog pose and decide to finish my workout with it. I grab the mat and throw it behind the door before heading to the bathroom. Staring at myself on the mirror, I take a deep sigh. I have lost so much weight and I know it is because of the appetite I don't have. The fridge is fully stocked and there is a lady who comes by to clean up the apartment and stock the fridge with more food.

“Is this some sort of a vacation?” I had asked Rhulani one afternoon when he ordered pizza and ice cream for me. All he did was smile and apologise for keeping me here against my will.

I fill the bath tub with cold water and sink myself in it. I cannot wait for Rhulani to show up so that he could let me speak to my sister – he couldn’t make it yesterday so I believe he will show up today. I have made my sister believe that I am travelling with my boyfriend while he attends to business. It took me long for my voice to stop breaking when I talk to her. My voice would tremble when the gun was pointed to my face. But since Stone told me that I won’t be getting a phone call hour if I continue crying, I had no choice but to act strong even when my sister and nephew tell me they miss me.

After a very long bath, I get into my everyday clothes — leggings and a t-shirt — before heading to the living area where Stone is standing in the middle of the room, his hands on his waist as he watches the television. He hears my movements and he slowly turns to meet me. He doesn’t say much. He never engages with me unless he has an order for me. I walk past the living area to the dining table to plug my laptop. Stone turns back to the television. I don’t know why he feels a need to be in this place – it is not like I have a code to leave the apartment. The windows are unreachable and there is no way out for me. The girl on the television is seated in a dark room where you cannot see her face. Another one of Ndumiso Gumede’s discussions.

“Yes... we were gang raped by their workers before they trafficked us out of our country,” the girl says. She sounds very young and it breaks my heart that she had to go through this. I swallow hard, realizing that I am in an apartment with a man who has a gun. A man I am scared off. A man who is fully aware that I am frightened by him. Anything could happen. Anything could.

As I decide to make my way back to ‘my’ room, I hear the lock turn. I am relieved when Rhulani walks into the door. Unlike the other days, he doesn’t have coffee in his hand and he looks pissed.

“Your sister reported you missing,” he announces.

“Oh!” I manage to say. “How did she find out?”

“Where is your phone?” he asks. I head to where I threw my phone at. It is useless without network. The only time I get to use it is when Rhulani is around because he knows how to disable his settings. Returning from the bedroom, I hand him the phone which he unlocks and hands to me. Stone is by his side when I am dialing my sister’s number. Sometimes I get the urge to screen for help but when Stone is around, all I do is co-operate. Rhulani pulls his phone and wears his earbuds just when the phone starts ringing. It doesn’t take her long to answer. Even when Rhulani always tells him that it is not necessary, Stone has his gun on my face. By the way, the gun is cocked.

“Nonku?”

“Hey...” I try to be nonchalant.

“Dont hey me. Where the hell are you?” She asks.

“I told you that I am travelling with my boyfriend.”

“Which boyfriend? The karate guy?”

“Yeah!”

“Right! Nonku, what the hell is going on?” Phelele asks. I dart my eyes to Rhulani who is writing something on a piece of paper. Afterwards he hands the paper to me.

‘Ask her why she reported you missing.’

“Sis, I got a call from some police. Did you report me missing?” I ask.

“Yes! Because I know something is fishy. I forced my son to take me to that karate studio this morning. Guess who was there training some two boys?” I close my eyes and pinch the bridge of my nose. “If the karate guy is at the studio, how are you travelling with him?”

Rhulani passes a paper to me so I read the response.

“Well, okay you caught me. We came back during the week but I have been so busy to give you a call.”

“I don’t believe you,” she says.

Again, I receive my response from Rhulani.

“Okay... why don’t I come visit you...” I clear my throat before continuing reading, “...with him? He has to meet you guys anyway.”

I shake my head at Rhulani but he nods instead. I don’t want to do this. I shake my head at him again and this time Stone moves closer to me, taking all of my space.

For the first time, Rhulani does not stop him and I realise that he won't stop him unless I agree to play along. I don't even know what these guys are capable of.

"I want to see you tonight," Phelele says and Rhulani nods.

I sag my shoulders before saying, "Okay."

When I am done with the phone call, Rhulani disables my network and walks to the door.

"What now?" I call out to him.

"I'll get you something decent to wear for tonight. Kings is meeting your sister and you are going to show her how crazy she is for filing for missing persons," Rhulani says.

I cross my arms across my chest. I am too pissed at Kings to play along as a happy couple.

I feel sick in my stomach.

"Don't fucking try anything stupid when you get there," Stone reminds me of the gun he has in his hand.

My phone beeps, and this takes me by surprise because Rhulani disabled it. It is a text message from Kings.

'I'll pick you up at six.'

I resist the urge to swear at him and tell him where to get off.

I loathe him and nothing is going to change.

I loathe him and I have good reasons.

CHAPTER 32

Heart of STEEL (Unedited)

KINGS

‘I’ll pick you up at six.’ – Me.

After waiting for a response, which doesn’t come, I slide my phone back into my pocket and head back to the table.

“Are you alright?” Abigail, Theo’s woman, asks when I grab my seat. I nod at her while reaching for my drink. I was in a middle of our discussion when a call from Rhulani came in. In the morning, when I was having a training session with Mpho and Alu, I didn’t realise that the woman who walked into the karate studio was Nonku’s sister. It was Mpho who asked why Nonku’s nephew did not join us because he came by the studio. It was too late and the damage was already done.

“Back to my feedback,” I say while placing my glass of whiskey on the table. “I am sending my guys to bulldoze him into selling his company. He is cornered now and I am quite sure he is willing to sell it to anyone interested. He has more debts than investments. He is too dry, he cannot afford to save himself. So, once he puts that signature on that piece of paper, the baby is yours.”

“Is he going to know that this was our fault?” Theo asks. The man has been over the moon since receiving the news about the arrest. The work that he did, together with his woman, is quite impressing. He provided us with

all the information to expose the money laundering company and all Ndumiso Gumede's associates. I know, it took a very detailed private investigator to dig all that dirt and link it to all these powerful men. It is just unfortunate that he got injured while fighting these men and he won't live to witness that his investigation saved the population of this country. It is sad that his family went through the most because of the very same men. Abigail was telling me about the family therapy that they are attending and how it has helped them. The boys are doing great and I can confidently say, they are ready for what life is about to offer them. Well, karma is indeed a bitch.

"At the end of it all, he is going to know," I respond.
"Only when the company is in your names and all is done."

"So, if we are taking the company? What about the debt?" Abigail asks. "Are we even prepared to take over such a huge responsibility? Even if we don't have to pay the debt for Gumede Enterprise, are we going to manage such a huge building like that?"

I take a sip and rest both my elbows on the table, leaning to explain this to them: Remember the time Ndumiso's suppliers were not receiving the payments? It was us, redirecting the money to an untraceable digital account which only my company can access. Each time money was lost, it was kept in there. Once the company goes live, Rhulani and I will transfer it back to where it is supposed to go. My lawyer will make an offer to

purchase his existing assets and I'll hand everything to you including Gumede Enterprise building.

Theo and Abigail turns to face each other, as if communicating, before turning back to face me.

"This is huge," Theo says.

"Yep!"

I already advised them to get a team to work with once I handover everything to them and walk out of their lives like I was never part of it. Gumede Enterprise was making billions of rands and if they continue to render the same services, they can make the same. I have the whole operating system in the palm of my hands, so there is no way they are going to fail.

"What do we do now?" Abigail shrieks excitedly. She is indeed excited but I can also see panic in her eyes.

"Think of the company name, send it to my team and they'll handle everything for you," I say.

"AT Operations," Theo says while taking his woman's hand. "Abigail and Theodore Operations?"

"I like TA Operations more," Abigail responds with a sweet smile directed to him. Theo doesn't respond but leans closer to kiss her. I know how they feel for each other because I have experienced this kind of love. It is unfortunate that not all of us are capable of keeping it until the end of time.

"Is it going to be AT Operations or TA Operations?" I ask, breaking their kiss. They respond at the same time, and laugh when they both choose their preferred name. I

laugh, advising that they should make a poll for their sons to choose.

I take another hour taking them in on where to begin. Right now, the company is about to be declared insolvent but we won't need to go through that route when my team makes an unbelievable offer. Who wouldn't want someone else to buy a sinking company and save his ass? What makes me proud is making the mighty Gumede sell his company and receive his own money as payment. This is equivalent to him donating a multi-million company to his ex-wife and her lover. That is going to piss him off and I cannot wait to see his face when he learns the truth.

After the meeting, I head to the mall to grab a few cologne. Now that Gumede Enterprise closed its doors last week, I have so much time in my hands. It was about time. I have never spent so much time in one mission like I did on his. Once I see to it that Gumede rots in jail, I am flying out of the country just to clear my head and recollect myself. I need it!

Walking past Michael Kors, I notice a dress that catches my attention and I am tempted to walk into the store to have it packaged for Nonku. Next to it is a pair of gold sandals. When a sales lady notices me standing by the window, she gives me a smile and waves me in. I should be walking past but then I do drag my feet into the store.

"I like this for my... " I clear my throat, not knowing what to call her. "...just someone."

I give her the size for both items while pulling my card. Wherever Nonku is, I am certain that she hates me and doesn't consider me as her man. This kills me but it is how it should be.

NONKU

I have been having butterflies in my stomach since the minute I received a text message from Kings. It is only four thirty but I feel nervous. I am working on my laptop when a knock comes from the door before it opens. Rhulani walks into the room with a box in his hand.

“Thought you would be getting ready,” he says while walking towards me. He places the box on the table. I know it comes from Kings because I have received such a package from him before. I have no idea where he gets his packaging - they could be more expensive than the gift itself.

“I am ready to go,” I say.

Rhulani sighs at me. “Nonku, look... you have to put effort into this. You know your sister won't buy it if you go to your house looking like that.”

By 'looking like this' he means a long active vest and leggings.

“What if that is the plan,” I ask. What a way to discuss my freedom with my capturer.

“You have been too easy on her,” Stone comments from the couch the same minute Rhulani pulls a chair and takes a seat.

“Look... I need you to co-operate,” he says. “I don’t want my guys to hurt your sister and her son. We are very much aware that her husband is out of town and believe me, if you want to turn against us, these guys could retaliate. I don’t want that to happen.”

“Why? Why do you have to keep me here?”

“Because I have to keep a close eye until we are done with our mission. You know more than you are supposed to know and we can’t have you confide in anyone because any word that comes out of your mouth might destroy everything that Kings has been working on for all his life.”

“Maybe you should ask what happened to your friend, Nomah. Maybe that’ll put some sense into your head?” Stone jumps in. He always prefers to stay as cold hearted as he is.

“What happened to Nomah?” I ask, darting my eyes between Rhulani and Stone.

“You are going to be tempted to signal your sister but I would advise against it.”

Rhulani gets on his feet and taps on the wrapped box. “He will be picking you up at six.”

“What happened to Nomah?” I ask, my gaze following Rhulani as he walks to the door. He gives me a shrug and tells me to ask Stone. My heart drops into the pit of my stomach. When Rhulani walks out of the door, Stone clears his throat while getting on his feet. I know for sure that they wouldn’t kill me but that knowledge doesn’t give me confidence when I am left alone with Stone. It is as if he is fighting so hard to spare me. And for some reason, I don’t want to get on his wrong side. Without another word, I slowly close the laptop, pick the box and head to the bedroom. They know how to get to me. I cannot risk Phelele’s life, knowing that her husband is even out of the country. She lives in a secured estate but I believe Kings and his men can bypass the security. Opening the gift box, I find a casual brown dress, gold sandals and a small brown bag. I know for sure, I’ll never find another man who knows me too well like this one. This is exactly what I would pick for myself to a dinner with my sister. With a deepest sigh, I grab a seat in front of the beauty station and attempt to make-up my face with whatever products I could find in my toiletry bag. Afterwards, I comb my unruly hair and put it up in a pony tail. Putting on my dress, it is just slightly loose. He got the right size, like he always did when he was a perfect boyfriend, but now I have slightly lost my appetite and had been losing weight. A knock erupts on the bedroom door, before Stone tells me that it is time. I pick the bag and head outside the door. I almost lost a step when my eyes land on the man standing in front of me. I knew I was going to struggle to breath because he seems to takes up all the air. Kings is staring right at me

with his burning gaze. I tilt my chin up and stare back at him.

“Are you ready?” he coldly ask. He has never been this cold towards me before. All those times when I was falling in love, he was pretending to like me. He takes a few steps towards me and I manage to take just two backwards until Stone’s body prevents me from walking back into ‘my’ room. Kings stops in front of me and pulls a necklace from his pocket. He hands it to Stone who doesn’t ask before twirling me around and putting the necklace on my neck.

I am fuming!

“You’ll find me in the car,” Stone announces as he makes his way to the door.

Is Stone going?

The door closes behind Stone and I am left having a staring contest with a man who used turned my life upside down. I thought he was cold just a minute ago but right now, he looks like that man who use to hold me in his arms and promise me the future. He clears his throat and shows me the door.

