

Love Tangle



by Takalani M

Prologue

No, no, no!

The bus just left the terminal as I get around the corner.

"Damn! Damn! Damn!" I hiss to myself as I pull the strength to sprint down the road to catch it

by the traffic light. If it leaves me, then I am doomed. I have to drop Amanda's assignment before going to sit for my Business management paper.

I clutch my school bag and start running down the street. I suck in a breath and sprint as fast as I could.

Dammit! All the robots are green, giving the bus a chance to speed off from me. I have no other choice but to charge further down the street.

My body is sweating. My sneakers are slippery from my sweat. And finally, the bus comes to a halt. I

have only one twenty seconds before the lights go green.

I make it. I bang the door a few times before the driver opens it. He shakes his head at me when I get into the bus. This is not the first or second time this is happening. It usually happens every week. I produce my student card for formalities and drop onto the seat.

I am sweaty. The deodorant that I used is so cheap that my armpits are burning from the salty sweat.

A few minutes later when I have caught my breath, I pull my

textbook and go through the notes. This is an important test. The last test before we start our examination is a few weeks. I always work hard to produce a great predication. With a good predication, I don't have too much pressure when it comes to my exams.

My phone beeps in my school bag. I smile when I notice it is a text from Amanda.

"What time are you here?"

"I am on a bus. We just left town so we should be there very soon."

"I hope you make it before I rush to class. I need the

assignment."

"Wait for me by the bus stop so that I don't delay you. I did your assignment and I typed it out for you. It looks perfect," I proudly announce.

Amanda is my girlfriend. She is the reason why I moved out of a school residence to a flat in CBD. We met a year ago at a school talent show. She is the most beautiful woman I have ever set my eyes on. She is a beautiful woman that I don't mind taking care of. My friends think I am a fool in love for renting out my Res room to have a little pocket

money to maintain her. They don't understand love the way I do. My father left my mother when my sister was born. He disappeared into thin air. I know the reasons why, because I always heard him yell at my mother. With his own mouth, he told her he didn't love her. He didn't love her enough to sacrifice for her.

I love Amanda and I will do everything to make her happy and give her what she deserves. I am nothing like my friends who are from well-off families. I was fortunate enough to get a bursary from a Marketing

company and they pay for my school fees, residence, and food. Amanda deserves to be spoilt so I stay with my cousin in CBD and use the school bus to travel to school daily. Too many sacrifices but I do it with love. I am always tired but I don't mind. I do not mind at all.

Minutes later, we get to the school bus terminal. Amanda is seated on a bench with her friend. She looks so beautiful in a short dress and gold sneakers. Her braids are long and styled perfectly to show off her pretty face.

"Hey babe," I say while fiddling in my bag for her assignment. It took me the whole night to finish it and I didn't study much for my test.

"Heyyy," she says while getting on her feet. I pull her to get a quick kiss. She doesn't like showing affection in front of people, but she does kiss me now and then.

"Here." I hand her the assignment. A good fifteen-page assignment.

"You are a star," she says while paging through the work I have done. She isn't going to get less than eighty percent on that

assignment. I made sure.

"Would you like to catch a movie after my test? You don't have class after twelve, right?" I ask. I know her schedule by heart.

"Uhm...maybe not today," she says.

"Oh, okay. We are meeting at the canteen for lunch, right?" I ask. We usually have lunch together. I have enough meal tickets to share with her. When I am broke, I buy food for other students and take cash from them.

Gauteng life is such a hustle.

"Lunch is fine," she says.

"See you at one-thirty," I say as

we cross the road to the lecture halls. Her friend is following behind. She doesn't like me much because I am broke. It doesn't bother me. As long as Amanda loves me, I am perfectly fine.

"See you then," she responds.

"I love you," I say and rush down the corridor to my lecture room. It is just a few minutes before we start writing.

My two friends are already seated. The bastards are cramming the notes. I drop on the chair next to Gundo and pull my books from my school bag. My stomach grumbles as I settle

down.

"Skipped breakfast?" Gundo asks. He is a cheese boy from Venda. We met at Res, during our first year. Zola had always been lonely, so we got him into our group.

"I was already late...I couldn't grab something to eat," I say.

"Today is the burger special," Zola says. We never miss the burger specials on Wednesdays. Half price kind-of a special.

"I will chill with you guys until I meet Amanda for lunch," I say.

"Amanda again," Zola mumbles.

"What do you want from that girl?"

"She is my girlfriend," I say.

"Dude, why mara huh?"

"Why what?"

My friends are not a fan of Amanda. It does bother me, but I can live with that. They don't know her as much as I do.

"Okay, let me get to the point...that girl is making a fool of you. Why can't you see that?"

"Amanda and I are going to get married after we graduate," I say. These are promises that we made to each other, and I am going to keep my promises to her.

"Do you know Charles Mbambo?"

"Who is Charles Mbambo?"

"Okay, guys...I think we need to get ready for the test," Gundo jumps in.

"Charles Mbambo is the businessman that...."

"Everybody, put your books and everything else on the floor. We are starting the test in the next five minutes," the lecturer yells from the front.

Time to nail the test.

I didn't get the bursary by mistake or chance. I am an A-student. I have always been an A-student. Today's paper was difficult though. It covered a few

things that I didn't prepare enough yesterday but I am guaranteed that I got a good mark. Gundo walks to our table with a tray of food – burgers, chips and cold drink. He places the tray on the table and gets on the seat.

I have fifteen minutes before Amanda shows up. And when she does, I am taking our corner table.

"The last question was based on Chapter 5, right?" Zola asks. He seems to be panicking so much.

"Can we stop discussing the paper? If you fail, you will repeat

next semester," Gundo casually says before taking a bite of his burger.

"I agree with you," I say. We can talk about what we are doing this weekend before we start with our examination in a few weeks. I would suggest a fun day at Gold Reef City but I am broke now. I had to give Amanda money to get a few winter clothes. I also sent money to my little sister who stays in KZN with our mother. She needed a few bucks for a school day trip.

"Fine, fine," Zola says.

All eyes turn to Amanda who is

parading into the canteen.

Wow! She has changed into a pair of jean shorts and a tank top. I take a large sip of my cold drink and hurry to her.

"How was the paper?" she asks when I lead her to our usual spot at the end of the canteen. It is loud here as people are lining up for food.

"I aced it," I say.

"You are so smart," she says while getting on the chair.

"Would you like a burger special?" I proudly ask. I can easily get her that.

"I want ribs and chips," she says.

"Uhm....okay...I'll be right back," I say. I can get her exactly that. I can get her anything she wants. Wallet! I left it in my school bag which is with my friends. I cross the room to their table.

"Should we wait for you?" Gundo asks as I grab my school bag from the floor.

"No."

"Is she going to give you a blow job?" Zola asks, uninterested. He is asking just to mock me. He hates Amanda so much that I am starting to think of interrogating him about it.

"Stay out of my business," I say.

"I don't understand why you let her make a fool of you," he says.

"What is your problem? Do you know something that I don't?"

"I think I do...but it doesn't matter much. You won't even listen to me," he says.

I am about to spit out a curse when the choir starts a song.

This is new!

We all turn towards the entrance where the choir is singing and dancing to a popular love song.

The whole canteen joins in, clapping hands and dancing to the melody.

Zola and Gundo get on their feet

when the choir is walking towards Ayanda. They line up, circling her. What the hell is going on? I hurry to where the spectators are gathering to witness why the choir has Amanda circled.

"Babe, you are all I think of, day and night," a male voice says.

What the fuck? He is on his knee, in front of Amanda. My girlfriend has her hands on her mouth. "I know you are young...but babe, I am ready to start a life with you. The millions, I make...I want to share them with you. Amanda Kunene, will you please make me the happiest man and marry

me?"

I feel strong hands pulling me back as I try to fight through the crowd. Zola and Gundo drag me away from the crowd. The celebration noise erupts in the canteen, making my efforts to yell at Amanda useless. She probably said yes because everyone is excited for her. Zola drags me out of the canteen while Gundo picks our bags.

"Leave me the hell alone," I yell as he drags me further away from the eatery section. "Leave me the hell alone Zola, leave me alone."

"So what? So that you make a fool of yourself?" Zola yells back. He doesn't understand. He doesn't understand how I feel right now. I want to go get my girlfriend. I want to get to her right now.

"Don't be stupid," Zola says. "She doesn't love you. She never did."

"What do you know? Amanda loves me."

"Then why was Charles fucking her every night when you are on a bus to town? Njabulo, wake up man...she was just using you."

What?

"Is that true?" I ask Gundo.

Was Amanda sleeping with that

man when I leave campus? Every day?

"I stay in the same Res as her...come on...why would I lie to you?" Zola says.

"She said she loves me," I say. Zola has let me go by now. I am calm. No, I am confused. No, no, no... I am broken.

"She has a perfect way of showing it," Zola hisses and leads the way to our chilling spot.

"Let it go," Gundo calmly says.

"No."

"Don't even think about it...just let it go Njabulo. Just let it go," Gundo says and follows Zola

behind.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how Amanda broke my fucking heart. Just like that, she messed with my heart and broke it into thousand little pieces.

EPISODE 1

I pull her hair with one hand while brushing the small of her back with another. She is bending for me. I am strong inside of her and her inner muscles are squeezing me.

"That's right baby," I hiss at her while thrusting into her. Slow,

slow, slow and then fast. She can take it. When I pull her hair tightly again, she lets out a whimper. Pain and pleasure! All those feelings, at the same time. She presses her hands on the white duvets and drops her face to the pillow. She is on her knees taking me from the back.

"I am close Njabulo," she cries out.

"That's right baby...come for me," I hiss while giving out the best few last strokes. I feel her body trembling before we both let go. She drops on the bed and I collapse on top of her.

"That was...wow," she mumbles as I get up and remove the condom. She takes the tissue from me and disappears to the en-suite bathroom.

"That was...nice," she says again. A confirmation, I see.

"As always," I say while moving the duvets and getting in bed. She joins me and cuddle with me before drifting to sleep.

I wake up to a quiet room. It is already morning but not bright enough to confirm it. The bed is warm but she is not here with me.

I roll to her side and dart my eyes

to the floor where we threw our clothes before a steamy love-making session. Her dress is there but the silk gown that is always on the hanger in my bedroom is missing. The silk gown that belongs to her. I roll back to my side and make a mental schedule of what I need to do today. I need to attend two meetings before heading back to Cape Town. I bought this Joburg house but my life is in Cape Town. There she is.

Amanda Kunene. The most beautiful girl in my world - woman now. She still looks as pretty as

she has always been, just a few years older and unhappy.

She looks miserable and pathetic sometimes.

Amanda smiles at me when she notices me watching her. I can't help it. She is damn sexy in that red silk short gown – with nothing underneath. A tray of food is in her hands. Breakfast in bed; I get a lot of those when she comes by.

“Did you sleep well?” she asks while carefully putting a tray with a full breakfast on the bed. Bacon and eggs – my favorite. If I could, I could buy a farm to

have them in abundance. It has everything to do with the fact that I only got to taste them in varsity. She made my bacon crispy – just the way I love it.

“I slept like a King,” I respond – Truth be told. She lands her lips on mine before sitting beside me. Her lips are soft and inviting.

“That’s good,” she says.

“Where is your plate?” I ask.

There is only breakfast for one.

“I need to go. I have to take the kids to school,” she responds without looking at me. She feels guilty, even after all these years. Guilt consumes her.

"Doesn't he pay for those school transports for rainy days like these?" I ask. Her husband, her useless husband Charles Mbambo is supposed to have that sorted out for her.

"He stopped paying," she mumbles.

"He is such a useless man."

"Don't talk about him like that," she mumbles.

"Why not? Because he is your husband? Because you love him?"

"I love you," she says instead.

I laugh out loud. I don't mean for my laughter to mock her, but this is shit funny.

"What the fuck is love? Don't you dare tell me about love when you don't know the word means," I bluntly say. This, between us, is not love. It is hatred. Hatred for what she did to me. Hatred - for humiliating me and breaking my heart into pieces.

"Njabulo...you promised to let this go. It has been decades...come on," she says.

"It has been decades for you...but that fucking day feels like yesterday."

"Njabulo..."

"Don't Njabulo me," I say.

"Please...can we move on from the

past?" she asks and I smirk at her.

Move on? Crazy, right?

She moved on from that day.

Gundo had to accomodate me in his School residence room for a week, making sure that I stay sane. Zola confiscated my phone to avoid me calling and begging her to take me back. I was willing to take her back and forget all the things she did to me.

Damn, I was humiliated. Amanda moved on with her life as if I didn't matter. As if she never loved me. She never did. Zola was right. She was using me for her

assignments. Even with a rich boyfriend, she milked me to zero cents. My sacrifices came crumbling down into thin air that day. I couldn't even show face at the Canteen. I felt like everyone was talking about the boy who was dragged out of the eatery center because his girlfriend said yes to a marriage proposal. She moved out of Campus that very same week and I never saw her again.

I needed that shake though. I became a better man. I worked my ass off to be just like that Charles Mbambo. A man that

invited a damn school choir to help him propose to the love of my life. I prayed to be like him. I did.

Does he even know I exist? Did he know I existed? I never asked Amanda those questions.

After that day, Amanda moved on with her life and she never explained herself. She still hasn't explained herself. The biggest mistake she did was to show up to my office this other day.

That was such a fateful day.

See, after college, I went to work for a Marketing company that took me to school. Zola left the country with his parents and

Gundo remained in Gauteng. I served at the company for a few years before setting up a little company to make me a few millions. I got a good pay but I knew it would not get me to Charles Mbambo's level. A level where I could call out a choir to fucking sing in the canteen. When Gundo got some connections to start running his marketing magazine, he hooked me up with a few connections. We were competitors but healthy ones. He took over Johannesburg and I did Cape Town and we always promised to brew something solid

together. We finally did.

I have no idea how Amanda found out about my little operation in Cape Town. She showed up at my office while she was on vacation in Cape Town. I fucked her the whole night while she begged me to forgive her. Since that night, I have been using her to get rid of the pain and anger she caused me.

"I am sorry," she mumbles.

"Don't be sorry...I am fine now," I say. "And you are here with me." She gets up and picks her clothes. I watch as she puts on her bra and a dress. Her underwear must

be damp and filthy. I turned her on the whole night at the club, by the time we got here, it was a hundred rounds of revenge sex. She shoves her underwear into her bag and disappears to the bathroom to fix her messy hair. I get off and walk to my closet. I come back with money. She is here for money too. It is either her husband is running dry or doesn't know how to spend money on his woman. The former it is. The mighty Charles Mbambo is running dry. I did a tiny research on him once and he is not as mighty as he was - when he

proposed to the woman I ever loved.

She receives the money then she walks back to the room. She shoves it in her handbag.

"Am I seeing you next weekend? Again, Charles is away next weekend and he is only back on Monday," she says.

"Nope," I say. She gasps at me. I have a life, you know? I don't always wait for the days when she is off.

"Oh, okay," she mumbles while tying her shoes. When done, she stares at me with dreamy eyes. I still see that girl I sacrificed my

varsity life for. She is still there but married to a man who doesn't make her happy. What a waste. If I still loved her, I would beg her to leave him. I also think that she is always waiting for me to mention it.

It is just not happening.

"I'll see you...soon," she says.

"Yes, sweetie. I'll see you soon."

Gundo is a family guy. He has always been. He had a relationship with a baby momma before falling in love and marrying Diana. He got divorced to Diana and got married again. Man has

been experiencing all sorts of love. I have a feeling that he has found a soul mate now. His wife is adorable. She is everything that Gundo ever wanted. Unlike me, he has a good heart and deserves a woman who has a beautiful heart too. She is it.

Today, we are at Melrose Arch for her baby boutique launch.

Gundo did a great thing for his wife. Do I envy him? Nah! We are cut out from different fabrics.

My sister, Zizipho, picks a flute of champagne when we enter the store. She is always my right-hand woman at places like these

where I don't want to feel like I don't belong.

"This place is so beautiful," she says while scanning the room. It is not a typical launch. We have a few people in the room. Loveable Rascals is engraved on the white wall. It is lovely.

"Let me go look for Thandeka," Zizipho leaves me walking around the room. All these cute little things around the room were designed by Thandeka.

Impressive. Very, impressive.

"You should be shopping here one of the good days," Gundo says. He caught me gazing at cute little

blankets.

"Argg...you know these things are not for me," I correct him. I do not wish to get to his level. I tried getting married to some girl in Cape Town. It didn't work. So, I know that I will live my eyes fucking Amanda's eyeballs out until the void in me vanishes. She needs the money. She needs more than money but that is all I am going to give her - money. She doesn't deserve my love ever again. No one deserves my love.

"You remember when you told me to propose to my wife...because I was smitten by her?" he asks.

Yes, I remember. I am the one who took him a brilliant video when he proposed to his wife at some fish restaurant back in Cape Town.

"Yeah," I respond.

"I am waiting for the day I will tell you the same thing," he says with a giggle.

"Right! You know very well that is not happening," I respond.

"It is just a matter of time," he says and looks straight ahead from my shoulder. I turn to where his gaze is at.

I smirk at him. Not happening.

"How are the boys...and Ciara?" I

change the topic. Gundo has twin boys. He also has a daughter that belongs to his brother. The brother was fucking his wife when he wasn't home. Just like Charles Mbambo was messing with my girl. See, life is that fucked up. This thing called love is one dangerous game. A very dangerous game.

"They are all doing great," he says with a proud smile. He always has a soft spot for his children.

I turn my gaze to Gundo's wife who is dragging her friend across the room towards us. The friend

seems to be fighting her, but not winning.

"Hey Njabulo," Thandeka says, "Remember my friend Maria?"

I turn my gaze to the friend, Maria. I keep my gaze at her for longer than normal. She has a nervous smile on – making her look innocent. She is the innocent type.