This is going to be the longest evening ever.

The ride to my sister’s house is very quiet and awkward, with Stone irritating me with his instructions. Kings has been on his phone, avoiding me.

Works for me but I wonder how we are going to act lovey dovey in front of my sister.

Stone stops at the driveway and only now does Kings slide his phone in his pocket. He jumps out of the car and hurries to my side to open the door. He opens the door and puts up his hand so that I take it.

Like hell I'll take his hand!

I jump out and lead the way to the main door. I see the door open before we even reach it - Phelele is the one who gave us security access, so I am sure she has been waiting for us to arrive. One look at her and I want to cry so bad. Her eyes lands on mine and immediately, I feel so emotional.

"Hey sis..." I say, burying myself in her arms. She wraps her arms around me and I am attempted to let the tears flow.

"Are you okay?" she whispers.

"Yes!" I shriek, but the tears in my eyes might give this operation away. "I miss you guys."

Phelele lets go of me and focuses on Kings, who is walking towards us. I turn too, watching him take each step. His smile is wide as he stops in front of my sister.

"Phelele..." he sings with a charming smile. "I have heard a lot about you. It is so lovely to finally meet you."

Phelele puts out her hand to shake his hand. She is captured, and I don't blame her.

"Sorry for inviting you in such a short notice," Phelele says.

“Anything for my future sister-in-law,” Kings says. I want to roll my eyes so bad but thinking about the danger I might be putting her and her family in, I smile widely. But what the fuck, really?

“Please... come inside,” Phelele says, making her way for him and I to walk inside.

Her house is forever warm and before this whole mayhem, I used to wish to be like her. I wanted to have a warm home with someone who loved me. Well, not anymore.

She shows Kings the couch and thereafter drags me to the kitchen.

“Are you okay?” she asks, boring her eyes into mine.

“Yeah!” I attempt.

“Why did you lie to me?” she asks.

When I remember what could happen to her and her family, I pull a smile and give her an excuse why I lied. All this time I have something stuck in my throat because I want to cry so badly. I want to cry. I want to cry so bad.

I take it Kings is curious about the chat I am having, despite the neckpiece they force onto my neck, as he walks to where my sister and I are standing by the kitchen. Phelele walks to her pot, the same minute Kings stands beside me.

“Babe... I was...” Kings says, but he doesn’t get to finish his sentence as I bolt to the toilet which is just around the corner. It is the smell of the prawns and garlic that

sent me to the toilet. I don't know why but I vommit every little thing I ate since morning.

I like seafood!

Why is this happening now???

“Wait... are you pregnant?” Phelele asks, making her way inside the toilet.

“I have never been pregnant; how am I supposed to know?” I cry out before throwing my head back to the toilet bowl and throwing up nothing but air.

It takes a little while until I get on my feet and wash my mouth. Walking out of the room, I notice Kings standing not far from my sister.

“Are you pregnant?” he asks.

“No, I am not,” I say sharply, walking past them and making my way back to the kitchen.

Then it hit me. I lied to my doctor, telling her that I didn't have any unproductive sex while awaiting the contraceptive.

“You love seafood. Since when...” this is all I hear Phelele saying before I feel Kings arms around me.

Noooooo!

CHAPTER 33

Heart of STEEL! (unedited)

KINGS

Nonku's movement from the bed grabs my attention. I jump from the couch and hurry to where she is sleeping. Looking down at her, from the light illuminating from outside the window, I notice that she is still sleeping. It is just a little after midnight and she has been sleeping since the time she fainted. Luckily Phelele's neighbor is a doctor who was available to jog to the house to check up on her. I was ready to speed her off to the doctor but when she opened her eyes and complained about just the dizziness, I relaxed just a bit. When she refused to go to the hospital, Phelele ordered her to take a nap and I insisted to stay by her side. She has been taking that nap and I have been worried sick since then.

I pull the duvet to cover her upper body. I am tempted to wet her dry lips with mine. Before the doctor left the house, he ordered her to drink a lot of water since she looks dehydrated and he also advised her to eat some food. I feel guilty for all the weight she has lost. I am the cause of her losing her appetite and making her life a living hell.

Making my way back to the couch, I throw myself on it and sigh deeply, staring up to the ceiling. Even though the doctor cannot tell or confirm what Phelele suggested, I cannot ignore the possibility of the pregnancy.

"No... no... no..." Nonku mumbles on the bed. I hurry to her side and sit on the edge of the bed so that I could wake her up. It is as if she is fighting off someone.

“Nonku!” I whisper while gently shaking her.

She doesn't stop fighting back so my shake is no longer gentle. When her eyes fly open and find mine on her, she pushes me off with both her hands. I mean, I could stand here like a statue if I want, but I do take a few steps back to give her all the space she desires. I watch as she pants and sits up.

“Bad dream?” I ask, hoping that she answers me this time. Unless her sister is in the room, she doesn't open her mouth to talk to me.

She drops her feet to the mat and takes in a deep breath and gets on her feet. My eyes follow her as she crosses the room to get to the guest toilet. I grit my teeth when my fucking penis reacts to her bare thighs. Her sister has given a t-shirt to sleep in and seeing her in it is a torture to me. I switch the side lamp on and wait for her to return from the bathroom. She does walk out of the guest bathroom after a few minutes but instead of getting back to the bed, she heads for the door. I am on her heels without a word. Phelele's house is a mansion and it took me two trips to the kitchen to get the turns right. She is headed there and I am by her side.

I take the bar stool and watch her walk around her sister's kitchen, searching for food.

“You don't have to police me in my sister's house. There is no way I can leave my sister and nephew with you,” she spits out. I'll take all the punches – I deserve them all.

“How are you feeling?” I ask.

“It shouldn’t be any of your business,” she says, placing a bowl of corn flakes on the table. She drags her feet to the fridge and returns with a bottle of milk. I quietly watch her. Last night’s episode changes every fucking thing.

“Do you think you are pregnant?” I ask.

“Another thing that shouldn’t be your business.”

“It is my business because that baby you might be carrying is mine.”

“How sure are you?” she asks and only now does she lift her eyes to mine. She is fuming.

“You know very well that I am the father,” I spit out.

“I am not pregnant,” she says and reaches for a wine glass. I narrow my eyes at her when she picks a bottle of wine from the wine rack.

“You know you cannot drink that until you are sure that you are not pregnant,” I say but she doesn’t stop pulling the drawer and retrieving a wine opener. “Nonku!” I warn but she proceeds to open the wine. I get from my chair and step just a step to snatch the wine opener. She fights for it until I tightly grab her wrist, “Nonku, stop it, man!” With her left hand she pulls the drawer and returns with a chef knife. I am quick to grab the knife from her and drop it to the floor. When I hear the door open from somewhere in the house, I let go of her, quickly put the knife back in its drawer, pick Nonku up and settle her on the counter and get in between her legs. Staring up at her, I beg, “Please Nonku... don’t

make this difficult, please. I am fucking tired of this and believe me, I am not enjoying any of this.” Her chest is rising and falling.

“Nonku... is that you?” Phelele calls out.

“Yeah!” she responds with an almost breaking voice. She clears her throat before her sister walks into the kitchen while fastening her night gown.

“Oh...” Phelele shyly says when she notices me standing in between Nonku’s legs. My hands land on either side of Nonku’s waist. I cannot breathe as my fingers tighten on the t-shirt she is wearing. Phelele continues, “I thought I heard something.”

“We were just grabbing a midnight snack,” I respond with a smile.

“Are you feeling any better?” Phelele questions her sister.

“Yeah... I am better.”

“Do you want to sleep in my room? We need to catch up,” Phelele asks and I turn my burning gaze to Nonku. I watch as she licks her lips and contemplates on this.

“You don’t mind, right? You’ll have her in the morning.”

“Uhm...” I drop my eyes to my pants where there is a bulge. It is this position I am in. I need not to say anything as Phelele laughs shyly and tells me that she will wait for the morning to catch up with her sister. She waves at her little sister and turns on her heel. Only when we hear her door close do I take a step away from Nonku.

“I am so sorry,” I say before fixing my pants and giving my freaking penis some space to breathe. It is going to be a very long night since I cannot even take a cold shower to take care of it.

She quietly jumps to the floor and grabs her cereal. She walks back to the fridge and retrieves a bottle of wine.

Fuck me right now!

“Nonku...”

“You can kill me if you want,” she says while pulling the cock and taking a long swig from the bottle.

“Nonku, I want you to tell me if he is abusing you,” Phelele begs her sister and I swallow hard at that question. She and Nonku are seated on the patio, catching up. I had thought Nonku would leave her neckpiece but to my surprise, she has it on as she has breakfast with her sister. It is either she forgot to take it off or she wants us to listen in on her conversation with her sister. “Is he abusing you?” Nonku hasn’t said anything and this can be more alarming than words.

“He is not,” she finally responds.

“Then why do you look so unhappy?” Phelele asks. “I know you Nonku... you aren’t yourself.”

“I am not happy, Phelele,” Nonku says and this fucking gets to me. Nonku’s voice breaks when she says, “I fell

in love with him but he doesn't love me. It was all lies all along." My heart breaks into a million pieces when she starts crying.

"Did he say he doesn't love you? He looks at you like he loves you but then it is you I have been worried about. Are you sure you aren't stressed about something that is not there?"

"I just found out the truth..."

I swallow hard. She isn't making up these things. This is what she thinks of me. If only she knew.

"Sisi..." Phelele says and I take it she is giving her a hug. I listen in as she comforts her sister. It is after a very long time when Phelele asks, "What are you going to do?"

"I'll just... get the courage to break things with him."

"And if the baby is there?"

"I'll get rid of it, relocate and start over! "

"No, Nonku! Please think about it."

When we return to the safe house, I order Rhulani and Stone in while Nonku gets settled in her room. She has locked herself in the room since our arrival. He already knows about the pregnancy and I don't have to tell him that things have changed. I instruct Stone to take care of the new mission from my desk and request Rhulani to get me clothes and a workstation for the duration of a week or two weeks' time. I'll camp here while we finalise

the Gumede mission – all we need is that signature and everything can be done electronically.

“The pregnancy changes everything,” Rhulani mumbles while getting from his chair. The pregnancy changes everything.

It is at three thirty in the afternoon when I knock on Nonku’s door. Really, it is out of courtesy – I could kick the door open if I want. The door slowly opens and Nonku freezes when she notices me. She scans me from top to bottom, noticing that I have gotten rid of the suit. Her eyes idle on the bowl of creamy stir fry.

“Please eat something,” I say, handing her the bowl. She quietly takes it and thereafter closes the door.

Yep!

I was expecting that.

It is only in the evening when I knock on the door and push it open after she ignored me. Walking into the room, I find her sitting on the floor by the window. At least the bowl is empty but I would have loved it if she could eat some more.

“Nonku, can we talk?” I ask while sitting on the edge of the bed. I sigh before adding, “I thought I would be explaining everything in a weeks time but I don’t think it would be wise to wait until then.” Still, she hasn’t given me her attention. “Look... I have been a jerk for these past month. I am sorry.”

Silence!

“I have been a jerk so much that you hate me so much and want nothing to do with me.”

“So what changed?” Only now does she lift her eyes to me. “The possibility of my pregnancy?”

“Yes!”

“I am not pregnant.”

“You might be.”

“And I won’t be keeping it.”

“No, Nonku!” I whisper, defeated. “I cannot let you put your life in danger like that.”

“Says the man who had men kidnapped by a man with a gun.”

“I am sorry there wasn’t any”

“I’ll be very stupid to believe anything else that comes out of your mouth,” she spits.

“Trust my word. You are my weakness, Nonku. They had to take you away from me because you knew more than you were supposed to and for some reason, you were my weakness. They couldn’t allow me to sabotage the Gumedede mission.”

“Why was I the target? You knew who I was, didn’t you? You were using me to get little details for your mission, didn’t you?”

“No, I never used you in anyway.”

“You toyed with my feelings. Our relationship was lies. It was all lies. And you watched me made a fool of myself.

Kingston, Kingsley... whatever the fuck your name is... you toyed with my feelings. You lied about everything... everything! So what makes you think that I'll believe that you ever loved me?"

"What we had was real. I loved you and I still do."

"It was lies," she says and shakes her head. "I don't even know who you are."

"You can ask me anything you want to know," I beg.

"Do you kill people?" she shoots. I sigh, not wanting to confirm this incase it scares her away from me. "Do you kill people for a living?"

"Sometimes, yes," I say.

"Oh, my God," she mumbles while moving to the corner of the room, far away from me.

"Come on, I am not going to hurt you."

"Did you kill that man in your building before returning to the hotel to sleep with me?" she questions.

"Yes!"

"Was it just him?"

"No, I killed a few during our relationship."

"You are not even remorseful."

"They all deserved it."

Her chest is rising and falling now.

"What did you do to Nomah?"

“My guys took her in to question her about the things she knows. She had been sneaking behind my back and sold some information to my enemies. I don’t know where she is right now and I don’t care much.”

Had I stayed clear of women, I wouldn’t be in this dilemma.

“Are you going to let me go?” her voice is breaking when she asks this. I don’t know if she is worried about Nomah or if she is scared of me.

“Yes; after a week or so. Just waiting for the last detail to close off the mission.”

“Can I make a request?”

“Anything!”

“When I walk out of this place, I want you to stay away from me.”

“Anything but that. I can’t. I need to be by your side during the pregnancy and if I am in your life, your life will be in danger. I am going to need to protect you from my enemies. I need to protect you with my life. I am not afraid to die but I won’t let you die for my sins. And I am not going to allow myself, for whatever reason, to be a useless, pathetic and deadbeat father like my very own.”

CHAPTER 34

Heart of STEEL

KINGS (unedited)

It has been just a few days and the tension has not died out. Nonku is still pissed at me and to be honest, she has all the rights to be. The only thing that has improved is her appetite. I don't know if that has to do with me playing the chef or if she is feeling any better. I haven't pushed her into talking to the doctor and the pregnancy test that I left on the night stand stays untouched. I have no right to force her into doing any thing.

It is six o'clock now and I am tying my sneakers so that I could go out for a run. I leave the house around this time because it is the time that I know Nonku is up and there is movements in her room. Just like the past days, I softly knock on her door and slightly open the door.

"Would you like to join me for a walk?" I attempt, just like the past few days. Today she is seated on a yoga mat, dressed in just a long t-shirt and a pink biker tights. I expect her to ignore me, which is a norm but she clears her throat and shakes her head. "Well... should we..."

"I need to meet a client today at two o'clock," Nonku says.

"Yes... yes... definitely," I respond excitedly as if she has requested to make up with me.

"Thanks," she says before closing her eyes and getting into a prayer pose. I watch her for just a minute, admiring how peaceful she is at that pose. She has been peaceful recently and I hate that I have turned her into something that she is not. It is when she open her one eye that I realise that I have overstayed my visit. I give her a smile before closing the door behind me and

heading for the main one. Locking the door, I head for the gate to get to the running trails. The safe house is situated in a farm just outside Haarties. I actually love the surrounding and out of all that we own, I think this is my favourite. Just a year ago, my company bought this land in the middle of nowhere, and my teams are setting up a few more houses in this gated complex - to cater for the cases such as the one we are dealing with. We have a few outside of Gauteng and the reason for this expansion is due to the amount of danger we deal with on our daily lives. Some times my teams need to lay low just like I do some times.

The area is very small, so I am going to need to make a few rounds in order to get satisfied with my run. I sprint for a just a kilometre before I cover the small area. I make a few more rounds just to get my heart-beat ring in my ears. After an hour, I head back.

Getting the breakfast ready, I am excited about taking Nonku to her appointment with a client today. I am glad that for one, I did not orchestrate 'this' meeting. I might have put in a word or two to the clients that are interested in taking this adventure with her. I wish I could get her in my team, but chances are she wants nothing to do with me and my filthy business. She hasn't stopped making remarks and breaking my heart while at it. I take all the punches like a foolish man that I am but when she mentions how my lies about the death of 'my' brother are the reasons she sees me like an animal. I don't give a fuck about many things, but I do regret pulling that lie just to cover for my absence from work. I

had people mourn with me. She, Nonku, mourned with me and I remember how it brought back bad memories about her brother's death. It was her mentioning all these that I realise that I am an animal and even though I had to put the mission first, I should have listened to my assistant and not entertain my feelings with Nonku. That was all I needed to do - walk away from the relationship before it even began.

Nonku walks out of her room while I am busy smashing the avocados to make the guacamole for our breakfast tacos. My eyes follow her as she walks to the refrigerator. She quietly opens the fridge and pulls a bottle of water. I am tempted to make conversation but afraid to spoil her 'better' mood.

"I am making tacos for breakfast," I announce. "My nephews and nieces love them so much."

Nonku stops on her tracks and turns to me.

"Do those nephews and nieces exist?" she spits.

I slightly shake my head, begging for her to stop making me feel guilty for all this shit I have been doing.

"They do. Maybe I could take you to meet them?" I ask. I mean, she is stuck with me for a little while.

"No thanks," she mumbles.

"Food will be ready in ten."

"Need to get ready for my meeting," she says. I give her a nod. This has been the most she has engaged with me willingly.

As I finish setting the breakfast on the table, my phone beeps with a text from my assistant. This is the notification I have been waiting for.

‘It is done! G signed the papers.’ - Rhulani.

‘Get Theodore in. Hook him up with the teams. The takeover must be massive.’ - me.

‘Already on it.’ - Rhulani.

‘Well done! Let Lydia take over the acquisition. Your job is done.’ - Me.

‘Can I have my life back now?’ - Rhulani.

‘All of it. Take your woman on a vacation. Use my credit card but don’t you fucking over use it.’

‘I know how to manipulate the bank notification.’ - Rhulani. Another text message pings. ‘Thanks, I appreciate. She is going to forgive me for neglecting her this past months. How are things with you?’

‘Still pleading for forgiveness.’ - Me.

‘I’ll organised the black squad to be ready for your call. Should I get you an assistant?’ - Rhulani.

‘No! I’ll manage. Now, go! Before I change my mind.’ - Me.

‘Don’t call me!’ - Rhulani.

I put away my phone with a smirk, knowing that after Rhulani’s text message, he is going to go AWOL on me until he is ready to come back. He deserves all the time he needs off. If it wasn’t about the news about the

pregnancy, I would have been flying out to some island to unwind.

It didn't sit well with me that Nonku refused to eat my food but watching her from the corner of the room, I realise that she is panicking. It could be the nerves. The cup of tea which the barista placed in front of her remains untouched. This makes me feel just a little better. For the first time in like forever, I see her genuine smile as she stands on her feet and shake Jeremy Ngobeni's hand. He was the first man I approached about Nonku's practise. Jeremy has a few franchise and I did pull his hand to bring Nonku in his camp. I know I could easily pull some strings and have her return to Gumede Enterprise which will be now trading as TA Operations but I think it is best she starts her own empire. She is destined for better things.

I miss this side of Nonku. The bubbly and confident Nonku who made me fall in love with her. Today, that Nonku is out to play.

"Would you like a refill?" The barista asks. We are seated in a small coffee shop in Melrose Arch.

"Yes please. Black. No sugar."

"Of course," he says while taking my empty cup. As Nonku has her meeting, I am in communication with Stone. I sent him a few instructions a while ago and I am in need of an update. When he asks to text me after an hour or so, I place my phone on the table and watch Nonku. The Batista places a cup in front of her. Picking

the cup and taking it to my lips, I almost burn my lips when I notice Nonku's warm eyes on me. Right at that minute, Jeremy turns and watch over his shoulder. When his eyes lands on mine, he frowns just a little.

I could have gotten a better spot to sit. Taking a deep sigh, I get on my feet and drag them to their table.

"Hey man... I didn't know you were here," Jeremy says while shaking my hand.

"Just taking care of a few things while I wait for her."

"I was just telling her how much I trust your judgement. Thank you for recommending her. She'll fit in perfectly with the new franchise line."

"You won't regret it," I say with a smile. "Let me let you finish while I take care of some business."

"Yes! Don't let me keep you."

I give them a good thirty minutes before Jeremy waves at my table and step out of the coffee shop. I call the bill and settle it for both my table and Nonku's. Thereafter I join her in her table.

"How did it go?" I ask while pulling a chair.

"Is this your way of forcing me to talk to you? Bringing me clients?"

"Is it working?" I ask, attempting to make a puppy dog fail.

"No!"

“Well, if it would make you feel better, I got him way before all this mess. It just happened that he reached out now.” She nods at my response. “Are you ready to go?”

She shakes her head.

I relax. I wouldn't want to go back to jail too.

“Would you like to go shopping perhaps?” I ask.

“No,” she quietly says.

“A walk in a park?”

“Not with you.”

“I can get a bench and watch you while you walk,” I offer. She stares down at the dress she is wearing - a walk in a park wouldn't be a very good idea. I pull my phone and check on Stone and when he gives me a thumbs up, I jump on my feet and grab her laptop bag. She has no choice but to follow me to the car.

Driving in silence, I make a few turns in familiar streets until Nonku turns her gaze at me.

“Where are we going?” she asks. Stealing a glance at her, I notice her chest rising and falling.

“I am taking you home,” I respond. Stealing another gaze at her, I find both her hands on her chest and her eyes glossy with tears. A tear escape her eye and I am tempted to reach out to wipe it. “I am done with the Gumede mission. Well, the most important part.”

“I see,” she quietly says while wiping her tear away.

“I got Stone to sweep the place and make sure that it is safe. I’ll have him bring your stuff from the safe house.”

“Do I have my life back now?” I ask.

“Part of it.” I sigh. “Could you please take the pregnancy test so that I know what the results are? Like I said, if you are pregnant, I cannot walk away and by doing that, I put your life in danger... and...”

“I heard what you said.”

“So, can we stop by the pharmacy? If the test is negative, I’ll walk out of your life for your safety.” Well, I don’t really promise but knowing what is for the best and the fact that Nonku wants nothing to do with me, I might indeed stay away from her.

Her response, which is, “fine,” is very faint.

I do stop by the shopping centre not far away from her apartment. Walking side by side, I wish I could take her hand but I don’t. She picks two tests before we pay for them.

The tension between us is very thick. In her apartment, Nonku takes her walk around until she stops in her bedroom and takes a seat on the edge of the bed. The apartment is clean. Knowing my team, it always has been clean and well taken care of in her absence. I don’t have to say anything before she takes the two pregnancy tests and steps into her bathroom.

My heart is immediately on my throat. A baby will be an inconvenience and it will just keep Nonku tangled in my web. The only great thing about it is the fact that I’ll still

be part of her life. I thought I was but I am not ready to let her go, so that fact makes me relax a bit. If the results are negative, I trust Nonku to kick me out of her life for good and I'll give her just that because I love her that much.

I give her time but when I couldn't take it anymore, I walk to the bathroom.

"Nonku, are you alright?" I ask when I find her seated on the floor with both sticks in her hands.

"I guess I am stuck with killers and liars," she says, placing the sticks on the bath tub. I check them and notice the two lines on both of them.

"You are pregnant."

"Yay!" she dryly says while getting on her feet.

CHAPTER 35

Heart of STEEL.

NONKU

"Is this how it is going to work? Are you going to be following me around like this?" I ask Kings, who is standing by my bedroom door. I just woke up from a nap.

"Not really. Sorry, I just couldn't help myself," he says. Without another word, he turns back to the living room, leaving me to make up the bed.

I fasten my morning gown before opening the curtains to let the light in and the windows. Thereafter I stop by the bathroom for a very long refreshing bath. It has been a week and I am getting used to my new changes. I have been dreading going to the doctor, but before jumping out of bed, I made an appointment to see her on Tuesday – that's the closest date I could get. I am not really looking forward to the appointment but I am left with no choice. My sister yelled at me just last night, urging me to start taking care of myself and the baby.

After getting into one of the dresses that Kings bought me just a few days ago, I settle on my beauty station to put on make-up and style the wig I installed last night. I refused to go shopping but that did not stop him from passing by the mall and grabbing me a few items. I might be annoyed by his presence, but I am glad that he took matters into his own hands. I love the dresses he picked for me. Two of them are formal, just like the ones I used to wear to work. The other three are very casual. To be honest, there was no need to get these items but Kings being Kings, after I told him that I am not going to the malls because I have nothing to wear, he decided that buying me new clothes – which won't fit me very soon – is such a great idea.

It is nine thirty when I walk out to the living area, where I find Kings seated on the couch with his laptop on his lap. There is really no need for him to be here after telling me that he has personnel watching over me.

He lifts his eyes to me and I watch as his lips turn into a smile. He keeps it there for a few seconds before he clears his throat and asks, "Where are you going?"

"Meeting!"

"With?"

"A friend," I respond, heading to the kitchen for a glass of water. Kings is on his feet, making his way to where I am. I notice a plate on a table when the smell of bacon welcomes me into the kitchen.

"I made you breakfast when..."

"Thanks. I am headed out for breakfast. You can eat it."

Kings covers the plate without saying a word, and thereafter leans on the cupboard, watching me as I down my bottle of water.

"Are you ever going to forgive me?" he asks, crossing his arms across his chest. "I told you, I didn't mean to lie to you."

"Just that the mission was more important than my feelings, huh? You would rather hurt me than compromise the mission."

"Yes."

I scoff, shaking my head and making my way to the bedroom. I pick my handbag from my beauty station. I find Kings still rooted at the same spot.

"When am I getting my car back?" I ask.

"In a few days. They are shipping it this evening."

“Shipping?” I ask. I thought he promised me to buy another one because I have no idea where he took my car and what they did with it.

“Had to get it bulletproofed,” he says as if what he is telling me is not bizarre. I narrow my eyes at him and he shrugs and adds, “We didn’t have to but I would love to be on a safe side.”