"Uhhmm, I remember her from the wedding," I respond. Of course, she was the best lady or something at Gundo's wedding. She was all over the place and there was no way to miss her.

"Yes," Thandeka happily responds. "She was asking about you...so I

thought I should re-introduce you guys."

"Is it?" I ask knowing very well that Thandeka is setting her friend up. Maria looks like she could dig a hole for herself to disappear. I have my hands in the pockets now, starting to enjoy the game.

"Njabulo...Thandeka is making everything up. I was not asking for you," Maria says with a smile. Her eyelashes dancing at me.

"You know what, I give up," Thandeka quickly says.

"Ouch!" I place my hand on my chest. That scores me a wide

smile from Maria. Is she blushing?

"Mrs Radzilani, can I have a minute with you?" Gundo says with a smirk. He wants to leave Maria with me. I know what he is doing. He has done it so many times in the past.

"Sure babe," Thandeka responds. They disappear with us watching the door.

I clear my throat and Maria turns to face me. She is a black beauty. Minimal make-up with a pop-up colour lipstick. I could call her 'rural' but in a very nice way. "Would you like something to

drink?" I ask and she gives me a tight lips kind of a smile.

"No thanks," she says. "I need to get back to the...uhm...to the welcoming station."

"It was nice meeting you again Maria," I say and she nods while walking away.

A pretty enough dress.

But...

Nah!

Not my type! Not my type to take home.

I would rip her heart apart with just a mere word. I keep my gaze as she picks a glass of juice from the drink station. She stares

back at me and I give her a little wave. Jesus Crist, she is smitten. "Do you like her," Gundo asks. He caught me watching her.

"Nah. I don't like anyone," I say. That is just the truth, I don't like anyone.

Ever.

EPISODE 2

I tightly squeeze my eyes shut and hope for the phone to stop ringing. I slept few hours ago and I know who is calling me in the middle of the night.

Can I have some sleep? I woke up from a beautiful dream and it is going to take another few hours to fall asleep again.

It stops ringing.

Thank God!

"Oh, God," I mumble while sitting up. The phone is ringing again and it is not going to stop until I pick it up. Some nights, I am lucky but if it more than one ring then it is definitely going to ring until I pick up.

"Hello Mma," I mumble on the phone.

"Maria, are you sleeping?" she asks as if shocked. If I roll my

eyes right now, she is going to sense it and gives me a lecture.

"I was a little tired," I respond. I am not going to mention that I spent the whole night at a colleague's farewell party, unless I want a 12:00 AM lecture. I only got home after nine.

"There is no getting tired. There is always something to pray about. We need to pray," she says as I slip my feet into the slippers. I put the phone on speaker and place it on the bed. I reach for my gown and put it on before getting on my knees. Every weekend we are always on these

midnight prayers. At least she doesn't wake me up during the week.

"What are we praying about?" I ask.

"We are praying for you today. What do you want God to do for you?" she asks. Wow. She randomly picks what to pray about and I never get used to it when she loudly prays for me. It is mind blowing and it makes me love her deeply.

What do I need God to do for me? let me see.

"I want the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" I

say. I do not know what I want because I do have what I want. I have her and my sibling; and I am blessed with a job.

"Why don't we pray for your life partner?" she asks instead of starting our prayer. I chuckle.

"What?" I ask. This is the first she wants to pray for my life partner unless she does when she is alone.

"Why don't we pray for your life partner? I have been praying for you for so long...and maybe I need to seal this prayer with you," she responds. So, she does pray for my life partner.

"Mma, why are you praying for a life partner for me?" I ask while laughing. It doesn't matter that it is after midnight and my roommate is sleeping in the next room.

"Maria, you are not growing young."

"What happened to, 'Maria...do not get involved with boys. They are not good?'" I ask. She used to give me a hardest time ever. I am glad she did though, I would have fallen for Rudzani Radzilani and gotten my heart broken.

"You are old enough now and you should be getting married soon."

"So, you are waiting for me to get

married?"

"Yes. I thought Thulani was your...partner but I see him bringing a woman to his house," she says.

"Mma!" I say. Why is she minding my business? Maybe I made it too obvious that I like Thulani so much. I do. He has become her favourite since he turned his life around. Most of the men in our village are just throwing their lives away.

"What?" she says. "Let's pray for your life partner."

"I do not..."

"God! I thank you for my

daughter's life partner..." my mother starts praying. She is one who always speak in faith. But this is weird, really. I mumble my prayer on the side as she asks God to give me a God fearing man who will love me, cherish me and protect me. She prays that God blesses me with a companion who is understanding and patient with me. A man who will put me first in life and keep me happy. She also prays that God blesses me with wisdom when choosing a boyfriend. "Maria, I cannot hear you," she says in the middle of prayer.

"In Jesus Christ I receive my life

partner..." I say out loudly before going back to mumbling. In my mumbles, I pray for a loving and understanding husband. Someone who will cherish me.

"Amen and Amen," Mom says and I repeat after her.

We have been praying for half an hour. A prayer for me to get a perfect life partner. How sweet? She hangs up after another ten minutes of catching up. Vodacom Night shift neh? I respect it. She makes sure she utilises it. I only fall asleep after a while, tossing and turning, imagining myself with a boyfriend or

husband. A loving husband like Mulatshawe in The Royal Mistress. I do not want to bring it to my friend's marriage. But, I want such kind of happiness.

No matter how late I sleep, I am never late for church. Mom instilled that in me. At nine forty, I am already seated on the fifth pew. A group of people are interceding on the stage. If I didn't sternly tell my mother that I cannot commit, I would have been part of the intercession team. She wants me to be like her but this is one task I know I cannot do. Praying with her when

she calls out of nowhere is good enough. I leave it to people like her.

My phone vibrates.

"We are hosting a braai. The nanny is off. Pretty please come and help me with the boys while I host?" a text from my dear friend.

"Anytime. I'll come straight after church." I respond.

"Thank you."

I place my phone in my bag and lift my eyes to the stage. One guy is staring right at me, busy mumbling a prayer. He is praying with his eyes on me. I turn to

check who is sitting behind me. No one. He is staring right at me.

What am I supposed to do?

Wave? The man in on stage – supposed to be praying for the upcoming service.

The band gets to the stage while he and his group walks down. The church is starting to get packed too. It is ten o'clock.

What a wonderful service.

It is 12h30 when the Pastor makes the last prayer. It should take me thirty minutes to get to Thandeka's house. Her family lives in such a wonderful suburb.

"I know you, don't I?" someone

asks from behind. I am following the crowd out of the door. I turn. It is the guy from the stage.

"I don't know," I slightly shrug a shoulder, "I bet you have seen me here at church."

What a lame pick-up line Sir.

"Yes, I remember now... I am the one who gave you the visitor's form when you came to visit our church for the first time."

"Yeah, right," I say.

"No, serious...I remember you," he says as we step out of the church. People are parting ways and others are standing in groups.

"Okay," I say. I visited this

church a year ago before joining them a few months ago.

"You were wearing a yellow dress with a white cardigan," he says.

"What?" I stop on my tracks. He is spot on. I was wearing a yellow pencil dress and because it was chilly that day, I added a white cardigan.

"You remember?" I ask, turning to face him. Wow. He has an angelic smile and dazzling brown eyes.

"Yes...you didn't come back after your first visit," he says.

"Yeah. I only came back a few months ago," I say. He is now

walking me to the gate to catch a taxi. I know he is going back to greet a few people before he leaves.

"I see. I was away for a few months now. I was deported to Limpopo but now I am back," he says. I don't know why he is telling me...but it is fine. I will listen.

"Would you like me to take you out for lunch?" he quickly asks as if nervous. "Oh, that came out wrongly. May I take you out for lunch?"

I move my eyes to his left hand and he has no ring on.

God? Is this the life partner my mom and I were praying about? We were praying just a few hours ago.

"I am invited to a family lunch," I say.

"Oh, okay."

"Thank you for the invite though, thank you."

"See you on Wednesday."

"I don't attend weekday meetings. I only come on Sundays," I say. He looks so shocked so I quickly add,

"Transport. I don't want to find myself stranded."

"That makes sense. See you on

Sunday," he says.

"See you on Sunday."

"Don't make plans after church. I would really love to take you out for lunch. Simple lunch."

"Sure."

Thandeka is alone when I get to her house. She is running around the kitchen, trying to get things done. She orders me to put my bags in the guest room which is called my room. I usually come here when her husband is away. I help her with a few salads since her husband will be bringing meat.

"I love the hair," I say. She looks pretty in this short bobcut. The last time I saw her, three weeks ago, she had a different hairstyle. "Thanks," she responds.

"Where are the kids?"

"Their granny decided to go visit a family member in Soweto," she responds before the kitchen door opens. Gundo walks in with hundred shopping bags. He is followed by his friend – Njabulo. They greet while crossing to the porch. it is probably alcohol. Why is the room suddenly hot? Thandeka eyes me while I fan myself.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"Yes, just a little hot."

"It must be the stove," she says with a smile.

"You didn't care to invite me in the morning... Look at me? I am wearing a long church dress with long sleeves."

"Gundo just decided to be spontaneous," she responds while mixing the beans into the bowl of chakalaka.

I like how Thandeka and Gundo love each other. They love each other effortlessly. They remind me of Rialivhuwa and Mulatshawe Ratshali. It is funny

that they don't exist but they inspire me so much.

A group of six guys walks into the house. They are here for the lunch. More guys come in too. This is actually Gundo's braai with his friends. There are no girls.

After two hours or so, lunch is ready.

"Please help me set the serving station in the dining room,"

Thandeka says. I wash my hands and take the plates and cutlery to the dining table. I take the salad bowls too. She places the rest of the bowls on the table.

"Here is the chicken and steak,"

Gundo says while placing the braai'd meat on the table. "We are hungry now. Can I call the guys in?"

"Sure, everything is set here. Maria and I will be in the guest room until you guys are done,"

Thandeka says to her husband.

Gundo leaves the room while

Thandeka picks a bottle of red wine. We already ate while preparing the food.

"Maria, please dish for yourself before these men finish all the food. You are going to get hungry after few hours, I tell you,"

Thandeka says while getting

upstairs to the guest room. She is right, I only took a few bites of the salads and I never had a proper meal. I pick a plate from the table and go around the table to dish for myself.

"Beef only...no chicken...and no pap." I lift my eyes to where the voice is coming from. It is Njabulo standing with his back on the wall.

"Excuse me?" I ask.

"I want beef only with salads," he says with a smirk. I open my mouth, meaning to respond but no words come out. "I'll be right back."

What?

I dish up what he asks me to.

Why am I even doing it? Everyone is supposed to dish for themselves.

No, I am not giving him my plate. I pick a fork and walk towards the guest room, but I meet him in the corridor.

"Where you following me?" he asks.

"What?" I ask. He lifts his hands to take the plate. I hesitantly place the plate in his hands. He stares at me. I stare back. Eye contest. Only when Gundo and his friends' noise takes our attention

do we break the eye contact. I smile and hurry past him to the guest room.

Why am running away?

"Haibo! Why are clutching on the fork?" Thandeka asks when I take a seat on the bed. I drop my eyes to my hand. I have a fork clutched in my hand.

"Oh, I forgot to take it to the kitchen."

"Who was that? In the corridor?" she asks. She probably heard voices. The door was open and it is still open.

"It was Njabulo."

"Oh, I see," she says with a

smile.

"Why are you smiling?" I ask and she doesn't respond. "I forgot to tell you...I am going on a date on Sunday."

"What? He finally asked you out?"

"What? Who?"

"Njabulo."

"No Thandeka. Oh, please."

"Then who asked you out?"

"Some guy from church. He saw me last year and remembered me when we met today. So, he asked to take me to lunch."

"I like him already," Thandeka says.

"You do not even know him."

"Okay, fine. I am just happy that you are going out for lunch with someone. I was starting to get worried."

"I hope he is the man that I was praying for with my mother," I say and Thandeka gives me a smile. She takes a glass of wine to her lips and takes a sip before she pumps me out to tell her the whole story.

Before it gets dark, I help Thandeka to clear up the dining area. She washes the dishes while I clean the floors for her. One by one, Gundo's guests are leaving and the twins will be back

soon. I would love to see them but I also need to leave so I could get ready for the coming week. Gundo walks into the kitchen with more plates than the guys left outside.

Really? She has already started the 'last load' in the dishwasher. "These plates are never going to finish," she complains.

"And friend, I need to go before I struggle with Taxis," I say. I can never let her husband take me home. I do not really like this Uber business and Thandeka has to wait for her mother-in-law to return with the kids.

"Njabulo can drop you home. It is on his way," Gundo innocently says. I didn't even know he was still here.

"Oh, no..." I say. I hate being a nuisance. I also do not mind catching a taxi, really.

"No, he doesn't mind," Gundo says. "Please..."

"Njabulo, you don't mind dropping one of our guests at home, right? It is on your way," Gundo yells towards the corridor.

"I don't mind," Njabulo yells back. He is in Gundo's office. No wonder I met him in the corridor.

Njabulo only shows up minutes

later with a few papers in his hand. "Who am I dropping home?" "Maria," Gundo says. "She has helped us so much, I cannot allow her to use a taxi."

"Oh, okay, no stress," Njabulo casually says before shaking his friend's hand. He hugs Thandeka and eye me to take my stuff. "I think I'll see you guys in two months' time."

"What is happening?" Gundo asks. "An Investor pulled back. I need to hustle for another one. I'll chip you in on the disaster tomorrow morning. I'll make a conference call with Dave."

"Sure," Gundo says while leading us to the car.

Njabulo gets in a driver's seat while I get on the other side of a white Polo car. I punch my location on his phone for it to loudly give us directions.

"Why are you never with your boyfriend? Don't you have one?" he asks.

"Excuse me?"

"I have seen you a few times in Gundo's house but you never show up with anyone. Don't you have a boyfriend?" he asks.

"Well, nope," I awkwardly say.

"The guy I liked didn't like me

back. So I dont have one."

"Right?" He stares ahead. "They never do."

"What?"

"The ones you like, they never like you back."

"Talking from experience?"

"Talking from experience."

"But I believe that if people cannot be together...they were never meant to be together."

"That is why you are going on a date with that guy from church?" he asks.

"What? You have been eavesdropping on my conversations with my friend," I

say.

"I was not far from the guest room and you guys were yelling about boys and stuff," he says. That smirk on his face tells me he is mocking me. I look at him and laugh. We did talk about men like Thulani and Rudzani and we even made bad reference with Robert.

"Well...I think that's why I am going on this date."

"Good luck with that," he casually says as if he really means the words.

"Good luck?"

"Yes...good luck. You need it," he

says as he turns the car towards where the GPS commanded him to turn.

EPISODE 3

"So you pray for a life partner?"

Life partner, LOL.

"Why not? If you pray for everything else, why not pray for a life partner?" she asks and shrugs as if it is obvious.

"So, you are a church girl, huh?"

"I am," she responds confidently.

I nod at her. Her innocence and all, so cute. "What happened to

you?"

"Excuse me?"

"Your experience...with the one you liked and didn't like you back?

What happened?" she asks and I smirk at her. The GPS directs me to stop on the left - my destination is on the left. I turn to the gate of a white building where she stays.

"You are home now. I will tell you all about it when I see you again...and you will tell me all about your date with your new boyfriend."

"He isn't my boyfriend."

"You wouldn't be going on a date

with him if you didn't want him to be your boyfriend."

"Do you date all girls you take on a date? Don't you sometimes just meet people to get to know them without thinking of being their life partners?"

Life partner - I cannot get used to this word.

"Nope, I don't go on dates with girls."

"Huh? Are you gay?"

Am I gay? I burst into a loud laugh.

"Maria, I am far from being gay."

"But, you don't go on dates?"

"Why do you look so shocked?" She

looks astonished like I am entitled to dates. I don't do dates.

"Because...everybody goes on dates."

"And you are disappointed because I won't be able to take you to one?"

"Not at all!"

"Ouch!" Damn woman.

"Ouch, what? I am not going to sit here and lie to myself...you are not my type."

"Ohhhhhh Maria," I say and laugh out loud. She laughs back while throwing her head back on the seat. Her laughter fills my car.

"I didn't mean it in that way. I

meant...I am not your type...so going on a date with you is not even close to my mind," she says after a fit of laughter.

"I don't have a type."

"You do."

"Okay, what is my type?" There is a loud hoot from behind my car. I am closing the way to the entrance. I put my car on reverse and the car behind me does the same. "We are going out for coffee. I want to know all about my types." She doesn't protest so I know she doesn't mind. I turn to a McDonald's drive thru to get us drinks. Two cups of coffee and

I park in the parking lot. "If a date wasn't far from your mind, I would have taken you to one."

She smiles while taking the cup.

"You wouldn't take me out looking like this," she says. She is right, her dress is hideous. It doesn't look good on her.

"So, you say I have types," I say. I am interested to know what she thinks of me. She turns and stares at me for a minute, acting as if she is calculating me. I put up a tight smile.

"You probably like girls who look like models. The shortest hair she would wear would be fifteen inch

and she wouldn't dare wear ballerina shoes."

"What are ballerina shoes?"

"Flat shoes."

She is accurate. Very, very accurate.

"I think I am that obvious," I say and she nods.

"So, what happened to you?"

I drink from the cup before taking a deepest sigh. I hardly talk about Amanda. I don't bring her up to my friends. She is just a past that happened and I wish I could keep her there.

"Well, someone I loved got engaged in front of me," I say

and she gasps. I don't even know why I am telling her this. She doesn't have to know that a woman was once my weakness. Not anymore.

"Have you forgiven her?" she asks after what seems like a decade.

"I...well...does that even matter?" I ask and laugh.

"It does. Where is she now? Do you even know?"

I think she is too innocent for me to her the truth. The truth that I am fucking around with the same person who fucked my heart up.

"Well," I shrug, "She doesn't matter now."