I head for the door and Kings is instantly by my side. I know I don’t have to be a jerk by now but I just want him to leave me alone. I want to be alone but he doesn’t afford me that luxury. He leads the way to his car.

As he drives us to where I am meeting my friend, I keep my gaze on the road until my destination. When I reach for the door and I do the same, I turn to face him.

“Are you going to follow me everywhere?” I ask.

“I didn’t instruct my personnel to keep an eye so I’ll do it myself.”

“Is this...”

“Nonku!” he says sternly, gritting his teeth as if I have just pissed him off. It reminds me of that day when my heart was broken into pieces. The day I found out the truth. He takes a deep breath and shifts on his seat so that he could look deep into my eyes... and looking deep into my soul he does. “Things will get better when your car arrives. I’ll give you the space you deserve. All I need is to be part of that baby’s life; and I’ll repeat again: If I am part of your and the baby’s life, chances are that

you are not safe. And for that reason, I need to make sure that you are safe.”

“I don’t...”

“Nonku!” he sternly says again, and if he wasn’t a man I used to sleep with and shag every chance we got, I was going to be scared for my life. He quietly says, “

“I am not being stubborn. I just need space from you. I need to breathe but you are all over suffocating me. You piss me off, Kingsley and I need space to think. To breathe. And to just have my life back. But I can’t because you decided the best thing you could do is breathe down my neck. Why can’t you acknowledge that I am mad at you and I am hurt by what you did to me?” I yell, angrily because I am so furious at him expecting me to just move on with life like he didn’t just break my heart in peace. He even has the audacity to tell me that he would rather hurt me than compromise his mission.

“I told you, I acknowledge.”

“Then why don’t you leave me alone? Oh... you can’t leave because there are people with guns, ready to shoot me,” I yell but quickly recover. I cover the tear that just decided to escape my eye even though I am not crying. I swallow hard and calmly say, “I regret ever meeting you.”

Kings stares at me for a very long while without blinking.

“Fine!” he mumbles.

“Fine, what?”

“Let’s go in. While you have a meeting, I’ll work something out. I’ll stay out of your life.”

“Thank you!”

Vule squeezes me into a very long hug. I am not going to cry about everything, I already did last week in my sister’s house.

“Now I know. Money changes people,” Vule says as she takes her seat.

“What do you mean?” I say, doing the same and picking the menu from the table.

“Who goes on vacation for two months? Only the rich do that,” she says, taking off her sunglasses.

“Oh! Well!” I shrug, not knowing where to start. There is a lot I need to fill her in. The last time we chatted, I was forced to type an SMS to her, telling her that Kings and I are flying out of the country for a few weeks and I will be unreachable. This was done with a gun pointed to my face. When I remember Stone’s scary face, I scan the restaurant for Kings. We parted ways when I left the car but I am certain that he is here watching me. My eyes stop at the table at the corner of the room. He has a table for one and the waitress he is chatting to is giggling. I wonder how he can flirt and still keep an eye on me since I am a target to his enemy. It is as if my thoughts summoned him as he lifts his eyes to mine. I swift mine to Vule who is asking about my vacation and what I got up to.

“Do you know what you are going to order?” I ask, picking up the menu.

“Yes. I feel like our favorite protein bowl.”

“I’ll go for a mayo sandwich.”

“Are you sure? Since when do you like chicken mayo?” she asks.

“Just craving for it now. I am pregnant,” I throw a bomb and watch my friend as she almost chokes on her food. While she tries to recover, I dart my eyes to Kings, who is scanning the room from where he is seated at the corner. He has his back to the wall and his eyes are searching. Before they land on mine, I shift them to my friend.

“That is great news, right?”

“Not really. Kings and I are done. Our relationship is over,” I announce.

“What happened?” she asks, a frown pasted on her face. As I lean closer, ready to offload on my friend, I take a minute to acknowledge that it was indeed going to be difficult to keep the secret about Kings’ mission. Vule and I share every little detail about our lives, so keeping it to myself was going to be hard.

Two cups later and our plates empty, I have offloaded to my friend about everything except the kidnapping and that Kings is a professional sniper. For some reason, I don’t want to get Kings in trouble.

“I wish I had something wise to advise you,” Vule says. I can’t help myself but my eyes roam the room for Kings.

When I find him watching me, I watch him back. His gaze is hypnotic. My friend clears her throat, pulling me from my thoughts. “You didn’t tell me he was here.” I shift my gaze to my friend, who is looking over her shoulder. When she returns her gaze at me, she is almost blushing. “I forgot you told me that he is too handsome. Jeeez!”

He is dressed in a black t-shirt and black jeans – as always. But it is the way he trims his hair and a beard, and ... it is his presence that makes every girl melt for him. If only they knew that he kills human beings for a living.

“But with time... you’ll forgive him, right? I mean...”

I feel very cornered by her question. Also, I don’t have an answer to that question.

“Listen, I am getting a lady called Julie – she will introduce herself when she is settled. She is moving into an apartment just down the corridor. She’ll drive you around until your car is back. If you feel unsafe, don’t hesitate to knock on her door,” Kings says while picking his belongings from the table. I wonder how long they plan to surround me with body guards because nine months is a very long time. “Her number is saved on your phone.” I fold my arms to my chest, fuming that he still has control over my phone. He sighs deeply before

saying, “I guess I’ll see you during the doctor’s appointment next week.”

“How did you ...” I don’t even bother finishing my question.

“I have a team, Nonku. But I promise you, they only give me the information I need. I won’t invade your privacy.”

“You already are.”

“You know what I mean,” he growls. He walks to the door and opens it. I watch as he turns to face me. I wait for his parting words and they do not come. Instead, he reaches for the knob and closes the door.

As promised, my car arrived on Tuesday morning, just two hours before the doctor’s appointment. A guy called me, telling me that he is parked outside. For the first time in ages, I smile genuinely. My car is back. It is the same colour and the same make but brand new. The gentleman steps out of the car and hands two sets of keys. I wait for him to make me sign somewhere but he tells me that all is taken care of and is fine.

My appointment is at eleven thirty, and thereafter I am going to pay a client a visit to go over the numbers I pulled up from their financial statement and needs clarification, so at ten thirty I am heading out to my doctor’s appointment. Stepping into the reception, my heart skips a beat when I notice Kings seated at the

corner of the room. I didn't think he was going to show up. Clearing my throat, I take a few steps to the receptionist who asks me to wait a few minutes while the doctor finishes with the other client. I take the first seat I find and find on the news channel which is playing on the television. Noticing the headlines, I know that Kings is the reasons we are not watching Mzansi With channel or some old SABC sitcom. My brows shoot to the roof when the presenter indicates that a company called TA Operations is taking over from Gumede Enterprise and the owner of this company belongs to Ndumiso Gumede's ex-wife. I look over my shoulder for Kings, who has his eyes glued on the television. It was all his doing, wasn't it.

Minutes later, when a young lady walks to the reception, the receptionist tells me that it is my turn. Kings also get on his feet and he is by my side before we head down the corridor.

"I am told you got your car," he says, placing his hand on the small of my back and slightly guiding me to the doctor's office.

"Yes!" I don't know why, my breath catches.

He opens the door and allows me in first. As embarrassing as it is, I relay my story for my doctor. I only feel a little better when she tells me that it does happen that one falls pregnant within 7 days of the implantation of the IUD. As she instructs me to lie on the bed so that she does the sonar scan, Kings is watching

me. She removes the IUD first and prep me for the scan to confirm the pregnancy.

“Dad, you can move closer and keep your eyes on the screen,” the doctor says. Kings doesn’t have to be told twice.

She does the sonar scan, pointing to show us where the baby is. I don’t see much but just a dot but when the doctor tells us to listen to the heart beat, I feel something strange in my heart.

“That’s a healthy heart beat, right?” Kings asks. I don’t have to turn to him to know that he is smiling.

“It is a very strong and healthy heart beat.”

It feels like we finished our consultation way too sooner. As I quietly walk beside Kings, my phone keeps vibrating in my handbag. At the reception, I put in my next appointment date and walk outside, still Kings is beside me. It is only when we reach my car that he says, “I guess I’ll be seeing you on our next appointment.” In six weeks. I nod at him while pulling my phone which hasn’t stopped vibrating. It is as if he wants to say something, but doesn’t. He pulls me closer and drop a kiss on my forehead before bidding me goodbye and walking away from me. I jump into my car, and check the Whatsapp message from my finance team from Gumede Enterprise. They didn’t remove me from the group when I got fired and I had muted the group. I take it the settings were changed when Rhulani had my phone. I scroll up to where the chats began, scanning for interesting facts.

‘Guys, did you also get an email from TA Operations? I was offered my job back.’ - one colleague. I scroll down, reading as the other colleagues send crying and dancing and happy emojis, confirming that they got their jobs back.

Lifting my eyes to where Kings was headed, I notice his car driving away from the parking lot. I return my focus to the chats.

‘Is this a scam?’ - Fifi asks.

‘No. I met with the new management yesterday. It is true. Everyone who worked at Gumede Enterprise got their jobs back.’ - Ephraim.

CHAPTER 36

Heart of STEEL

KINGS (unedited)

Driving from the practice, I force myself not to watch Nonku from my rear view mirror. I have never had to deal with a stubborn and strong headed woman like Nonkuleko. Shaking my head, I turn into the road and speed off to my apartment. Since we closed off the Gumede mission, I have no idea what to do with my life. Before, way back, before Nonku came into my life, I would have partied my ass off at the club and hook up with a few willing women. Now, just the thought of that makes me feel sick.

She has said it, she regrets ever meeting me but here I am holding on the last thread of hope. Hoping that she changes her mind some day and allow me to be in her life. I am not the forcing type and it pisses me off that I want to force myself back into her life. I could if I want to. She is mine at the end of the day. But I want her to want to be with me.

Fuck! I am confused. The thing is, I don't know what to do with all these feelings. One minute I want her to stay away from me because I am bad news. And the next I want her to run to my arms. This is new to me. I could lie to myself and make an excuse about the baby – it is more than that.

Ah! The baby!

I stop at the red lights and tighten my hands around the steering wheel. I am fucking going to be a father. I knew of the possibility of the pregnancy when we were in Nonku's sister's house. A few days ago when she took the test, that possibility became reality. But today, now, when I heard that heart beat? Man, I have never felt anything like that. For the first time in my entire life, I feel bad for being the reason to stop people's hearts from beating.

The lights change to green and I shift my mind back to the road. My phone rings just when I start the car.

“Yes!” I answer, scanning the screen for the name of the caller. Theodore Masindi!

“Hey man, how are you?” he says. I don't know him but I can tell that he is in a great mood.

“I should be asking you. I was watching the news.”

“The social media is buzzing. It is crazy man.”

“My mission is done. Go and enjoy!”

“The reason for my call,” he says.

“Yeah?”

“My wife just instructed me to send you an invitation for the celebratory dinner on Saturday. You and your woman.”

“It is not necessary.”

“It would be an honour! Molapo is coming through as well. This will mean a lot for my family.”

Ah!

Fuck!

I am starting to be soft!

“Send me the details.”

“Thanks. I really appreciate.”

The minute he hangs up, the text message comes in. With my eyes on the road, I reach for the phone and open it. Scanning the invitation, it is not just a mere dinner invitation. It is more serious and formal than I thought. Placing my phone back on the passenger seat, I try to think of someone I can tag along with to this. The last thing I want is to find myself miserable. I don't do well in small groups. I want to hide in the shadows. I want to blend with the darkness.

At my apartment, I plug my phone and watch to the charging station, switch the music on so that I could continue packing away my apartment. I was not ready to move, but with all the security breach that has been happening here, I am best moved somewhere else. I didn't want to purchase a house, but I had vowed that if I ever move out of this apartment, I'll be moving to a house. And moving to a new house is Hyde Park is what I am doing. I have been in communication with a realtor for quite some time and when she finally found a three bedroom house with a pool, a study and a massive man cave in the basement, I didn't think twice. It is rare to find a new house with a basement. When I went to view the house, I was ready to move in. The house is not small and it is also not too big for a bachelor.

Change is good, right? Change is good but I am excited about this one. I feel like if I move out of this place, and have someone rent it out, they'll be invading our space. By our, I mean Nonku and I. we might not have dated for too long but we created memories in this apartment. We shared good meals and I had the best sex of my life in here. Our connection was fucking out of this world and I don't think I am ready to let it go. But then, for how long am I going to hold on?

Taking in a very deep breath, I shove all my thoughts at the back of my head and start packing my black mugs and saucers into a box.

I hate how Nonku invades my mind like this. I am supposed to be picking up Fatima for tonight dinner. A friend of mine organized her to be my date. You'll be shocked how many businesses are out there. My friend owns a Rent-A-Date company, for miserable human beings like me and according to a kind of set up I am going to, he suggested her. I just need someone to keep me company but that someone needs to be able to hold up a conversation on her own. She must be smart and beautiful. It is now that I am parked outside Fatima's appointment that I don't feel like taking her with me to flash smiles to people. But then again, I know the round table invitation are best when you have a date by your side.

I pull my phone and text Julie. When she confirms that Nonku is home, I send Fatima a text message cancelling our date. This should be a win-win for her. She doesn't have to dish out fake smiles to anyone and she'll still get paid.

I drive to Nonku's apartment without calling her, because if I do, she might discourage me. Knocking on her door, I slide both my hands in my pockets. I notice the shadow on the peep hole, and wait for her to decide to either ignore me or open the door for me.

I wait! And the door opens slowly, revealing the most fucking beautiful woman I have ever met in my fucking entire life. She is dressed in an oversize t-shirt and bum shorts but damn, she is gorgeous.

“Kings?” she asks, swaying her heads to both sides to check if I am here alone. This is the softest she has been since our fall out.

“What are you up to??” I ask.

“Ahh... working?”

“It is a Saturday, 16h20.”

“Just catching up on my work.” I am happy that she is back on her feet.

“Don’t you want to take a break for three hours or so? I am invited to a client’s celebratory dinner and I don’t want to go on my own. I swear I won’t piss you off.”

She swallows hard and stares at me for a little while before she says, “I don’t have anything to wear.”

I smile.

Isn’t this her everyday language? If it wasn’t that we are pressed for time, I was going to buy her something to wear. She is the only woman I don’t mind spending on and if clothes is what she needs to me to buy her every day, I would do it in a heartbeat.

“I can pick a dress for you,” I say. She lets go of the door, making room for me to walk in. I take the knob while she makes her way inside. Closing the door behind me, I take in her space. It was during her visits where I felt that my apartment was a home and not some showroom. Her living area is filled with papers and books that she is working on and a laptop is on top of the couch. Her coffee table has two empty glasses and a plate.

“Excuse my mess, I have been buried in my work. I have a deadline for a financial report next week,” she says, making her way to her bedroom. She is warm and welcoming and I am starting to think that the little break was worth it. Or I am grateful for whatever happened between our doctor’s appointment and now.

While she darts to her bathroom, I turn to her closet to pick something for her to wear. There is one dress I like when I did my last shopping, so I pull it from the closet and lay it on the bed. Next, I pick a pair of nude sandals from her shoe rack. Making my way to where the bed is, I stop on my tracks when I notice a print out of the sonar scan. It is not the scan that caught my attention because the doctor emailed it to the both of us; it is the frame and the words written on the corner.

‘My first and only love.’

I run my thumb on the words. I smile. I might not be her first and love, but my baby is. That is good enough for me. And to think she once mentioned not wanting anything to do with this pregnancy, this warms my heart.

Not wanting to piss her off, I don’t pick her underwear and bra like I used to when we were together. Instead, I make my way back to the living room to wait for her.

This is Nonku we are talking about – she makes me wait for an hour before walking out of her bedroom looking bedazzling. I don’t know she transforms herself but she looks very beautiful. When she notices me scanning the different dress she is wearing, she says, “The other one is starting to be tight around the waist.”

Fuck!

Why are we separated? I want to pull her closer and wrap my arms around her waist to feel the changes she is talking about.

“You look very beautiful,” I compliment while getting up from the couch. I reach for her clutch bag and lead the way out.

Our drive is silent with the music playing softly. I promised not to piss her off, so I don't ask her questions such as: How have you been? Or how is the baby? Or was I never your first and only love?

On the other hand, she is quiet, scrolling through her phone. It is only when the navigator loudly announces our arrival that she slides her phone into the clutch bag and asks, “What do I need to know about the hosts?”

Parking the car in an empty space, I say, “Their names are Theodore and Abigail Masindi.”

“Oh!” she mumbles.

She probably knows the names very well. The couple have been trending since it was announced that they bought Gumedede Enterprise. The country did put two and two together.

I am the one to jump out first before I head to her door to open for her. She doesn't allow me to take her hand but that doesn't bother me. She has already done more than enough to be here. We are late; I can tell by the number

of cars on the drive way. They moved into a huge plot in Hartees and their home looks like a mansion.

As we were making our way to the main door, Theo notices us from the huge window just by the door. He excuses himself before rushing to the door.

“Hey, you made it,” he says while shaking my hand.

“Could miss it for the world,” I respond. He shakes Nonku’s hand while his wife makes her way to where we are standing. She is also a very beautiful woman with a warmest smile. As we step inside, Mpho and Aluwani are charging towards us.

“Careful now,” Abigail warns as they stop in front of us.

“Good evening, Sir,” Mpho greets, followed by his brother.

“They have been asking about the bootcamp,” Theo says as we walk further in.

“Alu is coming and I also invited my two friends and....”

“Of course,” I nod, not in the mood to correct them. I host teenagers, not a tiny kids who would cry on me.

Molapo notices me and he places his drink on the table and make his way to us.

“The man of the moment,” he says, pulling me for a ‘bro’ hug.

“I am not the...” I try to respond.

“We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you,” Abigail says. It is when I look into her eyes that I notice the spark. She is grateful and that spark in her eyes turn into tears

which cascade down her cheeks without a warning. She quietly cleans the tears with both her hand and shoots us a smile before she continues, “Oh my God...don’t mind me. These pregnancy hormones will be the end of me.”

“It’s okay.”

“Please get comfortable, dinner will be ready in few minutes,” Theo says while taking his woman’s hand. I don’t know what propels me but I take Nonku’s hand in mine. It is soft and warm and I cannot help but turn to steal a glance at her. I find her eyes twinkling.

“We need to talk,” Mr Mopalo says.

“Give me a minute,” I say, turning Nonku to face me.

“Are you okay?”

“Yea!”

I scan the room, and she does the same. Apart from Theo and Abigail, is just four other women and three gentlemen. They are seated on a huge couch by the fire place.

“Can I introduce you to them before I have a word with Mr Molapo?” I ask.

“No! I’ll be fine,” she says. I let go of her hand and watch as she walks to where the guests are. I watch as she picks a glass of juice. She waves a little before taking an empty seat.

I watch her.

I watch her some more as she listens in to the lady who is standing with a wine glass in hand. Everyone is laughing but you would swear she is spitting venom.

“Where are the boys?” the lady asks and one of the guests points at the children who are playing outside at the patio. Thereafter she continues, “Well, I respect Theo neh... but allow me to bring that dog’s name in this house; Ndumiso deserves everything and more....” The rest of her statement is faint as Molepo clears his throat. I turn to him and follow him to the empty dining room.

“I never thought I’d live to see the day you fall in love,” he starts.

“It shows?” I ask and he laughs loudly, some of the guests turn to face us.

I nod my head, surrendering to the giggle.

I accept defeat when it comes to Nonku!

Chapter 37

Heart of STEEL!

Nonku!

It is the laughter from across the room that grabs our attention. As everyone turns to watch Kings and the old gentleman he is standing with, I do the same. Our eyes lock and a smile forms on his face as if he wants to laugh at the joke shared. Kings is handsome and one thing that I am sure about is that he is going to give me a beautiful baby. Unfortunately, that is the only great

thing that happened from my short-lived relationship with him.

“Wait... who is that?” the lady who was busy talking asks.

“Kings!” the host, Abigail says.

“Theee Kings? The private investigator guy?” the lady asks.

“It is!”

“Kings... I am sorry to disturb... but may you kindly join us for a toast,” she calls out to Kings and the old gentleman.

As Kings makes his way here, Abigail leans closer and apologizes on behalf of Phindile, her friend. I give her a small nod but in all honesty I am unbothered. It isn't like Kings is my husband. I thought he would go walk to the centre where Phindile is but he stops just beside the couch I am seated on. His hand lands on my shoulder.

“I personally wanted to thank you for the great job you did,” Phindile says.

“Uhm... what job?” he asks.

“I couldn't keep it to myself after you closed off the mission. I told them,” Abigail says from her seat.

“This is the reason I also kept it from her until the last stages,” Abby's husband says, taking a seat next to his wife.

“So... you went to Gumedde Enterprise for all these months? Where you not scared of being caught.”

“I got caught but luckily my cover wasn’t blown.”

Phindile threw in question after question and even if Kings wanted to keep things to himself, he didn’t have a choice.

“Oh, I have a job for you,” Phindile says.

“I’ll give you some from my team to handle it.”

“No! I want you in the field Mr Kings. I want my mission to be executed the same way.”

“Unfortunately I don’t work in the field.”

“And this one?”

“It was a favour. And I wanted to send that man to jail myself,” he says. Thereafter he asks to be excused so that he finishes his chit chat with the old man, who I have figured is Mr Molapo. He leaves Phindile continuing talking about how sick of a man Abby's ex is. Sitting here, and listening in, I have realized that this is the first time the circle is meeting after the arrest, so they really have a lot to unpack. And the more I listen in, the more the story is interesting.

“Yoh, Phindile has us entertained. I am sorry I didn’t introduce myself. I am Poppy, Abigail’s sister,” one lady sitting next to me says.

“I am the one who should apologise,” I whisper back. “I am Nonkululeko.” She shakes my hand, and asks if I am one of Abigail’s friends.

“No. I am just here accompanying Kings.”

“Oh, don’t mind us... we are in a dark celebration. Abigail’s husband was an ass, so now he is arrested,” she says.

“I know him. I used to work at Gumede Enterprise.” The minute I say this, all the attention turns to me. Phindile asks how he was with his employees. I tell her that he was a shitty manager who got me fired because I couldn’t come up with a solution to his problem. Everyone is happy to throw in an insult or two. I also get a chance to ask Abigail if it was true that he bought a bakery for his side chick.

“He did, actually. It had always been my dream to open one. But he opened one for his mistress and he didn’t have the audacity to change the name,” she responds, also adding how he left her in the house while he went to the launch, posing for pictures with his side chick. I figured he wanted her to find out, I mean while would he even attend the launch. Poppy also adds that she is the one who brought the information to light when she saw the article on the newspaper.

Abigail sighs deeply before adding, “I am glad it happened that way though. Because the bakery was part of money laundering.”

“Imagine, who would have thought that Ndumiso would be part of these dark men who kidnap woman and use them as sex slaves? Fine, he never loved my friend and he was a selfish bastard.... But money laundering and sex slaves?” Phindile comments.

“Yazi sisi... we truly appreciate your man,” Poppy says with a very sweet voice. I look over my shoulder, trying to locate Kings who is seated in the dining room with the old man. I wanted to correct Poppy but then her eyes start filling up with tears. “My nephew has suffered in that man’s hands. If it wasn’t for Kings’ therapy, I don’t know what would have happened to him after he pointed that kid with the gun and exposed him to all the danger.”

The more everyone throws in their words, the more I realise how much of a demon my ex-boss was. He wasn’t just a selfish boss, who cared about making millions, he was an animal.

The chef informs Abigail that supper is ready outside. As everyone is making their way outside, Kings is by my side, taking my hand in his.

“Are you having fun?” he whispers. “I am sorry for disappearing. Molapo needed my advice.”

“I am alright.”

At the dinner table, he pulls my chair and watches me settle on it before he takes a chair beside me. As we dig in the starters, Phindile asks her friend if she is going to run the new empire in town – TA Operations. I found it cute when Abigail explains that ‘TA’ is hers and her husband’s initials. I think deep down inside, I am a romantic and things like this make me happy.

“Nope. I am going to leave it to my husband. I am going to expand the bakery I had opened in Bloemfontein. I am going to take it international.”

“Yes, girl!” Poppy snaps her fingers as her sister shares with us that she approached a well-known retail store and her products are going to be sold there.

“I love baking with all of my life... so Theo and the boys will take care of the big company,” she adds.

Kings keeps stealing glances at me and smiling at me. I don't know why I am suddenly overwhelmed with all these feelings? It must be the pregnancy hormones. For some reason, I find my hand rubbing my belly which is not yet there and Kings drops his eyes there too. He gives me a smile before we focus on the conversations around the table.

“I heard TA Operations hired back the old employees from Gumede Enterprise,” I say, not wanting to be the only quiet one around the table.

“Yes, that was the plan all along,” Theo says. “Kings advise that we continue with the same machine as everything was perfect. Suppliers will be paid and all money lost will be repaid back.”

How did Kings do that? I turn to face him with a questioning look and he does explain what he and Rhulani were up to for several months. Every little thing makes sense and it makes so so so much sense. And the more they unpack the case, the more I feel like a fool for retaliating without knowing the truth. But then again, I didn't know what the truth was.

After a very delicious supper, the guys move to the bar while I join the ladies at the living room. The way Poppy and Abigail are together, they remind me of my own

sister. And Phindile reminds me of my very own Vule who would be delighted when my enemies suffer.

“You must marry that man already,” Phindile says to me. When I sway my eyes to her, she nods towards the corner of the room where the bar is set. I turn towards the direction, finding Kings staring at me. He stares at me quite a lot and I do not get to it. This time he is not concentrating on Theo, but he is lost in his world. When I return my gaze, Phindile adds, “It is always best to marry a man who is in love with you.”