"You know what my mother says about forgiveness? She says when you don't do it, then that other person has a hold on your life. They move on and live their life while you are down and out." And there, Amanda just ruined my evening. I start the car and drive out of the parking lot to her flat. This time I park just before the gate.

"Thank you for the ride...and coffee," she says while unclipping the seat-belt.

She waves at me before

disappearing inside the building.
Why am I still here? Staring at
people? Staring at the direction
she went?

Back in Cape Town, I work my
butt off to get a new investor.
We manage to get one in a month
and a half's time and that means
I can fly to Joburg to see my
sister and her son. My life is in
Cape Town - such a lonely life
though. Everyone else is in
Joburg. It is about time I
relocate my office to Gundo's
building.

I landed just after seven in the

evening. I dine first, before heading to Taboo for my date according to Maria. I pick our usual table by the corner. I always pick the darkest side of the club. No light reaches here. The waiter takes my drink order. Whiskey! I order him to keep an eye on me and always bring a refill whenever I run out.

Minutes later, she shows up. She is exactly how Maria described my type. She is in a short black leather dress and red stilettos. Her hair is long and shiny, just the way I like it. Her lips curve into a smile when she notices me.

She gives me a warm hug before getting on the chair.

"How have you been?" I ask.

"Great. It has been a while."

"Right?" I smirk at her. She smiles back. But, Amanda is too beautiful. More beautiful than I thought she was when we met. Why did I even think I stand a chance with her?

I shake my head.

"Are you okay?" she asks. She always catches me staring at her. I cannot help it.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"My usual," she says. My

designated waiter for the night notices my hand and hurries to my table. He takes Amanda's order and takes my glass to bring me a new drink.

He hurries back with Amanda's champagne and my whiskey. It is starting to get packed but he can keep up. He places the champagne bottle on the table and gives us space.

She keeps staring at me.

Why is it hard for me to forgive her?

I let her dance half of the night when she is tipsy enough to do so. She shows off her curves as she

goes down seductively. By the time we leave the club, I am turned on to the core. She knows which buttons to press.

This is our usual game.

I get her to the house. I always tell Zizipho to give me space. I don't want her son to ever see me with a woman in my house. So, Zizipho makes sure that I have all the freedom when I get there. Amanda knows her way around here. She leads me to my bedroom and strips her clothes off when we get there.

She undresses me and gets on her knees. I wouldn't say no to a blow.

It is always perfect, mostly with my hand fisted in her hair.

By the time she bends for me, I pump out everything I could. It has been a month. A long damn month and a half.

She grips the edge of the bed and lets me release. She didn't even reach her orgasm, did she? But her moans were good enough to tell me she enjoyed.

We are both drunk and the room is almost spinning. I grab a tissue from the pedestal and pull the condom off. She gets in the duvets while I proceed to the bathroom.

Why do I feel empty?

I don't feel better. I don't feel anything. My reflection on the mirror is as dull. I feel empty like I am giving my life away.

"You know what my mother says about forgiveness? She says when you don't do it, then that other person has a hold on your life. They move on and live their life while you are down and out," Maria's words ring loudly in my head. I have been trying to ignore them since the night I had coffee with her. Her mother is right.

When I return to the bedroom,

Amanda has already fallen asleep.
I get on my side and pull her to
my chest.

I feel myself drifting away.

Only when my alarms rings do we
wake up. I put my alarm off and
go back to sleep. Amanda shifts
and lets me pull her into my chest
like I did when I came to bed.

She likes it when I do so.

"How did you sleep?" I ask.

"Fine," she mumbles.

I sigh deeply.

"We need to talk."

She lifts her head and stares at
me.

"What's up?"

"We need to stop this."

"What? Why?" she asks. Because it is the right thing to do, duh!

"I forgive you."

"What?"

"I forgive you. I don't want to use you anymore."

"Where you using me?" She pulls away from me.

"How do you explain this thing...this thing we do?"

"I thought you still loved me."

"I hate you Amanda. I do not love you. I am never capable of loving anyone."

"But...this?"

"What is this? When you wake up

here, you are going to run home to wash me off and pretend to be a perfect wife when your husband decides to come back from his business trips."

"I can leave him..."

"If you loved me, you would have stayed," I say. "I needed you to stay then. You never did and that showed me that you didn't love me enough. You never loved me Amanda, you never did."

"Please."

"Don't make things difficult, please," I beg. She is starting to tremble but she won't cry though. That is how cold she is.

"Please."

But really Amanda? Did she really think that I am going to ask her to leave her husband? The very same husband she chose when I loved her? She chose.

"Did you meet someone?" she asks. I laugh. She knows the answer to that. She ruined me. I am not capable of loving any one. Sometimes I think I took this heart break deeper than I should have. Maybe it is the humiliation. "Amanda," I say and try to take her hand. She pulls her hand away from me and jump out of bed.

"Njabulo...you love me. I love you,"

she says, on her feet now.

"No, you don't," I say while getting up. Love? What is love? She doesn't even know the meaning of it. I won't be fooled. I grab my boxers and put them on them off before pulling a gown from the hanger.

"Njabulo, I love you," she says as I walk to the door.

"If you loved me, you would have stayed when I needed you," I say. I mean it. I am doing her a favour. I cannot continue to use her.

I grab my phone and leave her in my room for the kitchen.

No breakfast today; she needs to leave. I make myself a cup of coffee while calling an Uber for her. She is sitting on the bed when I walk back to the room. "Your Uber arrives in fifteen," I say.

"Go to hell," she says while walking towards her clothes.

"I am already in hell. You drove me there," I respond while grabbing my pants from the floor. I took out my wallet to sort her out.

"I don't want your money. I am not your prostitute."

"Ouch, Amanda," I say.

What does a man do other than fucking around? It has been a number of weeks since I broke up "that thing" with Amanda. She tried calling me for a week but I didn't entertain her. It is better when I am far from her. I just like the fact that she hasn't pulled the stunt of coming to my house announced. I haven't heard anything from Zizipho, so I take it she is behaving.

Today I drove my sister and her son to the bus station. They are leaving for Kwazulu Natal for a visit. Had I known, I would have

stayed in Cape Town and not opted to work from Johannesburg. There is nothing for me to do here since I don't get to chill with Amanda. I don't have an excuse to drag my feet to the cinema with my nephew.

"Care for some drinks? I am paying" - I text Gundo.

"Ciara's swimming game tonight. You can come join us. The more the merrier."

"No man, have fun with your family."

"Thandeka is home with the kids. I'm sending you the location."

My phone pings for the last time

and it is the location of Ciara's school. Cheering Ciara will be better than getting myself drunk, sitting in the darkness.

Gundo is on his feet when I get to where he is. He is cheering for Ciara like he has a bet on this game. Like, a hundred dollars kinda bet. That is how much this man is fully behind his daughter. I get on the chair next to him and stare at the pool.

"She is taking the lead," Gundo says while clapping his hands. What? She can damn swim. If she is taking the lead, then she is going to win this one, it doesn't

matter how many laps they take. The rest of the swimmers are way behind her. Ciara flips her little feet to the wall and change the direction.

It doesn't take long before Gundo claps his hands and sits down. She has done him proud. This family thing suits him perfectly. He is a proud father, despite his brother's betrayal.

She does a few more laps with the other groups. Out of all the laps she does since I got here, she won half and took second on the other ones. She is so competitive; you would swear she

is Gundo's daughter. Maybe it is a Radzilani thing.

After the contest, Gundo leads the way to the parent's waiting area. It is only parents allowed at this side of the walls so we stand by the entrance where Ciara would see us.

"She is a star hey," I say.

"You can say that again."

"Come to think of it...you used to love to swim. Are you sure she is not your daughter?"

"The DNAs prove that she is not...but that doesn't matter man."

"Of course! So, how is everyone at

home?" I haven't seen them since the braai that he hosted at his house. I have seen Gundo in meetings and work.

"Everyone is fine. Everyone including Maria," he says.

"Dude..."

"I know you are interested to know even though she has a boyfriend now."

"She does?"

So soon?

"See? I knew you would be interested." He laughs at me.

"You should see your face right now."

"No, just that the last time I

saw her she was single. Where would I take a church girl?"

"Some men don't waste time," he responds.

"I didn't want to hurt her. She doesn't deserve a person like me, you know that. And...anyways, I am not interested in women."

"When are you going to move on from Amanda? Dude, it has been decades."

"I have."

"Then what is going on?"

"Nothing. I am fine." I look away. Ciara takes our attention. She comes running to her father to show off her medals.

"Hi Uncle Njabulo," she says. Good mannered.

"Let's go, Mommy is waiting to see your new medals," Gundo says while leading the way to the parking. I get a minute to catch up with my niece.

When we get to the car, she takes the back seat while Gundo tell me that Zola is coming to South Africa for a visit. He is probably coming to visit with his family of four. I am the only odd one out.

"Hey man, I'll see you," I say as Gundo gets into the car.

"What happened that night when

you dropped Maria home?" Gundo asks. He has rolled down the window. He already started the car.

"Nothing happened. I dropped her off...that's all."

"Then why was she asking if you were back?"

"She did?"

"See, you are interested?" he says.

"Did she asks about me?" I ask. He laughs.

"I thought you were not interested," he says while reversing the car.

"Did she ask or not?" I ask and

the bastard leaves the parking lot without giving me an answer. But, why would she? Did she?

EPISODE 4

MARIA

This is so weird but nice. I no longer spend my weekends alone or following my room-mate around. I haven't seen Thandeka in two months and she cannot stop to rub it in my face that Luzuko is keeping me away from her.

Luzuko and I decided to try things out to see how far we can go. He asked to court me and I

agreed. He didn't attempt to beat around the bushes and I didn't even waste time. I know I am emotionally ready for a relationship - I just want to keep things slow, really slow. He is my first official boyfriend. My mother has been the strictest mother I have ever come across. I would attempt to date a boy but she will find out and lecture me until I break things up with him. The most horrific dating scenario for me was when my mother dragged me to this guy's home, to tell him that it was over between us. We

were not really dating-dating at that time. My mother heard that he was spending time with me. When I thought of having a boyfriend, I ended up getting discouraged before a boy proposed. Rudzani Radzilani has always been my eye candy. The problem with him was that he was a womaniser. Rudzani is Gundo's younger brother. It still makes me laugh to think that Thandeka once thought her husband was a womaniser. This guy was the "it thing" in our village. I do not know any girl who didn't crush on him. So, he used to be my eye

candy. The Radzilanis are kind-of well off for a village family so Rudzani had that thing. From high school, he used to dress perfectly. He wore the latest pair of sneakers and had pocket money to feed the whole family. I cannot say much about Gundo since he is older than me and also, he has always been an uptight guy. I dated Rudzani in my dreams. I have. Then there was Thulani. If only, he would have given us a chance. Thulani cares so much for his sister that I found myself falling for him. I think he didn't take me serious because I was

too close to Thandeka. Maybe he took me as a sister too, I don't know. Ohhh, no! I know why he thought we wouldn't work; Njabulo's sister. I remember he liked Zizipho so much that he even took her to Wimpy for a date. I think that is why. I never stood a chance.

Talking about Zizipho and Njabulo... where is the brother man?

Mxm, why do I even care? He lives in Cape Town.

Distance was Thulani's excuse about us not working. I would have made a plan to make us

work, honestly. We would have made it work.

So, Luzuko is my first real boyfriend. This is exciting. Our very first date was in Montecassino. It was my first real-real date where a guy pulled a chair for me. He is quite a gentleman and I like that a lot about him. I think we spent the whole afternoon getting to know each other. He is quite reserved, very reserved actually but in these two months, I have gotten to get used to it.

"Are you even listening to me?"

Dikeledi asks. She has been telling

me about her boring job or something like that.

"Huh?" I snap my eyes at her.

"You were not listening," she says and gets from the couch. My eyes follows her when she walks to the kitchen to drop an empty bowl.

She comes back with a bottle of water. See, Dikeledi wears the shortest bum shorts pyjamas ever. I had to get used to her.

In fact, I am grateful that she wears clothes in the house now.

When we met, she didn't mind walking to the kitchen in nothing but just underwear. I used to be so uncomfortable until she noticed.

She drops on the couch and changes the remote. I don't even know what we were watching - I was deep in my thoughts.

"What were you saying?" I ask.

"When are you meeting your boyfriend?" she asks.

"Tomorrow after church," I say.

"Don't you get suffocated by this guy?" she asks. What? Luzuko is a nice guy.

"Why?"

"He is always picking you up for movies and small dinner dates and all."

"What is wrong with that?"

"You don't always look excited,"

she says.

What? I like those dates. We are getting to know each other. We are learning about each other's hobbies and all. It is just that sometimes I am tired, so so tired after a long day at work.

"Sometimes I am just a little tired you know?"

"What did he do?" she asks.

"What do you mean?"

"What happened between that Sunday when you met him and now? The giggling is not the same."

"What Sunday?"

"You met that Sunday...and had

coffee, right?" she asks.

"Uhm..."

"You were giggling the whole night and when I asked you why you were so smitten, you just said you met a friend for coffee. So, that giggling is gone. No matter how many times he takes you out."

"Oh!"

"Didn't you go out with him for coffee that evening?" she asks.

I can't lie.

I don't want to lie. But, I don't want to tell her the truth.

"I went out with a friend. A family friend."

"It wasn't this guy?" she snaps her gaze at me as if she just discovered a gem. Can she call him by name? "So, this family friend...is he a guy or girl?"

Yoh! Why did I tell her about him?

"Guy!" She giggles so hard. "Why are you giggling at me?"

"What is his name?"

"Does it matter?"

"Yes, because that is the guy you are supposed to be going out with. Now, you seem forced to go out every day. What is his name?" she asks.

"He is not my type," I mumble.

"What do you know about types?"

What is his name?" she asks with her phone in hand. She is about to find him on social media. She searched and found information about my colleague who was giving me bad vibes at work. She can even dig further than social media.

"Njabulo," I say. "I know nothing about him."

"Leave that to me," she says.

"Give me anything you know about the guy?" Dikeledi's boyfriend works in a security clearance company and she can give him any name to scrutinize.

"No, Dikeledi, I don't want you to

dig on him. It isn't right," I say. It would feel like a betrayal. I get on my feet and head to the kitchen.

She plays with her phone as if what I just said doesn't matter. This is my queue to go to my room.

There is always a meeting after the church service. Since the Sunday I met Luzuko, he offered to drop me home after each service. And now that I am his partner, it only makes sense. I wish I could leave and have him pick me up when we are ready to

dine.

Just half an hour later he shows up to the car.

"I am sorry..." he says as he jumps into the car. "The Pastor always takes his time."

"It's okay," I say. I tell him that I don't mind but I think I do mind. I just don't want to hurt his feelings.

"What do you feel like?" he asks as he reverses out of the parking.

"I am keen for anything."

"Nandos' will do, right?"

"Yeah, yeah," I say.

He puts on the music softly and takes us to the Nandos which is

closer to church. We keep stealing glances of each other. He has the most angelic smile ever. Like, he is always smiling like he is at peace. That is so refreshing about him. He looks like an open book.

We haven't told each other that we love each other – because we are not there yet. It gets awkward sometimes when we run out of things to say. The more we spend time together, the more it is getting easier for us to engage. All relationships do not necessarily start with a spark, right?

When I get home, Dikeledi is lying on the couch. I have given up on

the number of times I have invited her to join me for church. She jumps up when I get to our little living room.

"Njabulo Buthelezi," she says.

"Dikeledi...please," I say.

"I swear I didn't clear him. I just found his Instagram page."

"How because I didn't tell you which Njabulo he is?"

"I went to your Facebook page...and then got to a group picture of your friend's launch...and he was tagged."

"Oh my goodness Dikeledi?"

So much trouble to spy on a person.

"What? I wouldn't have known that you fancy a hot man like him? Like you went to coffee with THAT man?"

She turns the phone to me and there are a few pictures of Njabulo

I leave her and head to my bedroom. I already know that she is going to follow me and force this conversation to happen. She is nothing like Thandeka but we have grown to like each other so much that she has become that annoying sister.

"Tell me why you are running away from this?"

"I am not running away from anything. I just don't like it when you go against my word," I say. I take off my hideous dress. I had to wear the same dress that Njabulo frowned when he looked at it.

"Okay, let's chat about this and I will never ever bring it up, I promise."

"Okay, what do you want to know?" I ask while putting on a night dress. The most comfortable clothing item I have in my closet.

"Why are you avoiding him?"

"Because I have a boyfriend," I

say. And Njabulo is not interested in me and he never will be. I have seen him a lot of times and never have I wished to be his girlfriend. As fancy as he looks and how catchy he is and how funny he is, he is not an open book. He is not like Rudzani, who I would crush on for so many years without feeling guilty. Njabulo is not that kind of a guy. He doesn't look at women. He doesn't smooth talk women with his charms, he lets them be and he keeps his distance. So, I cannot like a person like that even if I wanted to.

"What else?"

"He is from Cape Town."

"Well...okay...that only can be a challenge," she says.

"Thank you," I say and with that, she leaves the room. I know she will never ask me ever again since she promised never to bring it up ever again. She will never bring it up.

Njabulo is a mystery.

Mondays are the most hectic days of the week. For some reason, our boss books meetings with clients on Mondays. Mrs Masango owns a logistics company and I work in the reception area. It is a small

company but its clientille is amazing. I share the table with Nomusa who is also a personal assistant to our boss. She has been working for Mrs Masango for four years now and she knows her moods like the back of her hand. During the meetings, she leaves the desk to take minutes so I am mostly alone on Mondays. After directing the clients to the correct boardroom, I have a minute to read a chapter of a book or check my whatsapp. Just when I pull my phone from my bag, I notice a text message from Luzuko, asking me if I want

to grab something after work. We usually meet like these. We haven't visited each other and I prefer it like this. I would find it awkward when we have to share the couch.

"Should we go out for supper after work?"