I keep my response – it won’t kill to pretend that Kings and I are in good terms. I won’t be seeing these people after I walk out of this door.

“I totally agree,” Abby says with a smile.

I won’t lie, I had a great time at Abigail’s place the time we were there. When we parted ways, the girls invited me for a sleepover party and I promised to attend but it was all lies. I don’t plan to make new friends. Or truth be told, I don’t want to be friends with everyone who’ll make me fall in love with Kings again. I saw how perfect he was with the kids last night before they were summoned to bed. He walked outside and took a seat amongst them. We couldn’t hear what they were talking about since their party was on the patio, but I saw how the boys danced around him and showed him a few karate

moves or two. I watched him throw his head back and laughed. I saw how perfect he was. And I found myself falling for him all over again. How can I not when he looks at me the way he does?

Shaking my head, I get on my feet and head to the kitchen to refill my glass of water. I have just submitted a financial report to my client and I could use some time to watch a movie before Kings pick me up for the doctor's visit.

Trying to keep your heart from falling in love is the most difficult thing. I have to constantly remind myself that Kings is the reason I don't want to go downtown to have a mocktail in my favourite bar. He is the reason I prefer to stay in my apartment than shopping or dining with my friends because I am paranoid about the danger I might be exposing myself to. It has been a few weeks since that dinner but I haven't stepped outside for anything other than grocery shopping and meeting my clients. I have seen Kings only twice when he brought me some of his cooking. It was just an excuse to see me because it isn't like I cannot cook for myself.

My phone vibrates from the couch. The text message is from Kings, telling me that he cannot make it to pick me up for the doctor's visit. My mood instantly changed. I was looking forward to seeing him.

'I'll try my best to be there. I just won't make it to pick you up.' – Kings.

'No worries.'

For the past weeks, my heart is torn between giving us another chance and sticking to my decision. I am starting to believe that Kings does love me like he says he does but I cannot be in love with a man who is going to bring danger to our door. How can I live with myself knowing that I support a man who takes life? My brother was killed, and I swear to you I don't wish well to anyone who took his life. I pray for them to be tortured in hell.

My heart won't forgive.

And now, imagining that Kings would leave me sleeping at night to end someone's life? I'll never find peace. And I can't help but to overthink. Where is he? Why isn't he going to make it at 14:00 when he is supposed to pick me up? I don't want to live like this.

At 14:30, I pull up at the practice. I swear my heart skips a beat when I notice his BMW. I see him on the phone as I jump out of my car. When he notices me, he opens the doors, and hangs up the phone. He jogs a little to get to me. He greets before stepping beside me.

"I made it on time," he says breathlessly.

"Where were you? Killing one of your targets?" I ask quietly and he stops on his tracks for a second before picking up his pace. He walks quietly beside me. I shake my head and scoff. "You are not even going to deny it."

"There is nothing to deny."

"Oh my God," I whisper only to myself.

The doctor's visit was very unnecessary. It is still early to check the gender of the baby and my vitals are perfectly.

This was just another reminder that a human is growing in my tummy. Scary thing, I tell you.

On our way back to the parking lot, I pull my car keys but Kings snatch them before I could even unlock the door.

“I am driving you home,” he announces while opening the passenger door. Knowing Kings, I don’t bother fighting for my keys. I slide into the car seat.

We drive in silence, listening to the news. When the two presenters discuss the news about a businessman who was found dead in a hotel room in Johannesburg, I sway my eyes to Kings.

“What?” he asks with a shrug.

“Did you?”

“Am I going to be blamed for all the killings in Johannesburg?” he asks.

I shake my head, turning to stare out of the window. I thought we were going to my apartment but Kings tells me that he is taking us for lunch. I am grateful because I am a little hungry. At a café, he picks a table by the corner of the restaurant where he could have his back to the wall. It is his thing I guess. I pick the chicken dish I see on the wall while Kings go for a seafood basket.

“We need to talk,” Kings start when Claire, the waitress walks away from our table after dropping our drinks in front of us.

“Mhm..” I take another sip from my juice.

“Is there really no room for us?” he asks. I can see the pain in his eyes when he asks this.

“I cannot be with a man who decides which person to kill when he wakes up every day.”

“It is a job.”

“It is not right,” I hiss.

“Am I not enough for you?”

“Are you hearing yourself right now? How are you not enough when you are damn perfect for me, Kings?” I lose it. “How? I hate myself for falling for you each and every single day...”

“Then why can’t we be together.”

“Its your job I cannot take. I tried... not making a big deal about this but it really is a big deal for me. I can’t. I can’t be paranoid for the rest of my life. I rather die of heartache than going crazy over how safe you are wherever you are... or which enemy of yours is following you. I can’t.”

“What if I leave everything?” he asks.

“What?”

“If the problem is my job... what if I leave everything for us?” I shrug because I don’t know what to say. I didn’t expect this.... What he is saying... to be a solution.

“What if I drop my job... and focus on the club? It isn’t like I don’t have enough money to survive.” When I don’t say a word, he takes both my hands and stares deep

into my soul. “Tell me... what if I drop everything for you?”

“That’s too much.”

“I am not willing to let you go,” he says and waits. After a little while, he repeats. “I am not willing to let you go.”

Chapter 38

Heart of Steel! (Unedited)

Kings

It is a Thursday morning and I am picking the ingredients for my breakfast while waiting for Rhulani’s call. I pick the eggs, the tomatoes, onions, peppers and cheese for my omelette. Since moving into this house, I have been fucking lonely since I moved into this house. I thought it was small enough for me.

Luckily, before I start preparing the food, Rhulani tells me that he is at the gate. I grant him access and wait for him to show up at my door. I have installed all the security features I need for my house so with a press of my button on my wrist watch, I unlock the main door for him. Since my walls are glass, I see him as he makes his way to the door. He knocks just once and open the door.

“You made it,” I say when he walks in.

“Oh! I am in the right house,” he says.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“I was searching for a house with black walls,” he says. I shake my head at him. As he walks to the kitchen breakfast bar and grabs a chair, he scans my house.

“What the hell did you do to my boss?”

“He is about to have a baby,” I respond. I might not want to admit but the thought of having a baby is changing every little detail about my life. The choice of the decor I have in this house is nothing like me. The colourful details around my living area has nothing to do with me. It is the changes I am willing to make for my future family.

I break the eggs into a bowl after frying the veggies.

“How was your vacation,” I ask.

“Very short!”

I laugh.

“Very funny,” I say. This motherfucker have been gone for weeks and I didn’t for once bother him but now he is back to work the grounds.

“I need to take some off.”

“Taking that vacation to some secret island?” Rhulani asks.

“No!” I stop beating the eggs and lift my eyes to him. “I need to take some time off from my job.” Rhulani stares at me as if I have lost it. I tell him that I am considering hiring a PI to replace me so that I do not have to strain the team. While he still takes everything in, I turn to the stove to prepare the two omelette. When I am happy

with the end product, I turn back to him and find him staring at me.

“I am waiting for you to tell me that you are just kidding,” he says, arms folded to his chest. “I don’t understand.”

“You don’t have to understand.”

He laughs and shakes his head.

“This is because of Nonku!”

“Everything is. I told you everything changes now that there is a baby.”

He gives me a nod and opens his laptop while I return to finish up preparing the breakfast. He must not agree with me but he knows how important it is for me to be a good father. And if giving up this will make me a good father and partner, I am willing to give it up. If it works, I don’t mind shutting down the empire and turn into what we front about.

I place a plate in front of him and take the chair next to his after pouring us glasses of juice. We go through a list of people who can stand in for me until we find a permanent solution. I still need to convince Nonku to move in with me. But not wanting to come too strong, I choose not to suggest this before I am back at her good books.

After breakfast and our two long ass meeting, Rhulani heads to the office and I make my way to my basement. Even though I promise to let go of my job, there is no way I am getting rid of my guns. With my wrist watch, I command the assess to a secret door which leads to my

small security room. Unless I show, there is no way Nonku is going to find it out. And I don't plan for her to find out. I check up on the personnel watching over Nonku and I am told she is meeting a client in town. Knowing that I'll piss her off if I will just show up where she is, I send her an text to join me for supper at my house instead of meeting at the restaurant like we agreed on. She promised to come back to me about my request and I don't think I can wait a little longer.

Since she is in a meeting, I am patient enough to wait for her response even when it doesn't come for another hour.

While I wait, I prepare myself for the club. If I am spending the evening with Nonku, I could check on things during the day.

To be honest, I make decent money for my club and giving up on my other job won't put a single dent on my pocket. My security company can do without me. Nonku has turned me into a fucking pussy. When her text message chirps in, I almost throw the tablet that I was holding.

'Only if you can prepare beef rib for me. It and chips.' - Nonku.

'I'll make you a mean beef rib and chips. What time will you come through?' - me. I don't even care that I sound desperate right now.

‘Around 17:00 so that I make it home before 20:00 for my bedtime.’ - Nonku.

I want to tell her that she does not have to leave but again, I am aware of how pissed she could get and how she could change her mind so I send her a thumbs up, followed by, ‘17:00 it is. I’ll send the driver at 16:30.’

‘Fine!’

With that, my mood is at the roof. I manage to finish my tasks for the day at 14:00 and thereafter head to the shopping centre to grab a few groceries for the house and the ingredients for tonight’s dinner.

Picking the rack of giant beef rib from the freezer, I throw it into my trolley. I hate frozen food but we don’t have five hours to start the ribs from scratch. I pick a few sparkling juice and vegetables before heading home.

I am sipping one of my best red wines when the driver informs me that they are at the gate. I give him the access while I make my way to the door. Sliding my hand into my slacks, I watch as the black Mercedes Benz pulls up to my drive-way. I walk towards it and open the back passenger door for Nonku. She takes my hand and I help her out.

“Thank you! I’ll take it from here,” I inform my driver who gives me a nod and reverses out of the gate. I turn to Nonku, who taking in my home. “Proud of my pick?”

“It is impressive,” she admits.

I lead her to the house.

“Welcome to your future home,” I say. I did mention to her about the move but she refused to visit me the last time we went out. And wanting her to think deep about my request, I was patient to wait for today to show her.

As I thought, she stops at the new portrait collection and as expected, she turns to me. Right there in on my wall is her face. I had Ntsako paint it for me just a week ago.

“You can’t have it,” I joke, because I know I’d be pulling it off from the wall if she tells me that she wants it.

“It is...” she shrugs a shoulder, “... beautiful.”

“That’s an understatement and you know it.”

“Something like that.”

“Come, let me give you a tour,” I say, still not letting go of her hand. I start by pointing at the dining area, living room and kitchen which is just a huge open space. I lead her to our right where the study is.

“This is where we are going to set up our offices. I’ll take the corner on the left and you’ll take the window because for some reason, I think you’ll like watch the dogs playing outside with our children.”

She smiles. Just a very small smile but the fact is that, she smiled. I lead her out of the room towards the corridor that leads towards the bedroom. We stop at the pyjama lounge, which is a very huge area that could fit couches and a huge play area.

“I haven’t bought the furniture because I don’t trust myself not to buy black couches for the children,” I say

and this time she laughs. “You would know better how to decorate this space right here.”

“You really thought...”

“Shh!” I stop her from making her negative comments that would distract me from my tour. I lead her to the first room with just a bed and a huge portrait on the wall.

“This is the guest room for now. All bedrooms have en-suite bathroom.”

“Fancy,” she mumbles.

The next room has white walls but unlike the other one, it is empty.

“This is closer to our room so it’ll be the nursery,” I say. The room is huge but I bet we can play around with furniture.

The next stop is my bedroom. It still looks like how I had set up my sleeping space in my previous apartment.

“What happened to black linen?” she asks.

“I thought I could start getting use to some colour.” I swapped the black linen to white and to say that I cringe each time I go to bed, is an understatement. It is going to need some getting used to in my own house. She smiles and I think because we are next to the bed, my dick twitches. Not wanting to spoil our dinner plans, I keep it in my pants and show her the rest of the house except the basement where I haven’t set a man cave including an indoor bar.

I help her to the kitchen chair so that I pull the ribs from the oven and fry the chips she asked for.

“What would you like to drink?” I ask.

“Coke,” she says. Luckily I have a can in the refrigerator.

“How is the appetite?”

“Picking up.”

There is nothing romantic about ribs and chips. Setting up the table in the patio, I am even wondering if the candles are even necessary. The perfect jerk in me goes ahead and light the dinner candles.

“This is nice,” Nonku says as she grabs her seat. I take the one next to her. She doesn’t wait for me. She picks her fork and start picking chips, dips them in a bowl of tomato sauce and shove them into her mouth. When I stare, for my own reasons, she says, “I am too hungry.”

“Of course, dig in.”

I settle for more wine, not hungry to lick my fingers for all the barbecue sauce I tossed the ribs into before serving it.

“You are a snob,” Nonku says when she notices that I am not eating.

“I am not hungry.” That and the fact that I am fucking sweating here. I am anxious to find out what she has decided about us.

When she is about to finish her food, I bring her the malva pudding that I have warmed up for her. I don’t

want to judge her choice of food today, so I take my seat and our more wine into my glass.

“So, have you thought about my request for us to try again?” I ask the minute she wipes her hand with a wet towel. She doesn’t lift her eyes at me while she cleans her fingers.

“Yes!”

“Was your house tour a plan of getting me to soften up?”

“The tour was to show you about the plans I have for our home. If you don’t like it, we can get another one.”

“Where do they teach you to say the right words?”

“I prefer to say what is in my heart.” I wait for her to lock eyes with me.

“If you stop...”

“Done!” I say and she laughs. “I promise! It is a done deal.”

“Then we can give it a try.”

“You won’t regret this.”

After dinner and loading the dishwasher, Nonku and I settle on a couch for a movie. Now that we are back at it, I am allowed to annoy her. Just like now when I refused to drive her home at seven. I promised to do so after the movie though. On a sleeper side of the couch, I let her relax beside me and then pass her a bowl of pop corns.

I swear I was going to keep it in my pants tonight but her vanilla scent pulls me in. I don’t even ask for permission

before turning my face to hers. Her breath catches when I reach in for a kiss. When she closes her eyes before our mouth even touch, I know she is in for it. Like a hungry animal that I am, I get on my knees and position her under me. We don't break the kiss when I slide my hand under the dress she is wearing. It is trembling things that tells me she is as consumed as I am. She opens her legs widely, making room for my hand.

"Shit! You are wet," I murmur to her lips. She moans, lifting her lower body to my hand. I slide in my finger, followed by another and her gasps are loud. She pants for air when I start strolling, making sure that I don't hurt her. She pants some more, deepening the kiss. I thought I was the only starved one but my woman here is showing me otherwise. Not wanting to deprive her of what she is chasing after, I allow my fingers to do the fucking until her legs start trembling. While she contracts, I jump to my feet to get rid of my Jean. Parting her legs, Nonku lifts her heavy eye lids and stare up at me. I don't break our eye contact when I slide my dick in.

"You are fucking going nowhere tonight," I hiss.

CHAPTER 39

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU!

“Friend, what are you waiting for? When are you moving into this mansion?” Vule says while scanning the kitchen.

“No!”

“You still doubt your relationship with him, don’t you?” she asks.

“Not really. I am just not used to depending on a man. What if I lose myself?”

“What if you don’t?”

“I don’t want to be like my sister.”

“Your sister chose to be a homemaker. You have the biggest accounting firm in the country,” she says and I turn to her, before we both laugh hysterically. What an exaggeration. Yes my little company is growing and I do see a great future in it. It is just that it will take me many years to get to label it the biggest in the country.

“To be honest, I am just scared.”

“Scared of?”

“This big commitment.”

“But you are certain that he loves you, right?”

“With no doubt. I feel his love for me.”

“Then I don’t know why you are worried.”

I shrug a shoulder. He has asked me a few times to move in with him because it will make things easier but I have promised to think about it. It has been over two months and I am still thinking about it. Even though I

spend five days a week in this house, I don't want to let go of my apartment. Just like he turned his apartment into an AirBnB, he suggests that I rent out mine to make money from it. I am not ready to.

"Enough about my nice life problems," I say. Phelele always calls my problems nice because I am the only girl who would refuse to move in with a man who is madly in love with her. I don't know if I am stubborn or just a realist. These girls are forgetting that this man once did not want a child? He was also willing to leave me if I wasn't carrying one? What if this is not exactly where he wants to be? What if he gets bored of this life we are forced into? I don't doubt it when he tells me that he loves me. I just overthink and my concerns are valid. "Enough about my nice life problems. What is going on in your life?"

"If you weren't spending too much time with your hot sexy boyfriend, you would have known that I found a new man."

"Another one?"

"We are just getting to know each other," she says. The other boyfriend she was trying things with turned out to have an ego. "Not all women are as lucky as you."

It hits me! I am truly blessed to have a supporting boyfriend like Kings. Apart from our own issues, I am having the best pregnancy a woman can ever ask for.

When a knock comes from the main door, Vule turns to me.

“Someone will get it,” I say while turning to the ‘helper’. Well, she is more than just a helper though.

“You even have a helper?” Vule whispers. It is the first time Lihle, the helper, is showing face because she is out doing her security job. Whenever Kings leaves the house, she is around taking care of things. I wish I could tell my friend but it is too soon to reveal such information to her. Not when Kings prefer us to keep some things to us.

“Ma’am, the mobile spa is here. I told them to set up in the back yard,” she says with a nod. It could be an ordinary nod but to me it is more than that. She is letting me know that they are safe. Before booking them last night, she had to ensure that they are a genuine company. It is things like these I hate about living here. Kings’ paranoia with my safety gives me anxiety. And to think nothing has happened makes it even worse.

We allow them to set up, change into gowns and head for a full body massage.

“I can get used to this life,” Vule says.

“Oh please. We used to do this even when I was single.”

“But we had to pay for it ourselves.”

I laugh. Well, she might be right. Kings is one of those men who let you spend your money the way you want. The only time I get to spend money is when I have to order in something to eat or my apartment bills. Everything else is taken care of.

“Do you know the gender of the baby?” she asks.

“We are going to find out tomorrow.”

“I can’t believe you are having a baby,” Vule giggles. “A one night stand definitely worked for you.”

“Stop it!” I laugh. Come to think of it, Kings was indeed supposed to be a one night stand but here we are.

“Do you want a baby shower?”

One that’ll be surrounded by bodyguards?

“No.”

“Oh, your man will buy you a planet for just you and the baby,” she responds.

“Stop being silly.” But she is not right. Kings, the man who did not want a baby, can move mountains for us.

Kings normally leave the house after nine to take care of things in the club but today he is not going so that we could go to the doctor to check the sex of the baby and he also promised to take me shopping for the pyjama lounge which is still empty. Normally during the morning til late noon, I am working on my business which is really doing well. Kings promised me that he has nothing to do with the new clients that keep popping. It was just a week ago when I approached an old colleague of mine to partner with me when I need her services.

“Would you like something to eat before we leave?”

Kings asks from the kitchen. I just ate an hour ago but

because he lives to feed me, he wouldn't mind fixing me anything I want. If there is one thing I enjoy about staying in Kings' house is the food. My appetite is well fed. I am also well fed in all other ways.

"I'm fine. We can grab something after window shopping for the furniture."

"Window shopping? Don't you have an idea what you want to buy? I am window shopping."

"I have an idea but what if it is over the budget?"

"What budget?"

"Ah, I see what you are doing. But didn't you promise me to take care of the finances as the accountant?" I ask and he bites his lips before lifting both his hands. These are things we need to do to make us work. I don't plan to cut every cent he spends but I am not willing to spend over two hundred thousand for just one room.

We leave the house at nine o'clock and only see the doctor at ten thirty. Kings has my hand in his when I lie on the bed for the doctor to do the scan. We both smile when we hear the heartbeat and when the doctor tells us that the baby is very healthy and growing just perfectly. I keep my gaze to the screen, waiting to see what it is going to be. I wish for a girl and luckily Kings says he is in for anything. Because he is so obsessed with me, I think he is going to be more obsessed with our daughter. And he is going to be tougher with the boy.

"It is going to be a girl," the doctor says and I can't help but shriek happily. Kings squeezes my hand with a smile

while the doctor shows us why she is certain about the gender. I am happy. I truly am.

After the consultation, Kings takes us to the furniture shop but I don't find the type of couches I want so he promises to fly me to Cape Town to Vetsak's only showroom. Because I am in love with their bean bags and there is one couch I liked on their online store, I agree.

"You must really hate window shopping," I say.

"Can I take you to meet my mom and sisters?" he says instead and I stop on my tracks.

"What?"

"I told my mother about you and she would like to meet you."

"Uhm..." I swallow hard.

"We don't have to go if you are not ready. I just don't know when the right time is. I have never done this before."

"No...the thing is I just forgot that you are human and you have a family."

"What is that supposed to mean?" he laughs.

"You are always serious."

"No, I am not."

He opens the passenger door for me and helps into my car. Thereafter he takes the driver's seat. It is rare that I drive my car when he is around but sometimes, which is not often, he allows me to drive.

“So?” he asks while starting the engine. “Can I take you to meet my mother?”

“You were serious?”

“Nonku!” he says.

I shyly smile at him and tell him that it is fine-even though I am panicking.

“Can we buy her something that she likes?” I ask, not wanting to arrive empty handed.

“Which mother doesn’t like groceries?” I laugh at his question because come to think of it, most mothers would prefer to see their fridge packed with meat and food over a pair of new shoes.

We are on Grayston Drive, ready to take a ramp for N1 when a black van overtakes us and braces in front of us. Kings is fast to put on the dead brakes. He puts his left arm on my chest to limit me from jumping to the windscreen. My hands fly to my seat belt which I tighten my grip around it. The car comes to a halt and I take a minute to breathe.

“Shit!” Kings swears before two armed men jump out of the van. My heart is at my throat when the two men stand in front of the car and start firing at us.

My screams are piercing, as I try to duck the bullets. It takes me a minute to realize that the bullets are hitting the windscreen and falling to the bonnet. Kings is seated, staring right at the two men. After what feels like a decade, the sound of the guns stop. Lifting my eyes to

the windscreen, I notice that the two men are fumbling with the guns, probably wanting to load more bullets.

“I want you to stay down,” Kings says before he pulls a gun under my seat. It feels like slow motion when he cocks the gun, opens the driver’s door and shoots at the first guy. Two bullets and one lands on the guy’s chest. Before his partner could react, Kings shoots at him and he drops to the ground. At a speed of light, Kings shoots the tyres of the van and thereafter closes the driver’s door. He quickly jumps to the backseat, pulls something from the back of the seat that I am seated on and hands it to me.

“Put it on.”

I receive the bullet vest and quickly put it on while he pulls the other one from behind the driver’s seat and puts it on. I never thought these things were fitted in my car. I am just grateful that they were.

“Stay down, I’ll be back.”

“No...no...no... don’t leave me here,” I cry.

“I won’t let anyone hurt you,” he says and with that he jumps out of the car.

I have never been this scared in my entire life. Checking the mirrors, I see the traffic behind us. What should I do? Do I call the police? But if I call the police, won’t they arrest Kings for shooting these two men? I decide against doing anything. Kings must have everything under control.

My heart jumps when I hear a gunshot. Turning my focus back to the van in front of us, I notice Kings smashing the car window with his fist and thereafter pulling a guy from the driver's seat.

"Please... please...please...don't shoot," the guy cries. He is so young, my heart bleeds for him. Kings wraps his hand around his neck and drags him to the back of the van.

"How many are you?" Kings asks.

"It was...it was..."

Kings drags the man in front of him before he shoots the lock to open the back door. As the door opens, Kings presses his gun to the boy's skull. The back is empty.

"How many were you?" Kings yells.

"Three. We... were...three," he trembles. "Please... please... don't shoot me. I was just hired to drive."

"Who sent you?" Kings yells. When the boy does not answer, Kings turn him to face him and without a warning, he shoots him on the shoulder. The boy screams his lungs out. I am crying too now. Kings has not stopped asking him the question. "Who sent you?" When he doesn't get his answer, he shoots him on the other shoulder before the boy falls to the ground. My hands are trembling when I pull the door open.

"Kings, please," I call out.

"Get back inside the car," he yells at me. By how angry he looks, I slide back inside the car, crying. He kicks the boy and asks him again. "Who the fuck sent you?"

“I don’t know,” the boy weakly cries.

Kings doesn’t ask any more questions. All he does is to aim the gun at the boy’s head and shoots, taking him out of his misery. He searches his pockets, together with his friends’. The sirens are loud outside as Kings makes his way to the car. He jumps in, closes the door and orders me to put on a seat belt. I quickly put on the seat belt at the same time he starts the car. I am quiet, and trembling as Kings speeds away from the scene.

“You are not to give the police anything. You were hiding under the seat and did not see anything,” he says when we notices the police cars heading our way, blocking us. He steals a glance at me and I nod. When he stops the car, he says, “You are welcomed to leave me because I am not done killing every fucking person who is behind this.”

As a number of police jump out of their car, he presses a button on his watch and says, “Track my device. We were ambushed and I am about to be arrested. Find three phones on the compartment behind the passenger’s seat.”

SEASON FINALE

Heart of STEEL!

NONKU

“Hands on your head and step out of the vehicle slowly,” one officer yells while pointing guns at us.

“I want you to close your eyes and breathe in and out slowly,” Kings says to me while staring back at the police officers.

I do. I take slow breaths in and out. I close my eyes and try to breathe. My hands are trembling when I raise them, still continuing to breathe slowly to steady my heart beat.

“Do as they say. Don’t find them. You did not see anything,” he says while raising his hands. The gun is in his right hand. He slowly throws it on the dash board and raises his hands up where they could all see it. Two police officers run to our doors.

“Unlock the doors,” the officer on Kings’ side yells. Kings slowly press the unlock button and the police snatch the doors open and jump for our hands.