Eish, I know I am going to be exhausted when I get home. I don't feel like going. I type my response and delete it again before I could press send.

A delivery guy appears from the door. I smile at him before putting my phone down. I will attend to Luzuko after I have

taken these flowers to the rightful owner. I already know they belong to Livhuwani. Apart from the flowers arranged for the reception area – which we have already received for this week – Livhuwani is the only person who receives flowers almost every week.

"Good day," I greet while getting on my feet and circling the reception desk to sign the board. My other job is to receive mail and all sorts of deliveries and take them to their rightful owners. "Hi..." he says while checking for the board. "I have a delivery

here for Miss Maria."

Wait, I am the only Maria in this small building. I smile. I have a boyfriend now. These kind of things happens when you have a boyfriend.

I pick the pen and sign on the board. It is yellow roses.

Ncoohhh!! He just made my day. I don't really love flowers but this is a great gesture. I am impressed.

How can I say no to supper after such a gesture? The card reads: I don't even know if you love flowers but would you like to go on a dinner date with me?

"Hello," he says. He sounds to be busy with something while on the phone.

"You knew I wouldn't say no to supper after this...I love the flowers," I say.

"What?"

"The flowers you sent. Thank you," I say.

"What flowers?"

"The yellow roses?"

"I didn't send flowers."

"You didn't?"

"No. You got flowers?"

"Yes. No. ooh...they are probably for our office reception."

"Can I call you later? I am busy

programming something."

"Sure."

I glare at the card and flowers.

They are definitely not for the office desk.

I notice a sign at the back of the card: N Buthelezi.

EPISODE 5

MARIA

Njabulo Buthelezi. Why would he

send me flowers? Or is Dikeledi

trying to mess with me? I flip

the card a few times, trying to

get some numbers I could call.

Nothing. He didn't leave a number

for me to call. He or she didn't leave any number. I cannot be so sure that it is Njabulo sending me these flowers.

I set the roses on the table and try to shift my mind to work.

Yellow roses, huh? I do not know much about flowers but I am definitely sure yellow roses represent friendship. Maybe, he wants us to be friends. Maybe it isn't even him. I suspect Dikeledi so much. She wants to see if I am going to be excited about the flowers or not.

Of course I am excited. These are my very first flowers, ever.

My reception phone rings. I sigh deeply and pick the phone.

"Masango Logistics, good day, how may I be of your assistance today?" I respond. This is how I pick all the reception phone calls.

"Listen to you, sounding like a professional." Njabulo's voice is too obvious to miss. I think it is his mocking tone that is easy to pick.

"Yes, I am professional, always."

"I just got an email that my flowers were delivered. Do you even like flowers? I was told girls love flowers."

"How did you know where I work?"

"Because...we share same friends," he says. "Also, it is easy to get anyone these days." I trust the latter. Dikeledi found his Instagram account so simple. I have scrolled through his wall. It is quite an interest account. "I don't like flowers...but thank you."

"I thought so. So, what is the answer? Would you like to go on a date?"

"Uhm...I thought you said you don't go to dates."

"And you said I must go to dates to get to know people. I am in Joburg these coming weeks and I

thought I could catch up with friends."

"Am I your friend?"

"Are you not?" he asks. Why am I smiling?

"Tonight I am going out for supper with my boyfriend."

"And you promised to tell me all about your date when we meet. When do we go out for supper?"

"I don't know," I mumble. I feel like Luzuko will feel betrayed when he finds out that I went out for dinner with another man. Another man who is as intimidating as Njabulo here.

"You know that I don't want to

mess with you, right? You have a boyfriend and I wouldn't dare take you away from him," he says. Why do I sense pain in his words? "You know...I think...look...I don't want to make you uncomfortable and I don't want to disrespect your boyfriend. Never mind, I asked."

Oh.

Disappointment! I am disappointed.

"Thank you," I murmur.

"Let me not keep you from your job Miss Masango Logistics, how may I be of your assistance today?" He mimics my voice.

"Really now?" I ask and he laughs out loud. He likes to mock me.

Maybe he likes to mock people, I don't know much about him.

"Thanks again for the flowers."

"Don't mention it. I was told girls like flowers...but you proved me otherwise."

"I am special."

"I have noticed," he says and then there is silence. Only minutes later does he clear his throat and tells me he has to go. He hangs up, leaving me giggling to myself. I am giggling at how he said, Miss Masango Logistics, how may I be of your assistance today?

How do I not roll my eyes at him? Nomusa only shows up at our desk after two hours. She looks exhausted and the formal shirt which was once crispy and perfectly ironed is now crumbled. The flowers make her smile before she settles on the chair next to me.

"These are so pretty," she says while picking them. "Are they for Livhuwani?" What did I say about Livhuwani receiving flowers every week? She is the only woman who brings these flower companies here almost every week. At least she has an office

to display the flowers.

"They are mine," I say. "From a friend."

"I need a friend like this," she says while smelling the flowers.

The only problem about these flowers is the fact that I have to catch a taxi with them on my lap. I don't even own a vase but I am taking them home. I will invade Dikeledi's cupboard to get a perfect vase.

After work, I am home before Dikeledi is. I knew I would find a vase somewhere in the cupboard. I place the yellow roses in my room so that my roommate

doesn't have to ask me too many questions. But chances are, she is going to follow me to my room for a chat.

I freshen up and change into a pair of jeans and a blouse. Nomusa and I wear uniforms for our reception job. I am forever on a pencil skirt and a company formal shirt every day. It helps me save my clothes for weekends. Luzuko calls me when he is downstairs. I am dreading to go to him. I wouldn't want to lie to him about the flowers.

He dines us in a restaurant just a few streets away from my

apartment. They serve expensive traditional food.

"Did you have a hectic day like I did?" Luzuko asks while folding his white formal shirt. He has that perfect smile on.

"It wasn't as hectic," I say. It really wasn't as hectic as his. I know because he always calls me or chats me up the whole afternoon when he doesn't have much work.

"I didn't even finish today's work...but I couldn't miss our date," he says. I give him a tight smile.

I didn't know relationships would

be boring. I am not even in a mood to stay up and chat. I want to cuddle my pillow and watch a movie.

"When are you going to invite me to your apartment?" I ask. I am tired of these small dates. Can we watch TV together or something?

"Would you like to visit me?"

Duuhhhh?

"Yeah," I say.

"Anytime. I didn't want you to think that I am moving too fast."

"I would like to see where you stay. We can do so on Saturday,

though? I would like to go home after supper. I have a long day tomorrow."

The waitress brings our food. We are both having beef stew. The rest of the night, he tells me about his meeting with the Pastor on Wednesday after the evening service. I already know it is to discuss the lady he is seen with almost every Sunday. I tell him not to mention our relationship with the Pastor. I don't want to feel pushed or forced because the church leaders are aware of our relationship. I grew up in church to know a few

people who felt obligated to marry. I don't want to find myself in that situation. He looks offended, but I am not going to change my mind.

"So, do you like flowers?" he finally asks when we are heading to the car. This is the question I was praying he doesn't ask. I don't want to be cornered to tell a lie.

"Not at all," I say. They are meaningless to me.

"Did anyone send you flowers?"

"It was a friend," I say while getting into the car.

"A guy sent you flowers?" he asks.

"A family friend," I say. I feel so

so guilty.

"I see." He starts the car. "Do you have many male friends? You didn't mention them."

"Well..." I chuckle. How do I explain that he isn't a friend? This is awkward.

"I would like to meet him. Together with your other friends," he says.

"I will invite you when Thandeka and her husband hosts a braai or something. They always invite us for lunch...they enjoy hosting people. You are going to love them."

"That is lovely," he says.

Phew!!

What is wrong with me?

Every time I glance at the flowers, my mind wanders to Njabulo and how funny he is. I am supposed to be getting ready for church but I am sitting here, staring at the almost dead flowers. They were only fresh for a week. I don't know if that is how they are supposed to be. Maybe I didn't maintain them the way they were supposed to be maintained. The ones in the office last for longer.

Sometimes I wish I could call Thandeka and asks for Njabulo's number so that I could ask if we could go out for a friendly date.

But, I don't want to come off as if I am desperate. I don't know why I feel like this.

My phone beeps. It is an alarm I set for me to leave the house on time. I never want to be late for church. I get to pick my favourite chair.

I pick my bag from my bed and hurry out to wait for a taxi.

Luzuko left for Limpopo for a funeral with some members of the church to represent our

Pastor. He would have been picking me up.

09h40 and I am already seated. The church is almost empty, with just a group of intercessors walking around the hall, praying. Minutes later, people are walking in. We are about to start. I pull my bible and place it on the chair next to me and go through my phone. I could text Thandeka to join me for lunch after the service. But that would be unfair of me to think of her because I know I will be bored after the service.

Someone picks my bible and

settles next to me. The scent is so familiar that I have to lift my head to check the person invading my space.

"What are you doing here?" I whisper. I scan him from his head to toes. He is on a formal suit.

"Wow...What?" he says and giggles. "Maria, what are you doing here?"

"Really Njabulo?"

"What? I came to visit this church. Wow...I didn't know you come to this church," he says. I cannot help but smile because I know that he is lying.

"You are in church...you cannot lie,"

I say.

"How are you? You look lovely," he whispers instead.

"Njabulo."

"What?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to church. Are visitors not allowed?" he asks with a shrug?

The programme director calls out for people to stand on their feet and greet a few people before we start with the service.

"Give them a hug and tell them that God loves them. Tell your neighbors that they look beautiful," the programme

director directs from the stage. The worship team is preparing to start. Njabulo gets on his feet. I do the same and start greeting people sitting in front of us. He shakes a few hands before turning to me.

"God love you...and you look very beautiful my sister," he says and pulls me into a hug. He lets me suffocate in his arms. His cologne, filling me. He doesn't know about the Christian hug because he has tightly pulled me in his arms.

My sister...

Really?

"God loves you," I murmur back

when he lets go.

The band starts playing. God, this is not happening. Njabulo is singing softly. I can hear his thick voice humming the song perfectly. I am tempted to watch him but I fight the urge. He is the one to steal glances of me.

Why am I feeling hot? I am the only one suffocating here. He seems perfectly fine.

By the time the service is over, I feel like running away to breathe in some fresh air. Instead, I lead the way outside. I can feel him behind me.

Thank God Luzuko is not here to witness this. I know I promised to introduce him to Njabulo, just not when I am panicking for no reason.

"That was a wonderful service," he says when we step out of the church.

"It was," I say. I hardly listened to the message. My mind was just wandering around.

"Where is your church boyfriend? I tried matching you with all those band boys," he says with a smirk.

"Epic fail, all of them."

"He is not here today."

"Oh, in that case you don't have

anyone to buy you food. Let me," he says.

Really Njabulo?

"Who said I am hungry?"

"If I am hungry, you should be starving," he says.

I could play hard to get, but he just wants to buy food, that's all.

Before I got here, I almost asked Thandeka for his number.

"I am joining you just because I am hungry," I say.

"And because you enjoy my company," he says while leading the way to the parking.

"Don't flatter yourself."

"If I don't flatter myself...are

you going to flatter me?"

"You wish," I say and he laughs.

"At a scale of one to ten, how hungry are you?" he asks.

"Uhm, four?"

"Okay. You are not too hungry.

Please accompany me to Witbank?

I need to drop some documents

there. We can grab lunch there if

you want. I'll buy you light food

for the road."

"Witbank?"

"Just an hour and a half away,"

he says. "I won't steal you. Text

your friend and send them a

picture of my car...just in case you

don't return home safe."

"Should I be scared?"

"You have all rights to be scared. I am not your boyfriend."

He had to remind me.

I don't have anything to do when I get home so this ride won't kill me. I swear his eyes glittered when I tell him that we can drive there together.

The whole drive to Witbank, Njabulo has been telling me lies only. I am dying from laughter. Out of all things he has told me, I don't trust that he was an SRC leader. I refuse to believe him. Half of the trip, he tries to convince me. Two hours later, I

still don't believe him. Njabulo, an SRC leader? No.

When we get to Witbank, he gets me a snack before we go drop some document at some hotel. He said one of his clients is staying here and he needed the signed documents urgently. As promised, after dropping off the documents, he takes us to Billy G for an early supper - we didn't make it for a lunch buffet.

"Eat as much as you can, we have all evening," he says as we are dishing the starters.

"All evening? I have work tomorrow."

"Konje!" he says. "Then let's eat, I should be dropping you home at eight."

"Not all of us are blessed like you."

"You promised to tell me about your date with your boyfriend," he says.

"It was fine. Nothing much to share."

"No, there should be something interesting because he won your heart on that date," he says.

"He is a wonderful guy," I say. He really is.

"Just not your type? You don't look excited."

"What is my type?" I ask. He

stares at me the same way I stared at him the other day, calculating me.

"A man who lives in church. Who prays three times a day...? A focused man who wants to settle down and get married...but he must be fun and spontaneous."

"I am that obvious, huh."

"Too damn obvious."

"But he is all that."

"Wonderful."

"Why don't you bring your girlfriend around when you come this side?"

"I don't have a girlfriend," he says.

"Why not?"

"Love is too expensive. I don't think I have enough to pay the price."

"How is it expensive?"

"I don't know how to explain it. But, I don't want to feel like...I am not enough." His issues are deeper than I thought. His face has changed. His smile is gone. I would have loved to ask about that person he once told me about, but maybe the timing is wrong.

"I bet you, you are going to get married and have children. Love is not expensive at all.."

"Over my dead body," he says.
Very sure of his words. I wait for
him to tell me that he is joking,
but he doesn't.

Wow.

"I think you are scared of
commitment."

"I hate commitments. I don't
think I'll ever find myself in one.
Over my fucking dead body."

Oh wow.

Anyway, he came out with the
truth about how he ended at my
church. He has the same issues I
have with Thandeka and Gundo;
you want to give them space to
be with their family. He was

lonely and I know how that feels. I go through it sometimes. And he needed someone to ride to Mpumalanga with. Nothing more. We stay at the restaurant for drinks after supper. He is having his whiskey, even when he still has to drive us home, and I am having a few glasses of juice. When I am with Thandeka, I do have a glass or two of wine, but never on a Sunday.

It is half past eight when we leave for Johannesburg. Of all days I have been out with Luzuko, I can never match them to just a day I spent with

Njabulo.

Isn't life supposed to be fun like this? Or is it that there is a spark between us? Or maybe I am crushing on a man while I have a boyfriend? The sad part is that Njabulo is far from what I am thinking. He needed a friend to drive down to Witbank with, nothing more, and nothing less. I am so disappointed in myself, for my wishful thoughts. What would this do to Luzuko?

We have been driving for an hour before Njabulo stops at a filling station in Benoni. His excuse was that we need water and snacks. A

part of me thinks he just wants to delay dropping me at home. It is just a wishful thinking that he is enjoying my company as much as I am enjoying his.

I pick an ice cream and he gets more bottles of water. It should be after ten as we speak.

My phone rings just when we buckle our car seats, ready to leave. I close my eyes tightly, wishing that whoever is calling will think I am sleeping. It doesn't stop ringing and I immediately know who it is.

Luzuko usually calls once and text me; but my mother will call until I

answer. I don't want to find out what will happen if I don't pick up the phone. She will definitely call Thandeka to go to my apartment to check that I am still alive.

Njabulo glances at the screen and smiles.

"Hello, Mma," I say.

"Maria, how are you nwana wanga?"

"I am fine, Mma."

"Did you go to church?" she enquires.

"I did."

"We had a guest Pastor today. It was an amazing service. You know

he was talking about faith...and he unlocked something that I didn't realise was very important?" she says before taking fifteen minutes to preach to me. I stopped Njabulo from starting the car. If she picks that I am not home, she is going to give me a lecture instead. I shrug at Njabulo who is now sliding on his seat. He has a smirk on his face, ready to mock me when I am done on the phone. "It was a wonderful service," I say, to cut her short. "Let's pray," she says. "What for?"

"Operation life partner? You haven't told me anything solid yet. The guest Pastor told us not to tire from what we are asking God to do in our lives."

"Mma, we don't have to...right now..."

"You are going to work tomorrow," she says. "Just fifteen minutes since you are going to work tomorrow. Put your phone on speaker and let's pray nwana wanga." Njabulo is staring at me, ready to burst into a laughter.

"Go on Maria."

I hesitantly put the phone on speaker and cover my face as my

mother goes on and on and on about how God must bless me with a perfect man. Again. I haven't told her about Luzuko - because I don't want to be rushed into anything. I should have told her that God already blessed me with a man. She wouldn't be telling God to make me look desirable to only the right man for me. Njabulo is having a blast. He is enjoying this so much. My mother though.

"Maria, were you praying?" she asks after twenty minutes in prayer.

"I have a prayer request Mma,"

I quickly say.

"Yes? God can do anything for you," she says.

"I have a friend and his name is Njabulo. He is struggling with forgiving someone who painfully broke his heart. Can you pray for him before you go?" I ask. When I turn my face to Njabulo, he no longer laughing. He is frozen listening to my mother lashing out verses to share with him when I see him. She prays, a heartfelt prayer, asking God to touch Njabulo's heart wherever he is. I think forgiveness is so close to her heart that we can both feel

her voice breaking. I am shedding a tear and Njabulo has his face bowed like he is also praying. Only when she says AMEN and hangs up, does he open the door and jump out.

Oh, no.

I also get out of the car and walk towards him. He is leaning on the back of the car.

"Njabulo, I am so so sorry... My Mom always asks me to pray for my friends. I shouldn't have told her that."

He doesn't say anything. Instead, he pulls me into a hug. I can feel his heavy heart rising and falling.

"No one has ever prayed for me,"
he says.

I could pray for him everyday..if
only.

If only.

If.Only!!

He lets me out of the hug and
stare down at me.

"Lets get you home before your
boyfriend calls a search party on
you," he says.

EPISODE 6

NJABULO

Get your ish together, Njabulo!

I watch as Maria hurries to her

apartment. I just dropped her off from our drive. She turns and waves at me – just as she did the first time I dropped her home. What an eventful evening? The time is 23:30. Most of the time was stolen by her mother who prayed. She prayed for me. 'It was just a prayer,' I tell myself while starting the car and heading home. I should just stop lying to myself. It was more than just prayer. It was more. By the time I get home, I throw myself on the bed without a shower. It was such a wonderful day with a wonderful girl. Maria is

a special case, I tell you. I like how grounded she is. Lucky is that bastard boyfriend of hers. I don't know if I was just reading too much to the situation, but she didn't look excited when talking about her relationship. What do I know?

I am a lost case when it comes to love and relationships.

Only now do I go through my phone. I had put it away so that no one interrupts me and Maria. For some reason, it felt like the right thing to do.

There is nothing important on the phone. Just a few messages

from Amanda asking if I am in Joburg. Her seductive pictures make me throw the phone away. I know that much, she is a distraction. She is not fussy but she is always looking forward for us to meet. Maybe to change my mind about my decision. It is not going to work. Not when Maria's face keeps flashing in my head. I shouldn't have drunk too much whiskey last night. My phone is buzzing on my pedestal, informing me to wake up.

Can I sleep in?

Dammit!

I reach for it and snooze it a few

times before I actually wake up. I am working from Creative Marketers' offices this week. I wish I didn't agree to this. Gundo will definitely be at work on time since he drops his daughter at school before work. He doesn't have an excuse to sleep longer than he shouldn't. Maybe I should offer to take Zizipho's son to school this coming week so that I stick to the time.

Arggg, my head is pounding!

Dammit!

It takes me forty minutes to get myself ready for work. I pray, I pray there is no traffic to work or

else I'll flip.

The house is quiet when I get downstairs. My sister and nephew are already gone for the day. I pick an apple from the bowl and hurry to the office.

No traffic! Thank God.

"A cup of coffee...a full breakfast...please order for me," I say to Gundo's PA who sits just outside his office. There is no longer anyone sitting outside the office which was assigned for me. I am hardly here so there is no need to have a permanent person waiting to serve me.

"How would you like your coffee?"

"Just the way you like it," I respond and she blushes. I have that effect on women. "With cream and two satchels of sugar, please."

"Got it, I will order right away."

"Is your boss in?" I ask and she nods. "Can I see him?"

A few soft knocks and I find myself in Gundo's office. I help myself to the couch while he finishes a conversation on the phone. It takes him a few minutes before he angrily places the phone piece back on the table. I raise my brow for him to explain what is frustrating him so early

in the morning.

"Some unhappy client," he says, uninterested.

"Unhappy?"

"He approved everything but now he changed his mind after print."

"That aint our problem," I say.

"As long as the client approved the work in writing...he cannot back down."

"I wish it was that simple."

"It is that simple."

"Did you get the documents to Witbank? I haven't spoken to Sakkie."

"I dropped them yesterday," I respond.

"And, what is with the smile?" he asks. I didn't even realize that I was smiling to myself. I cannot tell him about my time with Maria. For some reason, it seems sacred. Like, it was just between me and her.

"My wife says she gave you directions to Maria's church." What? I thought I asked her to keep it to herself. "You cannot keep a secret between lovers." So, they gossip about people. "Now I know."

"How was it? Did you go?" he asks and then laughs when I nod at him. This is why I don't tell

him everything. He always finds a way to mock me.

"She is a friend. You know that."

"I don't know anything."

"She has a boyfriend."

"Does he even exist?"

"He does. He called her in the afternoon." She was blushing when talking to him.

"Soooo..."

"So, I cannot persuade her even if I wanted. You know that very well."

If I could, I would turn her against her boring boyfriend. I just don't want him to go through all the pain that I went

through. That pain of investing everything in a woman only to find that her heart is somewhere else. Someone could ask why I haven't moved on from years ago. I think that was just the most painful heart break ever. Maybe because I gave Amanda everything in me. I gave her all fibres of my body. Everything. I did things for her. I sacrificed for her. But the more I think about it, the more I realize that it was my own fault. I was just stupidly in love with a woman who was using me.

I wish I could just move on but

that incident turned my world around. It made me woke. It changed the way I viewed life and the way I viewed women. Of course, I can never put Amanda and Maria in one basket....but she is a woman. She is capable of hurting her boyfriend the way Amanda hurt me. I don't want to make her that kind of a woman. I wouldn't want her boyfriend to feel weak and miserable like I did when I realized that Charles Mbambo won my girl.

"I am hosting Zola and his family over for lunch," he says.

Thank God we all want to move

on from the topic.

"You mean, you want to host a party." If I count on how many times Gundo hosts braais and family dinners, I could be rich.

I think I would do the same if I had a family like his. He always host his friend every third month. It keeps him closer to his family and friends - something I don't have.

"Just a few friends."

"By just a few friends, you mean the whole town...I understand," I say and he gives me a smirk. He knows what I mean. But I am definitely going there because I

know for a fact, Maria is going to be by her friend's side. She is going to play hostess with her friend.

"I am going to Pretoria with Phuti for a meeting," Gundo says, changing the topic once again.

"Joel wants to see us regarding his company merger."

"Do you have anything lined up for me?"

"It is a quiet week. Just get us more money."

"I am on it," I say while getting on my feet. "How would you like me working permanently across you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What if I seal the deal and I occupy the office across the floor?" I repeat myself. I think I am tired of the back and forth to Cape Town. I am just wasting money and I should just choose where I want to end up.

"Does this have anything to do with Maria? If so I need to buy her a gift," Gundo says with a grin.

"Dude...you don't want me to change my mind," I say and he laughs. He was keen for us to open an operating company in Cape Town when he was ready to

start his life there with his wife. Now, that they are back in Joburg, his language changed. He wants me here instead. I don't mind Joburg. Everyone is here to hustle.

Gundo's PA walks in with my breakfast. She sets it on the table and leaves.

"Come back to Joburg man...there is enough room for you here."

As promised, Gundo and his wife are hosting a family dinner for Zola and his family. Obvious, friends are also invited.

I have been excited since the

morning. It is Saturday and I couldn't even focus on my errands for the day. I haven't asked but I am certain that Maria is coming. Her smile is welcoming. Her voice is soothing. Her face lights up the darkest room. That is the face I have been longing to see. We haven't spoken since I dropped her home after our Witbank trip. Out of all trips I have been to with any women, that trip was the best. She didn't mean to make me fall in love with her...but something about her draws me closer. If I say I didn't miss her this past

week, it'll be a lie. If I say I didn't dream about her, I'd be lying.

She occupies my mind. She invades my dreams.

What is wrong with me? She has a boyfriend.

"Pretend she doesn't have one...just tonight," I say to myself as I pull up at Gundo's house. A few cars are parked. I already know a few cars on the drive-way.

Zola is already here with his coloured children. The most adorable children I have ever seen. His wife is sitting next to

him. She is wearing a jean and an African print blazer as if she is trying to fit in. His daughters are almost teenagers now. They have made him softer now.

"I was hoping to see your family," he says after we shook hands. He is mocking me. We follow each other on social media and he would be one of the first people to receive my wedding invitation.

"I couldn't rent one on time," I say. It sounds like a joke but it isn't. if I had a choice, I would rent a family for a day. That is how much I feel pressured sometimes when I am around

Gundo.

"No need for that," Zola says. He has changed from that overprotective friend. He now looks like he minds his own fucking business.

Thank God his wife is following him around for him to ask me about Amanda.

Where is Maria?

I proceed to the kitchen where Thandeka is busy with something. Her twins are hugging her legs, trying to grab her attention. It is chaos. There is no sign of her friend. My heart drops because I know Maria is the first to arrive

on days like these.

"Are you okay? The rascals are fighting for your attention," I say while grabbing one twin from the floor. He fights just for a few seconds before he lets me carry him.

"I am so used to this," she says. I am tempted to ask if Maria is coming or not. I don't want to come off as desperate.

Just before I could embrace myself, Maria walks into the living room with a guy behind her. I hold the twin tightly and watch her - and watch them.

"Friend, sorry... we had a meeting

with the Pastor first," Maria says. She looks at me and gives me a weak smile. I know what I am supposed to do. I must stay away from her.

"It doesn't matter now...I need help with the boys. The nanny is away this weekend."

Maria picks the boy from the floor. She tries to keep her eyes away from me. I get the message.

I turn towards the porch without saying a word. Gundo is busy with the meat; he doesn't have an idea why I ran away from the kitchen. No one knows. I

pick a chair next to Zola and everyone wants a piece of Gundo's son. He is that adorable. I hand him over to Zola's wife. Everyone here is going to help baby sit while Gundo's wife gets work done from the kitchen.

The people I was running away from walk to the porch. Maria is in a casual dress. A pink, knee length dress, that looks just fucking perfect on her. She has her braids tightly styled, showing off her perfect face.

She introduces her boyfriend to everyone who is sitting around the chairs. Zola looks at me with

pity. What does he know? Gundo has the same look.

Pathetic!

I hate feeling like this.

Maybe I could have some work done in Gundo's office. See, I am used to being around Gundo's married friends but I feel pitied on. I don't want anyone to feel pity for me. I hate that.

I grab a cold beer from the cooler box and head to Gundo's home office. This is my small haven at times. I could connect my phone on WI-FI and check on my most demanding emails. Instead, I am just sitting on Gundo's chair,

staring on the ceiling.

Maria's boyfriend! He looks like a perfect lad. He looks like a perfect match for her. He is reserved and looks like those well-mannered man. He is that God fearing man that she spoke about.

Nxa!

Why am I even bothered??

Does it matter what he looks like?

I take the last sip from the bottle and drop it on the table. I cannot even get myself to open a simple email. Luckily, Gundo has a TV here and I can catch up on soccer.

A soft knock on the door takes my attention. The door slightly opens before Maria shows herself. She closes the door and freezes right there.

"Are you not hungry?" she asks. I shake my head with a smirk.

Isn't she just sweet? Everyone is probably dishing for their husbands.

"I am not hungry," I manage to say without sounding rude. In my heart I want to ask her what she is doing here. I closed the door for a reason.

"Njabulo?" she calls me, sweetly.

"Yes," I murmur.

"Are you avoiding me today?" she asks.

I huff out a laugh. "Don't flatter yourself. Why would I be avoiding you?"

"It looks like you were fine before I showed up."

Corrections! Everything was fine before you showed up with your bloody perfect boyfriend.

"I am fine. I was fine then."

"I don't think so," she says.

"What do you think, huh?" I ask while jumping up from my chair.

"I think you are avoiding me."

"Why would I be avoiding you?" I ask while taking a few steps

towards her. She moves a step back before I could even get closer to her.

"I don't know. You tell me," she mumbles.

I walk closer to her. She is now leaning on the door. Nowhere to run to.

"You know why I am avoiding you?" I ask. She is now breathing heavily. Am I scaring her? if so, I don't mean to.

"Why?" she whispers the words.

"Because you decided to bring your boyfriend here. He wasn't supposed to be here."

"Why not?" she whispers.

"Because I don't want to break his little heart."

"How?"

"When I talk to you. When I look at you."

I get to where she is standing. A part of me wants to rip her apart and kiss her until she cannot breathe and the other part doesn't want to break her precious relationship.

"How."

"Don't pretend like you don't know," I say. My breath on her face. She knows what she does to me. She is driving me crazy. She drives me crazy. I couldn't sleep

the whole week.

"Tell me," she whispers. I trace her lips. They are juicy as hell and I wish I could devour them.

Jesus!

"Stop it..." I say. She must stop playing this game.

"Tell me Njabulo," she whispers.

"Do you know where Maria disappeared to?" I hear the voices from outside the room. She heard the voices too, that is why her eyes are widened. It is her precious boyfriend. I quietly press my body against hers to keep the door from opening. If anyone is looking for us, they won't find us

here in a compromising situation. I press my weight even more and she sucks in a breath with her eyes closed. This is sexual, but asikholapho. Someone tries the door and it seems locked. It is not locked. It is just our bodies pressed on the door.

"When I see her, I'll direct her to you," Gundo responds. He says something else but they are already walking away from the corridor.

That was close.

Maria sighs when we break apart.

"Stop wandering off...you are

giving your boyfriend a hard time," I say.

"Njabulo," she whispers.

"Go back to your boyfriend...he is worried sick about you," I say.

Her eyes turn dark. It doesn't bother me. I am doing the right thing here.

"Please...don't close me outside," she says; her voice begging.

She doesn't know what she is doing. She sucks in her breath when I look down at her. She doesn't know what she is asking for.

"Your boyfriend is looking for you," I say while walking back to my

seat.

"Njabulo."

"Go, Maria. Please," I say.

Fuck it, I don't want his world to come crumbling like mine.

"Maria, leave!"

EPISODE 7

MARIA

I know he is trying to close the door from not opening...but I am tickled. His cologne is very...manly. I stare at him as he presses me harder on the door. I cannot help but suck my breath. Is he going to kiss me? Is he? Can he?

"When I see her, I'll direct her to you," Gundo says from behind the door after someone tried opening it. The voices fade away when Njabulo still has his body buttering me.

Can he kiss me?

Will he?

He moves backward, giving me room to take a deep sigh.

"Stop wandering off...you are giving your boyfriend a hard time," he says.

He is not going to kiss me.

"Njabulo," I say instead.

"Go back to your boyfriend...he is worried sick about you," he say. I

don't want to be anywhere else but here. I want to stay right here.

This is twisted but for some reason...I don't care much.

"Please, don't close me outside," I beg. I don't want to leave him alone. Is there something wrong with me?

He stares down at me, making me suck in my breath. Njabulo.

"Your boyfriend is looking for you," he says, walking back to his seat.

"Njabulo."

"Go, Maria. Please," he says.

"Maria, leave!"

Why does this feel like a dagger in

my heart? I am so so so embarrassed but I sternly lift my chin up and compose myself. It is fine. I will leave him alone.

I open the door and storm out.

The pair of eyes that I meet down the corridor belongs to my best friend. She is chatting up with one of the guests but she raised an eyebrow when she notices that I came from the room where someone knocked.

Why am I emotional?

I make my way to "my room". I need some air. I need to breathe.

Few minutes later, the door opens. It can only be Thandeka.

She has one of the twins on her back.

"Maria, are you okay?" she enquires. She looks worried – very worried.

"I am fine."

"What happened?" She is still standing by the door.

"He introduced me to the Pastor earlier today." I didn't want to go but I also didn't want to come off as disrespectful when the Pastor requested for my presence.

Apparently, people have been seeing us together and they were rumors that we were involved. As a Pastor, who protects his flock,

he had to see the both of us. I shouldn't have gone there. I met the Pastor and his wife; and that makes our relationship official. I am disappointed in myself for going there; knowing very well that someone else makes me feel excited in the insides.

"Uhm...that is a good thing, right?" she asks. I shrug. The man I want is in the office but he kicked me out instead.

I shouldn't have brought Luzuko here. He insisted since I promised him that I would introduce him to my friends.

"I didn't want him to officiate the relationship like that. I feel trapped now."

"Is it Njabulo?" she asks.

That obvious, huh?

"He doesn't want me."

"But..."

"Njabulo has issues. Issues I cannot fix."

"But..."

"Maybe I should just focus on my relationship Thandeka. Maybe I should give Luzuko a chance to be in a relationship with me. I am not giving him enough chance while I am busy falling for a man who doesn't want me. Luzuko

loves me. I think he does."

"But you don't look happy Maria."

"I think I am just confusing myself." Nzabulo is

just...something else. Like, he is doing exactly what Thulani was doing to me. I don't know hey.

"He was looking for you."

"Let me go see him before he gets worried," I say while standing from the bed. I wish I could leave. I don't feel like chilling here.

Luzuko is blending in quite well with the people who are sitting at the porch. He enjoys the debates about the bible because

he knows it from the first to the last page. He breaks down all chapters with so much ease.

"Can we go?" I whisper to him. I no longer want to be here.

"What?"

"I am not feeling so well," I respond with a frown. I am lying and should be ashamed of myself.

"Is it why you disappeared?" he asks while getting on his feet.

"Do you want me to take you to the doctor?"

"No."

"Maybe we can get you tablets or something," he says. I nod.

Thandeka looks at me with puppy

eyes when I tell her I need to go. Only her and the man in the other room know the truth why I am leaving. I am running away.

Luzuko drives me to the Pharmacy to get me a few tablets before taking me home.

"I love you," he says before I could step out of the car. This is the first time he mentions it. I stare at him. I wish to tell him that I don't feel the same but those angelic eyes are looking at me and his smile is confusing me. I don't want to break his heart.

"Maria, it's okay...you don't have to say it back."

Thank you.

I grab my handbag and drag my feet to the house.

This is crazy. I haven't seen the man I adore for over six months. Why is it so difficult to let go of Njabulo? I haven't seen him for more than six months now. Worse, I was told that he permanently moved to Johannesburg but he is running away from me. During the twins' birthday party, Thandeka told me that he flatly refused to come to the birthday party because I was going to be there. It broke my heart that I didn't

get to see him. Another thing that teared my heart was a few pictures I saw on his Instagram account. Two months ago, Njabulo was tagged by this girl who was sitting on his lap. Her caption was: He is taken. That means, he has a girlfriend now. The picture was taken inside a car – a different car. It wasn't the Polo that I know but he was the one driving it.

He is taken. I don't even know why it bothers me. He has been single for as long as I remember. I respect his decision. It is just weird that I cannot get over him

even when we didn't even date.
When I even have a boyfriend.
The only time I see him is when
my roomie and I spy on him on
social media. He doesn't post much
so it doesn't help.