“Careful with her. She is pregnant,” Kings hisses.

“You don’t get to tell us how to do our jobs,” the officer says. Kings goes quiet as they grab our hands and put on the handcuffs.

Damn, these things are cold.

“Careful with her. She is pregnant,” Kings hisses when I wince to the pain.

“If she is pregnant, why is she in a getaway car with you?” the police officer spits.

“If you know your job, you wouldn’t be jumping to conclusions,” Kings spits back. This is the same guy who told me to do as the police say.

I get dragged to the van. I brace myself as they throw me into the back.

“I said be careful with her,” Kings yells as he tries to fight out of two officers’ hands.

“I’m fine,” I say, so that he could calm down. I jump to the back and sit on the floor of the car. Kings joins me.

“Are you okay?” he asks, looking down at my belly. I nod, sad that I can’t even rub my tummy to settle her. My baby girl.

The van starts moving.

“Aren’t you hungry? I feel like a salmon steak,” Kings says with a smile.

Who thinks about food in times like this?

“I... don’t have food in my mind.”

“Try imagining your next meal. It’ll make you relax,” he says.

I close my eyes and imagine a full plate of barbeque sticky wings and chips. It doesn’t work. Not when the driver is driving recklessly. Turning to Kings, I find him sitting quietly with his eyes closed. It seems like none of this fazes him. When he opens his eyes, he turns to me and smiles.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yeah!”

“I am sorry you had to see that,” he says. If we weren’t restrained, he would have taken my hand in his.

I am grateful that he never let his guard down. I am glad that he was with me when this happened. I wouldn't have survived on my own.

At the police station, the officer opens the door.

"We will walk," Kings tells the officer. He is the one to jump out and stand by the door as I do the same. We follow the officers behind as they take us to some room. They pull the chairs for us and leave us seated.

"We will be out of here in no time," Kings says. I want to ask how, but then I shake my head with a smile. Since when does he not keep his promise? "What's funny?"

"Just something I was thinking about."

"What are you thinking about?"

"That you keep your promises."

"That I do," he responds. I smile again and he says, "It looks like you have a lot going on in that head of yours. What are you thinking about?"

"That you were supposed to be my one night stand."

He laughs.

"And you are out here stuck with me in police custody," he says.

"Never thought I'd find myself arrested."

"You have never been arrested?" he asks, pretending to be shocked. "Even for public sex or drunk driving?"

"Never!"

“Ah! It isn’t a big deal really. It is just another day. At least you get to tick it off your bucket list.”

“My bucket list aint this crazy. It didn’t include guns.”

“You should up your game,” he says and I laugh, shaking my head. An officer walks in on us and darts his eyes between the two of us.

“Sounds like a party in here,” he says while pulling a chair. The other officer joins him.

“Could you get her something to eat? She is pregnant.”

“This is not a hotel.”

The officer introduces themselves as Detective Bakang and Constance.

“Three bodies and you are out here asking for food?” Detective Bakang says.

“Self defense,” Kings says. “If you did your homework, you would have known I am certified to kill.”

“Certified to kill?”

“Yes! It is my job.”

Detective Constance wants to say something when the door flies open and two men walk inside. One of them is the old man I met at Abigail’s house.

“Free their hands,” the other gentleman says while placing his hands on his waist. When the two detectives want to argue, the man yells for them to unlock the handcuffs. The first thing I do when my hand is freed, is to rub my wrists.

“The three men who were gunned down are the men we have been looking for, for the past two months. They are linked to the Mthembu killing and also the assassination of the business man in Mpumalanga. This is Molapo from special unit.”

“If you did your job well, you’d know this.”

“Kingsley here is a private investigator that was hired by the special force unit,” the man adds. The two detective’s cannot meet our eyes.

“Can we get out of here? She is hungry and traumatised,” Kings says, swaying his head between the men in the room. The big boss nods and Mr Molapo tells us to follow him. We do follow him to where his car is parked. Kings open the back door and I slide in. He walks to the other side and joins me at the back. Before the car moves, he reaches for my hand and directs Mr Molapo to drive through the next restaurant he comes across.

“Do you know anything about the three men?” Kings asks.

“Hired hitmen.”

“Bloody amateurs,” Kings hisses. “Are they really connected to the cases mentioned?”

“Yes!”

“Makes my job easy,” Kings says as he pulls his phone from the pocket. My phone is left in the car so I can’t even text my sister or make a phone call. Mr Molapo

turns to KFC where I order some food to push me until I get the sticky wings and chips that I want.

In the house, I head for a shower while Kings chooses to make some lunch while he waits for his assistant. It feels like any other day to him.

My fingers tremble when I turn the water on. Reality is starting to kick in. I try to breathe in and out slowly like Kings suggested. I don't know when Kings got in the bathroom but he pulls me into a hug. He rubs my back and tells me to cry.

Instead I laugh because how the hell am I going to cry when I don't have the tears?

"They deserved to die, didn't they?" I whisper, tightening my arms around him.

"They did."

KINGS

Rhulani walks into my house at nine thirty in the evening after having to deal with the police. We had to retrieve the car to get Nonku's belongings and the three phones we needed. Luckily the special unit confirmed Kings Security as an agent hired to help on the case. But it took too damn long to get the authorization to release the car. When Rhulani walks in, Nonku is snuggled

beside me. We were supposed to be watching a movie but she fell asleep after an hour in.

“Give me a minute,” I say while shaking Nonku and telling her to go to bed. She gets on her feet, greets Rhulani as she crosses the living room towards the corridor. I place the mug on the coffee machine to make an espresso. “Want a cup?”

“Nope!”

“Suit yourself,” I mumble. It is going to be a very long night.

I pick my mug and we make our way to the basement. In my security room, Rhulani plugs his laptop and connect the three phones.

He hands me Nonku’s phone, which I plug to the charger.

He runs the data and forwards one report to my laptop so that I could analyse while he runs the data on the other two.

I scan through the old chats, also retrieving the deleted data.

“Motherfucker!” I spit.

I turn my screen to Rhulani, who rests his back on the chair and reads the data. He reaches for his phone, dial’s Stone’s number and puts him on a loud speaker.

“Yes!” he answers.

“What colour was the van you suspected to be following you on your way to TA Operations with Theodore?” Rhulani asks.

“Black!”

“Call in extra security and cancel the kids’ sports this Saturday.”

“Copy that!” he says before Rhulani drops the phone.

“A day ago, Stone reported that he suspected a van was following him. He kept an eye on it but it didn’t come by.” I am hardly in the office now so they keep me updated in most cases. Our security company is assigned to guard the Masindi family. For security reasons, the children are home schooled and security around their home is tight.

I picked up Gumede’s name on the chat. These amateurs were hired to eliminate Theodore and Abigail, and also me. I knew he was going to strike back – I expected him to. What I didn’t expect him to do was to hire an amateur. He is pathetic when broke.

“How did you sleep?” I ask Nonku the minute she opens her eyes and finds me staring. She tossed and turned a few times but I was close by to pull her in tight hugs when she needed them.

“Not too well,” she mumbles.

“Wanna talk to someone about it?” I ask.

She shakes her head. I reach for the phone and hand it to her.

“You found it,” she says with a smile. I allow her to go through messages and stuff while I watch her. I like how perfect she looks in the morning. She is still as beautiful as the first day I laid my eyes on her.

“Do you have anything important to take care of today?”

“I just postponed a meeting to next week. And you?”

“I need to step out for just a few hours. But I’ll bring sticky wings for lunch and we’ll finish last night’s movie before my mother and sisters come by for dinner. I’ll find a way to bring them here,” I say. When she doesn’t refuse, I get my answer about where we stand. We stand where we were before some stupid amateurs detoured us to my mother’s house.

As hard as it is to leave her in bed, I drop a kiss and jump out of bed to get ready. I jump into the shower, take the longest cold shower before picking the black jeans, black shirt and a black biker jacket. I pick my black clothes from the drawer and make my way to a lab in downtown Johannesburg. Rhulani is waiting for me with our guy.

“Give it 30 seconds to be impotent,” the old man advise. He places a packet of cigarettes on the table and a lighter on the side.

I take the cigarettes and lighter first and place them in my right pocket.

“This is cute,” I say, taking the photo from the table and carefully placing it in my left pocket. The old scientist hands me a packet of two small yellow pills which I slide into my jean pocket. Rhulani hands me a tag and informs me that my meeting is set for eleven thirty.

An hour later, after parking my bike at the far end of the parking lot, I kill the engine and sit up straight. The weather is a little dull now, almost cloudy as if it is about to rain. This is Johannesburg, it can rain at any minute. I make my way to the entrance, meeting two armed officers who allow me to walk past the metal detector after showing them my tag and after dropping my gun at the safe.

“Do you know your way?” one officer questions.

“Never been here,” I respond and the officer gives me directions to the interrogation room. I head down the corridor to a room on my left. This is where they have Gumede in custody. I grab a seat and wait. It is just after ten minutes when the door opens and two officers push Ndumiso into the room. He gives me a double take before spitting to the ground.

“Watch it, Gumede,” one officer says. Thereafter they help him sit before freeing him from the chains.

“Thank you, gentlemen,” I say, giving them a nod before they walk out. I turn my gaze to the man seated in front of me. “What? Are you seeing a ghost?”

“What the fuck do you want?” he asks.

“You can’t accept defeat, can you?” I say.

“No one steals from me.”

“Who stole from you?” I ask.

“You did, your motherfucker.”

“I gave your ex-wife what she deserves for all the pain you put her through. Also, the world is better off without you. You must be grateful that your ex-wife’s husband didn’t order a hit on you. I am glad he didn’t, because it was fun watching you become this pathetic man that you have become.” He stares at me, fuming. “I was willing to let you live until the stunt you pulled. No one messes with me and lives to tell a tale.”

“Fuck, you!” he spits. I wish we were meeting elsewhere so that I could blow his brains out. But I am here on a ‘job’ and dragging people’s names is not what I plan to do. I need to do a clean job.

“Is that what they are doing to you? Fucking you in here?” I hiss.

He tightens his jaws.

“What are you going to do?”

“I am going to kill you,” I whisper.

“Try me,” he says and laughs. He knows how safe he is in here. They might not be listening to my conversation because Rhulani has messed with their audio feeder but kept the camera on, so if they hear any noise or see any action, they’ll come running before I even reach for his throat.

I rest my back on the chair and watch him. After what seems like forever, I sit up straight and pull the picture from my pocket.

“Your three children had a little reunion a while ago. I must say, your daughter looks just like you,” I say, studying the picture that Rhulani got for me this morning. It was taken by Abigail on her son’s birthday. She invited his siblings and a picture was taken then they were playing on the jumping castle. While pulling the cigarette and lighter, I throw the picture in front of him.

This is why I did not want children at some point in life. Children are their parents’ weakness. As I light the cigarette, I watch as he picks the photo and studies it. I drag the cigarette, and blow the smoke to his face.

“What the fuck?” Ndumiso coughs while I get up from my chair and move further away from him. I pretend to be smoking, while leaning on the wall. I lift my eye to the clock on the wall. It is ticking.

“Struggling to breathe?” I ask at the same time that I slide my fingers into my pocket and pull the little packet and keep it in my hand.

He coughs, and starts struggling to breathe. Our scientist rubbed the acid poison on the picture, and the smoke that I blew to his face activated it. He throws his hand to his chest, and gasps for air. Lifting my eye to the clock and noticing that thirty seconds is over, I jump, pretending to be shocked. I drop the cigarette to the floor and rush to bang on the door for the officers to come in. When the officer opens the door, I say, “Looks

like he is having a cardiac arrest. Get help! Now.” With that I turn to him, grab him by his clothes and help him to the floor while I slide the pills into his pocket.

“Keep your eyes open,” I hiss, while one officer kneels beside me to help him as well. He tries hitting his chest but the more he does it, the more Gumede loses his breath.

“What the hell happened here?” the officer asks.

“I was showing him the picture of his children and asking him questions and he just started acting up,” I say.

“Where is the damn doctor?”

It takes another two minutes before Gumede gives up fighting.

“Shit!” the officer swears while trying to do CPR.”

The doctor only comes in another minute late, and takes over. He orders the officers to get the stretcher.

While they rush him to the doctor’s quarters, I excuse myself.

My job is done.

I pass by the office, to get rid of the clothes I was wearing earlier. Thereafter I pass by the shopping centre to get some sticky wings and chips. When I arrive home, I find Nonku watching TV. I slide on the couch next to her. She grabs her wings and starts devouring them until her phone starts pinging. Dropping my eyes to the screen, I notice the messages are popping up from ‘Finance WhatsApp Group’. Nonku grabs the phone and

then quickly reaches for the remote to change the channel.

“...and it is confirmed that business tycoon Ndumiso Gumede passed away today at 12h20 after a cardiac arrest. Even though deadly drugs were found in his possession, tests will be conducted to confirm the reason for his cardiac arrest...”

Nonku gets on her feet and asks, “Would you like something to drink?”

“A fucking champagne for me.”