TV is boring on Friday nights. Or
maybe I feel lonely! Have you ever
been in a relationship but feel
lonely? That is how I feel
sometimes even when Luzuko is
free to take us out. I am being
unfair on him but the time when
I told him that we cannot work,
he asked that we give it a
chance. He has never done
anything wrong but love me. He is

failing in love with me every second of the day. He is also delighted to meet my mother. She was insisting on praying for a life partner and I was really getting annoyed that I told her I found one. She was delighted when I told her about it and now that she was coming to Johannesburg, she wants to meet him.

Somebody shoot me right now.

"Pizza, anyone?" Dikeledi asks the moment she walks into the house. I smile at the box she has in her hand.

"Oh, yes," I say while getting off from the couch.

"What's up? You look grumpy."

"I was just bored."

"Let's go to the club tonight."

"No, please." I am not in the mood.

"Tomorrow?" she asks. "You promised me a Saturday night clubbing. You have been dragging me to your church...can you just join me once? I bonused so the bill is on me."

"How am I going to go clubbing when there is church on Sunday?"

"We won't stay for long."

"How are we getting there?"

"Stop with the excuses. My boyfriend will pick us up. You won't

drink, so you'll obviously wake up on time."

"Where are we going?" I hesitantly ask.

"Tabboo."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"You miss him. It'll be great to bump into him, don't you think?" she asks. We have been spying on Njabulo and the man sure spends some Saturday nights at Taboo. Dikeledi said she is sure. He hardly posts a picture of himself. He posts just a glass of whiskey or even the artist performing. I

don't know if I want to spy him
live from across the room.

"No Dikeledi," I say. The thing is,
by now we already know when he
posts so, this weekend, I am dead
sure he is going to be there. He
usually goes there mid-month. A
pattern that Dikeledi picked from
his posts. You would swear that
she is an investigator.

"We are going there. I promise I
won't make you speak to him. You
will just watch him and we will
return home."

"My mother will cast that
persistent demon out of you," I
say and she smiles. She knows she

just won.

"I have a perfect dress for you."

Indeed, she had a knee length leather dress for me. It is literally something I wouldn't pick from my closet. I like it, compared to the skirt she is wearing. It is short and almost showing off her behinds. It is Saturday evening and I feel like I am trembling as we make our way to an Uber that is waiting for us from outside our gate.

Oh, my goodness, Maria. What are you doing? Luzuko doesn't know about this. I told him we are going out for supper. If I

mention the club, he will come flying.

The club is buzzing, with people dancing smoothly in the middle of the dance floor. It doesn't matter that it is not yet month end, the place is packed. There is no way I am going to see Njabulo here, if he is here. The thought makes me relax.

Dikeledi gets us a table next to the smoking area. She smokes, now and then, when having beers and stuff. She taps a waiter's shoulder and gives him a few hundred rand notes while whispering our order before

sitting down. He returns with an ice bucket with a bottle of wine, bottles of water and just a few bottles of Savanna. I thought I was not supposed to drink tonight. Anyway, we have a little principle. For every glass of wine I take, I should finish a bottle of water too. This way, I will still be on my feet when we leave.

On her fourth bottle, Dikeledi is almost at a peak. I heard that smoking while drinking alcohol makes you get sloshed faster. She is getting there. Thank God her boyfriend showed up an hour ago. He is occupying a table with his

friends.

My heart skipped a beat when I notice Njabulo moving to the other side of the dancing floor. It looks like he just got here. He is holding hands with a tall woman in a red dress. The chairs are full, so he stands with her at the corner of the room.

I feel hot. Dikeledi is too busy to notice.

My heart sinks when I notice that the girl he is standing with doesn't look anything like the one who tags him on the Instagram posts. He has his hand on the small of her back while she

whispers in his ear.

Wow!

Why did I even come here?

I take three huge sips of my wine. I am half-way the bottle but as sober as they come. It is the water I have been gulping the whole evening.

Aw! Aw! I need to pee.

I pick my clutch bag and yell in Dikeledi's ear. She cannot come with me since the table will be left unoccupied. The toilet is just here, so I rush in to relieve myself and freshen up.

"What?" I say to myself when I noticed the time. It is almost

mid-night. We need to go.

When I return back to the club, there is commotion at Njabulo's corner. I widen my eyes when I see two men grabbing Njabulo's arms, exposing his front body to a huge fat man in a suit. Without a warning, the man throws a hundred punches on Njabulo's stomach. Some punches going to his face. There is nothing that Njabulo can do. The two men are holding him tightly while the other guy feast on him.

I scream, with everybody else and the DJ stops the music.

Oh, my God, Njabulo. The

bouncers run to get to where the fight is. The three bouncers pull the men away from Njabulo. I watch as he drops on the floor and curl himself. His face is bleeding.

"Stay the fuck away from my wife...you bastard," the fat man yells and spit on him. He fights the bouncer to let go of him. He stares at Njabulo's date before telling her to follow him. She does as she was told, leaving Njabulo on the floor.

"Njabulo...are you okay?" I call out, getting on my knees. He flinches when I touch him.

"Njabulo!"

He stares at me before asking me what I was doing there. One bouncer picks Njabulo up and helps him to the chair, next to the bar. In no time, the party continues without a care

"Is he okay?" Dikeledi asks. She is now sober. We all are.

"He is badly hurt. I don't know what to do."

"Help me to the car, please," he groans.

Dikeledi tells her boyfriend, who helps him to the parking lot. He is in pain. He came in a different car.

"How are you going to get home?"

"You cannot drive," I ask.

"I'll call my sister to come," he says.

"We need to go...Ndamu wants to pick his cousin from Vaal," Dikeledi says.

"You go, I'll wait here with him. I am sure his sister won't mind dropping me off when she gets here."

"Okay, call me when you get home," she says and rushes to where her boyfriend is. I have switched off my phone already. I didn't want my mother to call and panic.

Njabulo calls his sister to call an

Uber and come to where we are. When done, he places his phone on the arm rest and stares at me.

"I deserved it," he says.

"Oh you did. What were you doing with someone's else wife when you have a girlfriend anyway?" I snap.

"Who told you I have a girlfriend?"

Oopsss! See what spying on people does?

"Isn't it obvious?" I ask and he shakes his head. "A married woman Njabulo?"

"She also deserved to be used," he says.

"But.."

"I was wrong, I know," he says.

"She is my ex." The one that broke his heart? I don't ask. I don't want to bring her up.

"I see," I mumble.

"What were you doing in the club Maria? Do you drink now?"

"Well...I was having fun just like everybody else?"

"In the club?"

"Why not?"

He shifts and carefully sits. He stares at me, with lust. If only he knew that I have been thinking about him for months.

That, I have been praying that

the flowers deliveries made to our reception were from him, apologizing or even asking me for ice cream. Anything. If only he knew how I longed for him to call me and bother me. His eyes are communicating with me.

"You are a big girl...don't listen to me."

"If you were so worried about my boyfriend being in the picture...why weren't you worried about your EX's husband?"

I had to ask that.

I miss him so much and it is his fault.

Without saying anything, he slowly

lifts his hand and caresses my cheek. His palm is soft but the back of his hand is not. It is like he is telling me something without using words. I close my eyes and let his back of his hand romances my cheek.

I feel him.

I need him.

Again, I wish he could kiss me...or maybe I can kiss him instead. His eyes are shimmering with lust. He feels what I feel.

The bang on the window startles me. Njabulo pulls his hand away and let the window down.

"Njabulo...are you okay?" Zizipho

asks.

"What happened to you?" another voice says. The driver's door is opened and the girl from Instagram rushes to pat her hands all over him. He flinches but she doesn't stop. She is genuinely worried sick about him. She lifts her eyes at me.

"Hi Zizipho...I thought I could wait with him," I quickly say so that she knows I am not an enemy.

"Maria?" Zizipho calls out. "What happened?"

"I don't know. I found him fighting with some men," I say

while getting out of the car.

"Njabulo...why fight, huh? I thought you said you just needed a breather," the girlfriend whines while helping him out so he could seat at the back. I make my way to where they are so I could chit chat with Zizipho. Njabulo doesn't say anything; all he does it to stare at me with those eyes I fell in love with. I don't know what he is trying to communicate...but he doesn't need to apologise if that is what he is trying to do.

"Are you driving?" Zizipho asks.

"No...I..."

"Get in, I will drop you home,"
Zizipho says.

The girlfriend is worried sick about Njabulo. Now I understand when he says he cannot hurt my boyfriend. This woman has her heart invested in this and I am not a demon to destroy her heart. The drive from the club is awkward. We are all silent except Njabulo's girlfriend who is mumbling how much she was worried sick about him when Zizipho woke her up to accompany her. He stays with her in his house.

Zizipho stops at my apartment.

"Thank you Maria," Njabulo says from the back seat.

"My pleasure. Goodnight everyone," I mumble before shutting the door and watch them drive away. I drag my feet to the house.

"Are you okay?" Dikeledi asks when I shut the door. I rest my back on the door and slide down to the floor, breaking into a cry. What is happening to me? I don't know how I feel.

"Are you okay?" Dikeledi asks, panicking.

"I shouldn't have gone with you tonight," I say in between sobs.

"What did I do?" she asks with a shrug.

"You made me fall in love with a wrong man...all over again," I say and she frowns at me. Maybe the wine is only intoxicating me now.

EPISODE 8

NJABULO

Can she be a little careful?

I flinch as she tries to help me with my clothes. Tinyiko has been my girlfriend for three months now. Quite a beautiful lady who loves me dearly. It has just been a few months but she has fallen

deeply in love with me.

Jeez!! I think that bloody Charles broke my ribs. Dammit. My body burns from the pain. My face is fucken messed up. It is swollen. Tinyiko unbuttons my shirt with her eyes on mine. Her eyes are warm. Not as fiery as Maria's. I tried so hard, for these past months, to forget about Maria. It has been what? Seven or eight months since Gundo's family dinner. From that day, I knew I should just stay the hell away from her. I am not good for her. "Are you okay?" Tinyiko asks while pulling my shirt off my shoulder.

We are standing in the middle of the bathroom. I nod as she unbuckles my belt. It would have been for something special, but my body won't take any of that. All I need is a dozen of painkillers and sleep. She helps me out of my slacks.

"I am sorry."

"For getting beaten up?" she asks and giggles. I am sorry for leaving you while I mess with my bloody EX. She doesn't deserve it. Amanda has just been persistent for us to meet. Tonight, I thought we could just dance and part ways. My days with her are

over. She does call me now and again, requesting money and the stupid me would give her a few bucks. It is the hold she had on me or I am just stupid. I think the latter, it is.

She helps me into warm bath.

The moment I settle in it, I wish I could sleep here. She had poured some bath salts that are soothing me as I soak in.

"I'll get you water and some tablets," she says before leaving the bathroom. I am such a bastard. It is after midnight but she is going up and down as if she is a nurse on duty.

"Go to sleep my love," I say. I need to feel this pain. There more I feel it, the more I'll be reminded to stay away from trouble.

"Painkillers?"

"Cannot drink painkiller after whiskey," I give her a perfect excuse and she walks away.

I slide down on the bath tub and rest my head on a little cushion. I don't remember when last I used this damn thing.

I close my eyes and the only face I see belongs to a woman I fell in love with. Maria. Why did she have to see me tonight? Like

that? Her perfect shimmering eyes haunt me. I didn't get to see her smile tonight. She was as worried sick as Tinyiko.

Tinyiko. I snap my eyes open. She is sleeping in the next room and here I am fantasising about a woman I can never have.

I just can't help it. It feels like I can smell her. Like, I can feel her close to me.

I can hear her voice, her words ringing loudly: "what were you doing with someone else's wife when you have a girlfriend." What I cannot get off my mind is her yelling at me and asking that if I

was worried about her boyfriend, why wasn't I worried about my EX's husband.

She doesn't know, Charles came into my picture. That would make me a Charles if I interfere in her relationship. It has been seven or eight months, they might be getting married next week. She might have been at her bachelorette's party for all I know.

"Are you still fine?" Tinyiko asks.
She is not sleeping?

"Why are you not sleeping?"

"I am waiting for you. I need to make sure that you are warm and

in bed," she says.

"Give me a minute," I say before she leaves the room. I follow her minutes later, trying my best not to ask for pain killers. How am I am going to learn?

She tries to curl around me as we both sleep.

I am woken up by a sharp pain on my rib.

"I am sorry," Tinyiko says while sitting up. "I was trying to go get you something to eat. It is already morning but I am not sure about the time."

She gets out of bed.

"What time is it?"

"Just after ten," she says while putting on the gown.

"I have lunch later. I'm not yet hungry," I mumble and she leaves the bed.

I wonder if Maria made it to church. Even though she didn't look drunk, she did have a hint of dry wine in her breath.

I just remembered her face. Her soft dark beautiful face. I long for her touch.

It takes about a week for my body to be better and almost normal. My right eye is no longer swollen, so I can go back to work.

I hated staying indoors. I even had to stop myself from driving to Maria's work place just to see her. I stopped myself from ordering her flowers. I just don't know what to do. Tinyiko stayed with me the whole week. She stays here more than she does her place.

Everyone is in a great mood today. I can tell from the receptionist who welcomed me with a widest smile. I know it is a Friday, but the vibe is different from the other Fridays.

Anza, my PA, is leaning on the table, having a chat with Gundo's

assistant.

"What is going on?" I ask as I head to my door. Anza quickly moves to her desk as if I will bite her.

"Sir, I didn't know you were coming in today," she says.

"Fine. I thought I should come in today," I say. I know it is awkward to show up at work on a Friday. I was bored from working in my house.

"Should I get you anything to eat?" she asks.

"Chicken Mayo sandwich and black coffee," I say. Before I could move to my office, Gundo jumps

out of the elevator. He is wearing a pair of jeans and sneakers.

Okay, something is going on here.

"Look, who is here," he says as he approaches where I am. I look like his boss. I am in a long sleeve black shirt, tucked into grey formal pants. I hardly wear casual during the week. Gundo doesn't dress casually on Fridays too.

"Why is everyone in such a great mood?"

"Because, we are having a party at twelve."

"A party?" I ask, putting my hand in the pocket. "What are we

celebrating?"

"Appreciation party for our employees? It is long overdue."

"Why does this happen when I am not around?"

"You are around now," he says.

"Mr Radzilani, do we get to drink alcohol?" Anza asks. I turn to her and she quickly looks down.

"Alcohol will be served after three," he says.

"Andd..."

"And we got a sponsor," Gundo jumps in before I could even finish my sentence. He knows I wouldn't have approved.

"Enjoy. Anza, you can join them at

twelve," I say.

"Thank you Sir," she says. Hey, she cannot even hide the excitement.

"Ain't you joining us?" Gundo asks.

"What? I am the only one who is in formal wear. You guys have fun."

"Nonsense. You are joining," he says.

"Call your girlfriend to come by. My wife is coming over later when she knocks off at three."

"Ahhh..." I drag.

"On second thought, don't call her in. We need to catch up. Don't call her," he says before opening his

office door. I do not have much of a choice. We are catching up indeed.

Anza disappears on me the moment she brought me my food. Gundo's PA is also gone. I cannot blame them, the whole building is buzzing. Phuti brought me a bottle of whiskey, which I opened an hour ago. It is half past three.

I attended to a few emails and set meeting for next week. I would like to go home but don't want to disappear on Gundo. I roll my sleeves and pick my glass of whiskey. I am getting one last

refill and I'll be out of here.

Tinyiko has already called me, telling me that she rented movies for us. I hate that ish but sometimes you have got to do what the wifey wants. That came straight from Gundo's mouth. Who am I not to listen? He has nailed this relationship business. I am taking my baby steps and it looks promising.

I take the stair case to the roof top. I can already hear the loud music. If there were people who loved to party is Phuti and his buddies. He is on the stage behind the DJ Booth. I cannot help but

smile. you'd swear he doesn't work here.

I thought alcohol was served an hour ago...but people are already tipsy.

Where is Gundo?

I search the floor until I find his back. He is conversing with people I cannot see from here since they are seated and he is standing.

Tinyiko is waiting. I just need one last glass and I am out of here.

"Hey man...I think I should....."

"Hi!" she waves at me. Maria is here.

"Hi," I say before clearing my throat.

"You finally left your office," Gundo says. What is this? He has a smirk on his face. I know he is mocking me right now. He is the only one who knows how I truly feel about Maria despite my relationship with Tinyiko.

"I came to ... see what is going on here," I say. I don't want to say my goodbyes anymore. Maria has her scorching hot eyes on me. That is all I see right now.

"Mrs R, don't you need a drink?" Gundo asks and Thandeka quickly gets on her feet.

"And a loo too," she says before they disappear.

Maria has a bottle of water in hand. She is not drinking alcohol. It would be weird to seat next to her so I stand.

There is awkward silence but the sound is blasting.

"You look so much better," she finally says.

"What are you doing here?" I ask instead. I want her to stay as far away from me as possible. She drives me crazy. She scares me.

"Wasn't I supposed to be here?" she asks.

"No...no...I didn't mean it like that," I quickly say. I am an idiot.

"Thandeka and I are going out for supper. She needed to see Gundo first," she says. "I didn't know you'll be here."

"I work here."

"You do?" she asks as if I she doesn't know. Obviously her best friend already told her.

"I do."

My phone beeps. It is Gundo asking me to join him in the office, to discuss Noel's portfolio.

He has no timing whatsoever.

"You must stop being a stranger, hey?" I say while getting up. She looks sad. I am sad too.

"It was nice seeing you again,"

she says and thereafter gives me a tight-lips-kinda smile.

Gundo is standing by the drinks table. He has a platter of food there aswell. Dude, I don't want to work on a Friday evening. Plus, Tinyiko is already waiting for me. He offers me a glass of whiskey. I take it because the other one is finished. He downs one glass and groans at the burning throat. It is almost getting dark outside. I am standing by the window, watching the hectic traffic outside. Friday afternoon are crazy. If I don't leave now, I am going to get stuck in traffic.

"Are we having a private party or what?" I ask while turning to Gundo. His laptop is not on the table. He doesn't look like he has something important to discuss. If he did, he wouldn't have downed that whiskey.

A soft knock on the door and Gundo flies to the door. He opens it and makes a way for his guest to walk in.

My heart jumps.

Maria appears. She looks confused.

"Please come in... Thandeka should be here in a minute. There is something we need to discuss," he

says. "Take a sit."

Maria hesitantly walks in and settles on the couch. I cannot help but stare at her dress that became shorter than it is when she is on her feet. A sleeveless pinkish dress. Come to think of it, I haven't seen Maria in pants. I shake my head, sip my drink and smirk at what Gundo is doing. This bastard! Gundo takes the key from behind his office door and gives me a grin. Even if I want to jump on him, he is way too far for me to reach him before he flies out.

"My wife and I thought you two

need to talk and stop this madness," Gundo says.

"Dude, don't you dare lock that door," I warn him. I have already lost, though.

"Just talk it out and get to the conclusion. We are both tired of you crying on our shoulders when all you need to do is to talk it out and solve the equation yourselves," Gundo says.

"Radzilani, don't you fucking dare," I sternly say. When Maria gets on her feet, Gundo walks out and shuts the door. She freezes when the door loudly locks.

The bastard!

Maria drops back on the couch. Wow! So, this is how I am going to spend the night.

"Maria, I'll be chilling right here...if he makes you feel uncomfortable, just call for me to open. Other than that, I will open in thirty minutes and I swear I won't eavesdrop," Gundo says from behind the door.

Thirty minutes is a lot.

"Excuse my friend. He loses a screw sometimes," I say and Maria giggles. "Thank you for joining me."

"Yeah? Thank you for inviting me," she says. Oh, she is playing

along. I smile.

"Would you like something to eat? We have...uhm...let me see..." I walk towards the platter, "...we have wings and riblets...and potato wedges."

She gets on her feet and picks a side plate. I grab the wine and pour her a glass while she dishes for herself.

"I am not drinking wine," she says when I hand the glass to her.

"You are going to need it," I say. She stares at me. I smirk at her and she takes the glass. I watch as she takes her seat. I stay standing by the window.

'Babe, order a pizza with Zizipho, something came up,' I text Tinyiko. I cannot tell her that my friend locked me in an office with a woman I cannot stop thinking about.

I watch as she bites on her food. She is careful. Very careful.

"How is he?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"We kinda took a break," she says.

I grin at her.

"What happened?"

"I refused for him to meet my mother...and well...I was drunk when he came to pick me up on

Sunday morning. Since you disturbed our Saturday night at the club, we decided to party at home...and we slept when I was supposed to be waking up for church."

"So, it is my fault?"

"How is it your fault? No, I am an adult. No one make choices for me," she sternly says. She is starting to get annoyed with me.

"I am sorry about your...break," I say. That was lame but I cannot take it back.

"Fine," she says, "and how is she?"

"Fine. She was just worried about

me getting into a fight."

"Luckily she doesn't know they were beating you up for messing up with their wife."

"Oh, please," I say and laugh.

"She looks like a wonderful person," she says.

"She is." I can never fault Tinyiko. She is perfect. I just don't like her.

"I used to stalk you and her on Instagram...I am sorry," she says. I widen my eyes. What the?

"That's how you knew I had a girlfriend?"

"Yes. I was always jealous of her," she says.

Can I commend this woman for her honesty? She is braver than me in many ways. And...that makes her sexy. Very sexy.

I think I am tipsy. She is done eating so I help her with the plate before getting on the seat next to her. I am scared though. If she touches me, I am going to explode.

She stares at her hand before taking a sip of her wine.

"Can I ask you to be honest with me? I will never bother you after this one," she says. I nod. She lifts her head and stares right into my eyes. "How do you feel

about me?"

"Uhm..." Brave woman, huh. I shift a little bit before taking her hand. "Maria, do you want me to be honest?"

"Yes."

"I...like you more than I should. I liked you from that day when Thandeka dragged you to me. When you asked your mother to pray for me...I got blown away. You captured my heart and I don't think no one will ever capture my heart like that. Well...I am just not right for you," I say.

"Who are you to decide for me?"

"I am one person who would hurt you. I don't want to break your boyfriend. I don't want to break Tinyiko. I am not as perfect as you."

"Then why are you with her?"

"Uhm...I don't know...maybe.."

"You are doing exactly what your EX did to you. Letting her fall in love with you when your heart is somewhere else. Same thing I am doing to Luzuko."

Now that she mentions it. I am worse. I have been dreaming about Maria while Tinyiko was lying on my chest. I would imagine Maria undressing while it is my

girlfriend doing so.

I am no better.

"You know what sucks? I always told everybody to follow their hearts and I never get to."

"Where is your heart?"

"With you." She didn't even hesitate to say that.

I groan and say, "Do you know what you are asking for Maria?"

She nods.

"Why do you think I am better than you?"

"I don't know. You are just sweet and I don't think you can ever hurt anyone," I say and she licks her lips. Dammit Maria. Her eyes

are hypnotising me.

"If I am perfect...why do I want you so bad when I know you have a girlfriend?" she asks.

I groan at the feeling that is making me feel chilly.

She doesn't move when I place my hand on her cheek. It is warm. Just as I thought, I am burning. I feel like I am about to explode. Her eyes, are shimmering with lust. She doesn't move as I move my other hand to the other cheek. This right here is a woman who can change my life. My heart is drumming under my shirt. I want her. I need her. She

closes her eyes when I move my thumb to her lower lip. From here, I can see her cleavage. As her chest rises and falls...I feel...like dying.

"Are you guys okay in there?"

Gundo calls out with a loud knock.

"Go away," I call out but he unlocks the door anyway.

He peeps through the door.

"Are you guys still fine?"

The bastard.

INSERT 09

MARIA

I freeze when Njabulo lifts his hand and lands it on my cheek. His hand burns me but I don't flinch. I want his touch so so so bad. He is shaking as he places his other hand.

Njabulo, I am so in love with you: I wish he knew.

This moment right here is what I needed for so long. So, so long. His thumb rubs my lower lip and I feel like screaming. Instead, I close my eyes and suck in my breath, ready to receive his lips. Njabulo! Can you kiss me already? A loud knock interrupts us.

"Are you guys okay in there?"

Gundo's asks.

"Go away," Njabulo groans. Gundo didn't hear him because he unlocks the door. Again he asks, "Are you guys still fine?"

Njabulo still has his hands on me and I am looking at him to finish what he started. We were almost there. Maybe all we need is this kiss.

"Don't we look like we are fine?"

Njabulo asks his friend. He is as pissed as I am.

"Thirty minutes is over and it was very quiet in here. My wife tasked me to make sure that her friend is comfortable at all times."

"Does her friend look uncomfortable?" Njabulo asks and I giggle. I am sure comfortable. "She looks very, very comfortable, if I must say," Gundo says with a grin. I am now shy. Gundo almost walked on us kissing. The kiss I have been waiting for so long. Gundo closes the door but this time he doesn't lock it. Before Njabulo could turn his eyes back to mine, his phone rings, forcing him to let go of his hands which were on my face. He clears his throat and picks his phone from his pocket. He stands and walks to where he was

initially standing when I walked into the room.

"Yes...I understand babe...I am sorry. That is why I sent you the message saying that something came up...No...I am still at the office...what? No...I know I promised...yes...okay...let me call you in a few minutes....sure...love you too," Gundo says on his phone. He has his back on me but I can easily see how tense he is. He has his one hand on his waist, trying to make his girlfriend understand whatever she is complaining about. It is obviously his girlfriend - he is worked up and

trying his best to calm her and sweet talk her. He told her he loves her too. It makes this whole thing very awkward. When he hangs up, I clear my throat and get on my feet.

"I am glad we got to chat," I say. I don't want him to feel guilty about what happened here. His girlfriend is obviously worried about him and he should be getting home to her. It hurts, but he has got to go.

"When am I going to see you?" he asks. I shrug. I really don't know. It will be up to him.

"You'll tell me," I say.

"Uhm....I am sorry again...my friend got carried away with this whole thing," he says. We are back at the first step. I just lost all hope to start over.

"Not a problem. I scored a free supper," I say with a smile. He smirks at me. I pick my handbag from the couch.

This is awkward! Really awkward!

"Thanks again," he says. He has said that before but it is fine.

"Good night," I say and head for the door. Gundo is sitting by his assistant's table. He has his legs rested on the table. His glass of whiskey is empty.

"Hey Maria," he says when he notices me.

"Where will I find Thandeka?" I ask. He drops his legs on the floor and quickly stand.

"She is back at the roof top. Did you guys talk?"

"I believe we did," I say shyly. He almost walked on us kissing. I cannot even look him in the eyes. I leave him standing and head for the roof top. The music is playing loudly now. Everyone seem to be in a greatest party vibe. Thandeka gets on her feet the moment she notices me. She picks her wine glass and walks straight to me.

She has a smile on her pretty case.

"How did it go?" she asks as if I was the one who instructed her to lock me into an office with my crush.

"We spoke," I say.

"And?"

"And his girlfriend called," I say. Her smile turns into a frown. I know she doesn't want them to break up if there isn't a reason. She is just on my side. And I appreciate.

"At least, you told him how you felt about him. Did you tell him?"

"I did."

"And you can move on knowing that he knows the truth, right?" she says. I nod. Even though I don't want to move on. I am willing to move on though. Njabulo is not going to break up with his girlfriend. I heard the way he spoke to her. I am not willing to be in a relationship with him when there is someone in the picture, so I lost him. Just like that, and I am willing to move on.

"You and your husband are sneaky," I say with a laugh. Who locks people in the office?

"It had to be done," she says with a laugh. "Should we go catch

a movie."

"Would you mind taking me home? I already ate my supper and I feel like turning in right now," I say. I am not in the mood anymore. I am angry at Gundo for disturbing us. I am angry at Njabulo for taking that call. But, maybe it was meant to be that way. Maybe it is a sign.

"I'll take you home," Thandeka says while walking back to where she was sitting. She picks her clutch and leads the way to the car.

Before she drops me home, Thandeka promises me a proper

supper without Njabulo or Gundo involved. I wave at her before she drives away.

I drag my feet to my apartment. Dikeledi should be home unless her boyfriend picked her up for the weekend.

The only person to welcome me into my living room is Luzuko. He is sitting on a couch, watching television. I am shocked to see him.

"Luzuko," I say and he quickly stands.

"My love," he says. "Your friend said you were out...so I thought I would wait for you."

Oh God, I am not in the mood.

Where is Dikeledi??

"I'll be back," I say and cross the room to Dikeledi's room. She is not home. She couldn't stay here with him in the house. But she should have warned me. I would have taken Thandeka's movie offer. I would have stayed at the party until the last person left.

I drop my bag on my bed and change the shoes before walking back to the living room. Luzuko is watching the news. His smile brightens the room when I enter the room.

"I missed you so much," he says

while standing. He was the one who chose to stay away. I didn't miss him at all.

"Would you like something to drink?" I ask while walking to the kitchen.

"Anything is fine," he says.

I get a juice for him and a glass of wine for myself. I need a glass right now, I am not going to wait for him to leave because it might be after the end of this evening. He stares at me as I settle on a single seater.

"Are you now drinking alcohol?" he asks.

"Is there a problem?" I ask. He

clears his throat.

"I was praying Maria...and I got a feeling that something is trying to attack our relationship."

"Nothing is attacking our relationship."

"Wait for me to finish," he says.

"Something is attacking our relationship and if we do not pray harder Maria...we are going to lose this precious relationship."

Precious relationship? I am miserable in this precious relationship. I can't.

"Luzuko, I don't want this relationship anymore," I say. He widens his eyes like a demon is

addressing him. I am not possessed. I am in my senses.

"We need to pray," he says.

No. we don't need a prayer.

"No we don't. I am not right for you."

"We are all humans. We can make mistakes. What I saw on Monday was just...well...you were just stressed perhaps."

On Sunday he came here to pick me for church. I had opened the door for him, drunk as hell. I puked on the floor with him watching me. He was disgusted. When he forced me to get ready for church, I fought him out of

the door. I went back to sleep and nursed my hangover until my mother arrived in the afternoon. When he showed up, ready to meet my mother, I refused him to come inside. I made a million excuses for them not to meet until my mother left for Venda again.

"I am in love with someone," I finally say.

"WHAT?"

"Yes. I cannot keep stringing you along Luzuko."

"You were cheating on me?"

"I would have cheated on you Luzuko...and I don't want to do

that. You deserve better."

"I deserve you."

"You deserve someone who will love you. Not someone who has to learn to love you. I can't." Luzuko looks like he was stroked by a lightning.

"I love you. What do you want me to do?" he asks and a knock takes our attention. I get on my feet and head for the door.

"Maria, are you in there?" Njabulo voice makes my heart jump out of my chest. He followed me. I turn to Luzuko who is already on his feet. "Maria. Open up. Are you in there?"

I freeze.

Luzuko passes me and walks to the door. He opens it.

"It is you?" Luzuko asks.

"Is Maria here?"

"What do you want from her?"

Luzuko asks. His voice has changed.

"I need to talk to her. I am sorry to disturb you but is she here?"

he asks. I force my legs to the door.

"Njabulo," I say. That is all I manage to say.

"Uhm...are you alright?" Njabulo asks.

"She is alright," Luzuko responds.

"Uhm...well... I had to make sure that you were fine," Njabulo breathlessly say. "I'll see you around." I know whatever he would do, Njabulo wouldn't want to cause drama. I wish he would; just this once. Luzuko and I watch as he walks away. I turn back to the house first. "Is he the one you like?" Luzuko asks as if it is a sin. "Please leave," I whisper. I want to be alone. I am on a couch now. "Maria...the devil is attacking us. I saw all these things. Believe me, not everyone is happy about our union."

"I am not happy too," I sharply say.

"You don't know what you are saying," he says. His voice has thickened. Why does he look scary now? He walks slowly towards me. His eyes are sharp, as if he is possessed. I catch my breath before he leans to stare into my eyes. "Maria, you don't know what you are saying. You don't. You don't know what you are saying."

"I..."

"Say it," he sharply says.

"I...don't know what I am saying."

"Yes. We are going to pray about

it...say it."

"We are...we are going to pray about it," I say, shaken. His eyes are still buried in mine. I flinch when he pulls me to stand. He pulls me closer to embrace me.

"I forgive you my love," he says while brushing my back. I flinch when he tightens the hug. "I forgive you."

I kept my phone off since that night. I don't want Luzuko calling me or texting me. When I missed church yesterday, he came banging my door. I didn't open. Today I am saved by the fact

that he left to Ulundi on Sunday evening. His job depots him to small towns to assist on IT infrastructures and stuff like that. This time he is gone for two weeks. If it wasn't for that, I was going to stay away from work. I would be scared that he will show up and get all weird on me. I still cannot shake away the thoughts of what happened on Friday night. He seemed possessed.

"One hour to go and we will be out of here," my colleague says. We had been complaining about how long this Monday was. Our boss

had endless meetings and we were both running around, making sure that everything was set for all her meetings.

"When last did you check the time? We are thirty minutes away," I say. It is almost four.

"Wow...Livhu's roses are delivered late today," she says. I lift my head to the entrance. It is not the delivery guy walking into our reception.

"Njabulo," I say, dropping the pen in my hand and walking towards him. He has a navy suit on. He has a new cut on. He looks like a gentleman so I can't help but

giggle. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to ask you out on a proper date. I don't want you locked in a room with me this time," he says.

"I knock off..."

"I will wait," he says. This time he brought red roses. I take the flowers and show him the couch. He turns towards the reception couch while I head back to the reception desk. I shake my head at my colleague. I am not explaining anything to anyone. At four o'clock, I take my handbag and flowers before following Njabulo out of the door.

He is driving a Range Rover, like the one I saw on Instagram. He no longer shows up in a Polo. I bet it was in Cape Town before he moved here.

I jump on the passenger seat while he gets in the driver's seat. "Your phone has been off since Friday," he says. It means he has been trying to get hold of me.

"Yeah. Sometimes, I switch it off," I say. I usually do when I avoid Luzuko. I want to tell him what happened after he left but I don't want to ruin this moment again.

He drives until he stops into a

new estate. I thought we were going out for dinner or something.

"Do you stay here?" I ask.

He smiles at me and says, "I wish."

The houses here are new and they are too far apart from each other. They look like farm plots in the middle of the city.

Njabulo stops at a glass house in the middle of the estate. The lights surrounding the glass structure are on – it is almost getting dark. There is a lake not far away from the glass house.

"Where is this place?" I ask. I am blown away.

"My friend Zola owns the place. He wants to open a wedding venue for his wife to run," he says as we walk towards the entrance. The glass house does look like a huge hall. It is glass everywhere, including the roof.

Wow!

A picnic is set in the middle of the hall. Cushions and all; and all sorts of food.

"I didn't know you were romantic," I say.

"There is a lot you don't know about me Maria," he says.

"I believe you," I respond as he helps me to a huge cushion. He

takes off his blazer and settles on the other cushion. "How did you get this done."

"Well, I made a few phone calls."

He passes me a glass of white wine. I must say, I am drinking too much wine these days.

"Did I get you in trouble on Friday evening?" he asks.

I clear my throat and shake my head. I don't want to tell him what happened. It might ruin the whole mood. I am still gunning for my first kiss.

"What made you move to Joburg?" I ask. We can rather talk about us today. Tonight. It

is getting dark by the minute, and the lights from outside are already beaming through the glass walls.

"You."

"What?"

"You made me move here. It was long overdue but you made me stay," he says. Isn't this just cute? "I was tired of the back and forth."

I pick a side plate and pick a handful of bacon from the serving dish. Whoever set this picnic has experience.

"That is sweet," I say. "I thought you were taking me to a

restaurant."

"My friend told me to bring my crush here. So, I thought I could utilise the opportunity."

"So, I am your crush."

"Isn't it obvious?"

"Not if you don't mention it."

"You are my crush," he says and I laugh at how serious his face was when he said that. I am tempted to ask if he spoke to his girlfriend but again, I don't want to spoil the mood. We eat while sharing why Cape Town is better than Johannesburg. I don't have anything to say because I haven't been that side. I love

how he speaks. He always has this smile when he speaks.

I dish more food and drink more wine. By now I don't even know the time. All I know is that it is late. The stars are shining brightly from the roof. The lights from the outside provide enough light into the room. We are as good as outside. I can imagine a wedding in this glass hall. It would be breath-taking.

Njabulo lifts his hand to my cheek. This seem like something he enjoys doing. His hand warm on my cheek. My heart starts jumping out of my chest. We are alone. We

are here because we both wanted to be here.

I close my eyes when I see him leaning towards me.

The kiss I have been longing for. His lips lands on mine. I suck in a breath when he kneels and moves his whole body closer to mine, his mouth still on mine. His lips are too soft, I feel like crying. I have been waiting for this like it was a dream. If my tears don't fall, I don't know. His heart is beating loudly. Mine too. He deepens the kiss with his hand behind my head.

It feels like a dream when his

tongue collides with mine. It does. I kiss him back with so much fire. I don't even know why I am so emotional right now.

He is moaning. Me too. He moans loudly as he lays me on the cushion. I open my eyes and the stars from up the roof almost blind me. I am in love with Njabulo Buthelezi and this feels like a dream.

Oh my God.

His hand slide inside my formal shirt. I wiggle at his touch. He doesn't stop kissing me until I feel his hand on my boob. It takes everything in me to break the

kiss.

"Are you alright?" he asks, panting.

"I am a virgin...I can't.." I warn. We can keep it at kissing. If I wasn't a virgin, I would have lost my morals right now and give it away on the first date.

"Why?" he asks. His eyes are on me. They are burning.

Why am I a virgin? What kind of a question is that? I pant, longing for him to kiss me again.

"I will give it up when I get married," I say without thinking twice. I know it is lame for a man like him.

"Then, I will have to marry you," he says before smashing his mouth to mine.

Heaven!!

"Oh my God, Njabulo!" I whisper before he parts my lips and slide his tongue into my mouth.

Oh, wow!

He moans and groans as he deepens the kiss. His kiss so passionate.

I am pretty wet!! Too wet!

"Do you want me to stop?" he asks in between the kiss. For my answer, I pull him by the neck and let him kiss me. And boy, oh boy, does he perfectly kiss me.

Hmmmmmm, I have been waiting for this for too long.

EPISODE 10

NJABULO

What a dream come true!

I break the kiss before I could nut in my pants. That was breath-taking. I lift my head and stare down at her. Damn, her eyes. Her eyes full of lust and love. We are both panting, staring at each other.

"I have been waiting for this day for so long," I say and she smiles in agreement. I believe she is in

love with me as much as I am in love of her. I roll on the side and move her to my chest. "This place is so beautiful, don't you agree?"

"It is," she says while placing her palm on my chest. The stars are glittering from afar as if there were witnessing this magical moment.

"Should we leave in the morning?" I take my chance. It is not cold. We have all sorts of throws we can use as blankets here. I just want to spend this night with her. I just want her in my arms like she belongs to me.

"We can stay here and watch the

stars." She agrees with me. That makes me smile. I don't care about Tinyiko at this moment and she is not worried about her boyfriend. Bringing them up will just change everything right now. She pulls a thick throw and covers our legs up to our waists. "How come you are a virgin? Is it church?" I ask.

"I have never been in love to a point of giving it away. My mother has always been on my case about boys that I could never get a proper boyfriend," she responds. "And church too. You know?"

"So your mother has always been a prayerful woman?"

"She has always been but she started going over board when she survived an illness. Few years ago when I was still working for Gundo's company, I moved back to Venda when she wasn't well. Since she recovered from the death bed, she lives for prayer," she says.

"So, are you as prayerful as her?"

"I can never match her but I pray a lot," she says.

The whole evening, she tells me about her life in Venda. How she grew up in the same village as

Gundo. It is fascinating to hear about her life as a young shy girl. I had switched off my phone before driving us here. I do not want anyone to disturb us. The only people who would come looking for us are Gundo and Thandeka. Thandeka is very strict when it comes to her friend. She doesn't want nonsense. At first she was worried that what if Maria will not be comfortable to be with me in the middle of the jungle. She instructed me to drive her home if she ever asks to leave. No negotiations. I don't think Maria wants to go home right now. She

is perfectly fine.

By now she is sleeping peacefully. Her breathing has changed for me to know she is fast asleep. I am here wondering how life would be with her.

I'd be happy. I'd be in love. I'd make her happy too.

I lock her in my arms before feeling myself retiring.

"Njabulo, wake up," a sweet voice instructs before I could open my eyes. Without opening my eyes, I pull her in. I can tell it is bright outside.

"How did you sleep?" I ask when I open my eyes. The glass walls

are not as romantic as last night. Now, we look too exposed.

"I slept well...even though you let me sleep in my clothes," she says.

I smile at her.

"You should have told me you wanted to sleep in my shirt. I would have taken it off for you," I say and she blushes while getting up.

She irons her clothes with her palm and thereafter fixes her hair and put on her shoes. It is not yet too bright so I bet it is still too early to be late for work.

I get up, put my shoes on and pick my blazer. I drop Maria

home. She shyly hurries to her apartment before I drive off to my house.

Before I could nicely park my car into the garage, Tinyiko jumps into the garage. I close my eyes before jumping out of the car.

"Njabulo...what is wrong with you?" she yells. "I have been calling you all night. I have been texting you without you checking any of my texts."

I jump out of the car.

"My nephew must be in the kitchen right now. Please, do not put up that drama in front of my nephew, please," I hiss.

"What?"

"Go to our room. I am coming," I say and she storms out of the garage. While she goes up the stairs, I turn to the kitchen where my nephew is indeed having breakfast. Zizipho gives me an eye.

"Good morning," I greet.

"Uncle Njabulo...it is my soccer game tonight," Nkosinathi says when he sees me.

"I am not going to miss it for the world," I say. I learnt this from Gundo. These school events and sports are very important to these children. Nkosinathi's

father is nowhere in the picture so I am the male figure.

Tinyiko is pacing the room when I enter my bedroom.

"Where were you?" she asks. She is fuming.

"We need to talk," I say and she drops on the bed. Her eyes are already teary like she knows that I am about to break her heart. We couldn't talk on Friday evening and the whole weekend, she was just in the greatest moods I couldn't break her heart.

"Are you leaving me Njabulo?" she asks. She is ready to gush out all the tears.

"Yes," I say and she breaks into a cry like I expected. "Babe, please don't cry."

"What is wrong with me Njabulo?" she asks.

"Nothing babe. Nothing is wrong with you," I say while getting on the bed next to her. I try to pull her hands but she flatly refuses. She jumps out of the bed and stands at the corner of the room.

"Then what is wrong? What is special about her?"

"I like her a lot," I say.

"More than me?" she asks. Do we have to do this? I don't want to break her heart. I was never in

love with Tinyiko. I was willing to learn to tolerate her and love her.
"Please..."

"Is it Amanda?" she asks.

"What?" I ask. I never told her about Amanda.

"I know she has been asking you meet her. Even the night you were beaten up...you were there to see her."

"Were you going through my phone?"

"You gave me no choice Njabulo. You have been distant since that night at the club. You were distant with me since that night. I had to go through your phone

to get my answers."

"That is fucked up Tinyiko. That's fucked up," I say. I never touched her phone and she shouldn't have dared gone through mine.

"So what is special about this Amanda?" she asks.

"You wouldn't understand," I say while getting up. I will leave it at whatever conclusions she has about this.

"She is your EX Njabulo. What more do you want from her?" she asks. Oh, it isn't over.

"I need to get ready for work," I say while heading for the flower.

"I cannot believe you were sleeping with her while I waited for you to come home," she says, crying all over again.

"I didn't ask you to wait for me here. You chose to stay here Tinyiko, please."

"What?"

"Did I ever ask you to move here? Didn't you just show up? Don't make it my fault."

"Oh my God, I don't believe this," she says while covering her face with both her hands.

Ohhh Lord!

I jump into the shower for a power shower. I have a number

of meetings to attend. When I return to the bedroom, she is seated and blankly staring at the window.

What is wrong? We dated for just three months. It breaks my heart that I didn't stop it before it got to that. But, stringing her along is not going to work. It was only going to hurt and break her heart.

"I curse the day I met you," she says and storms out of the room.

I can confidently say that the past two weeks have been the best days of my life. Maria and I

have been spending so much time together. She is a great company to keep. We did movies almost every second day this past two weeks. I can now say I love that ish. I was just doing it with wrong people. We even did a double date movie thing with Gundo and Thandeka. These two are the friends I am going to keep til the end of time. Zola will be laughing his ass off when he hears this. I am in love. Powerlessly in love.

Last night, she asked me to take her to Exclusive Books in Sandton. They were launching a book she wanted to buy. Whether it is

books or movies or counting the stars...I will do it anytime with Maria. She is a keeper.

Tonight, I am taking her to dinner. I am taking her to a proper, three course meal kind of a romantic dinner.

"Wear something sexy like you did at the club. I am taking you out for dinner," I say on the phone.

That night at the club, she looked sizzling hot. I would have been jealous at any man she would have been entertaining that night.

"I already have a dress in mind," she says. I like, I like.

"Oh yeah? I cannot wait to see you in it. Look, I am going to a meeting until five. So I'll pick you up at seven, is that fine?" I ask. "Seven o'clock it is. I'll be ready." "Cheers," I say and hang up.

Why am I grinning like a fool? I am so in love it is not even funny. Tonight we are going to discuss the EXs. It is long overdue. We didn't bring it up these past weeks. We both didn't want to ruin the moments we spent with each other. I did mention that I broke things with Tinyiko. Tinyiko is not giving me a hard time at all. She just sends me texts now

and then, but nothing to tell me she is not taking it well. It must take her a few days to let go. It is her EX I want to be sure about.

"Tinyiko told me you broke things with her because of someone else," Zizipho says when I get into the house. It is just after five and I want to freshen up before I leave. Also, I left a little gift I want to give Maria tonight. I bought her this pretty necklace that she would love very much.

"Yes," I say while filling a glass with water. I gulp it down before

moving my eyes to her.

"What happened?"

"I wasn't in love with her," I say.

Why do we have to discuss this?

We never used to discuss about my business. But, I think I have changed in this past two weeks, she is curious. She is my sister at the end of the day.

"Wow"

"Wow, what?"

"I can tell that you are in love now," she says.

"I am."

"When do I get to meet her?"

"Very soon Zizipho. Very soon," I

say before leaving her in the kitchen and heading for my room. No one has ever gone wrong with all black. Black tuxedo and black shirt. No one. I feel like a handsome husband.

By seven o'clock, I am parked outside Maria's apartment. What I also like about her; she is always on time. Always.

"Hey, I am outside," I send her a text and put on some music. She likes Dr Tumi so much that I had to download his albums.

"Maria, are you coming?" I text after fifteen minutes.

I roll down the windows and stare

at the gate, hoping that she saw my texts. The more I sit here, the more I am getting anxious. Has she changed her mind?

I ring her phone but there is no answer. Did she get cold feet? I lock the car and walk to her apartment. She is already thirty minutes late and that is so unlike her. Unless this perfect date night requires dress up and make-up. Maybe she got delayed at work and came back home later than normal.

A few knocks and the door flies open.

"Hi," her roommate greets before

scanning me with a smile.

"Is Maria home?" I ask.

"I just got in now now...come in; I'll check her in her bedroom."

"Thank you."

I walk in. This is the first time I am inside their apartment. I usually pick her from downstairs or at work. The last time I was by their door, her ex-boyfriend was here. Their apartment is very girly. All colours in here are too feminine. It is perfectly set though; there is nothing to fault it.

"Uhm...she is not in her room,"

Dikeledi says.

"Well, I was supposed to pick her up at seven for our dinner date. Her phone is ringing though," I say. I am starting to get worried. She tries the phone, no answer.

"It does look like she was home earlier," she says and leaves the room again. She walks back and say, "She did take a shower. Her bath towel is wet."

"This doesn't make sense," I say.

"Wait for her here...maybe she stepped out to buy something," she says.

I take the offer to wait for her. I have been trying her phone

without success. Her work phone is ringing non-stop too.

Where would she be? The instructions were straight forward though. I told her I was going to pick her up for dinner at seven. She is allowed to change her mind, but it would have been nice if she told me that she won't be able to make it. We can always reschedule.

It has been an hour now and she is not showing up. I call out for the roommate, who comes wearing a sweater and track pants.

"If she shows up, please ask her

to call me," I say.

"No problem," she says.

I head for the car, disappointed. It hurts hey. It hurts that she went AWOL on me.

Instead of heading to my house, I turn towards Gundo's house. Maybe her friend will be honest with me. Maybe she will tell me that her friend changed her mind. The nanny opens the door for me. She shows me the living room before she disappears. Gundo is watching soccer when I get to where he is. I feel lost, perfectly dressed in a tuxedo in the middle of the night. I even forgot to

leave the blazer.

"People go to balls and never invite us," Gundo jokes when I walk into the living room, in formal wear.

"Some of us have a life," I say while getting on the couch. Gundo is in shorts and a vest. He is relaxed. Before I could even relax, Ciara comes into the room wearing her gown.

"Good night daddy," she says while throwing her arms to her Daddy. She greets and also gives me a goodnight hug. She picks her little colourful books and disappears down the corridor.

"Is your wife in?" I ask.

"She is putting the twins in bed. They always give us trouble.

So...give her...twenty minutes," Gundo says with a giggle.

"I need to talk to her."

"Is everything okay?" he asks.

"I was supposed to pick Maria up for a date but she wasn't home and she is not answering her phone. It is out of character for her. So, I wanted to ask if maybe she has changed her mind about me."

"This girl is giving you tough time, huh?" he asks. I laugh.

"These love things are just too

hard to maintain. Jeezzzz!" What I am scared about, is her changing her mind about everything.

I am not even interested in what is playing on the TV. Gundo is yelling and shouting at the referee. On another day, I would be teasing him, but I am here waiting for his wife.

The door closes and Gundo loudly says, "We have a visitor. You must be looking decent."

I laugh. She probably walks around here naked after hours. She shows up in a full night set, with a gown on top.

"Njabulo," she says when she walks into the room. "You look sooo fine."

"Thank you."

"Are you guys watching soccer? I came for a cup of tea. I have some designs to put together," Thandeka says.

"I am here to see you," I say.

"Have you spoken to Maria today?"

"Yeah. She told me you guys are going on a date," she says while getting on the couch next to her husband.

"I have been to her apartment, she is not there. Her phone is just

ringing when I call it. Her roommate doesn't know where she went. Did she say anything else to you? Has she changed her mind?"

"No..." Thandeka seems worried. I am worried too. She pulls her phone and makes a phone call. No response but she calls again.

"Put it on speaker," Gundo says as she dials again. She does and she jumps when Maria answers.

"Maria, are you okay?"

"Uhm...Thandeka...yes," Maria says.

"Where are you? I thought you were going on a date with

Njabulo. Where are you?"

Thandeka asks. I am tempted to ask her myself, but I don't want her to hang up or hold in any information. There is silence.

"Maria?"

"Thandeka, I am okay."

"What happened to your date?" she asks.

Silence again!

"I changed my mind," she says.

Wow! I move to the edge of the seat. Thandeka is looking at me with pity eyes. Maria should have told me that. A text would have been appreciated. I would have drove home and drank myself to

sleep than stopping people from putting their children to bed.

"What happened? Why did you change your mind?" Thandeka asks.

"Thandeka, I am still in love with Luzuko," she sadly says.

What?

What the fuck?

Just like how history is repeating itself.

"Please be honest with me Maria. Both of us know that is not the truth...please Maria be honest," Thandeka asks as I get on my feet. It feels like my heart is ripped open once again. Maybe

Tinyiko's curse is already working.

"Thandeka..."

"Where are you? You are not home. Where are you?"

"I am having dinner with my boyfriend," she responds.

Thandeka waves my hand to stop from going.

"Where are you though? Where are you having dinner?" Thandeka says.

"Thandeka, I have to go," she says. Gundo is on his feet with me.

"Maria?? Maria?" Thandeka calls out.

"I will call you tomorrow at work,

okay?" she says before the line is cut. Thandeka calls the phone again.

"Mrs Radzilani...sorry, Maria just left for the bathroom," a male voice says. His voice so joyous. It must be the Luzuko guy.

"Where are you?" Thandeka demands.

"We are dining at Kream but I must be taking her home after a movie," he says. "Is there something wrong Mrs Radzilani?"

"No. It is just that she was supposed to be somewhere else today."

"Oh, she told me that your

husband's friend was begging her to join him for supper tonight. Is that where she was supposed to go?"

"I...I...don't know...but..."

"I hope you are not the one poisoning my fiancée, Mrs Radzilani," he says.

"Fiancée?" Thandeka asks.

"She will show you the ring when she sees you tomorrow," he says happily. "I will ask her to call you when she gets home."

"Thank you," Thandeka says and hangs up.

What a blow!!!

"Good night," I mumble.

"Njabulo, something is wrong," Thandeka says. Gundo stares at me with those same pity eyes that his wife gave me.

"What is wrong? She chose what she wanted, didn't she? I just thought we were going somewhere," I say.

Maybe I am just cursed.

"She would have told me where she was when I asked her."

"She obviously doesn't want us to get to her."

Thandeka must not make excuses for her friend. I am alright.

"No, something is not right," Thandeka says.

I wish something is just wrong so that we could fix things. I wish she didn't choose him over me.

"Gundo, get changed, we are going to a closest Kream right now,"

Thandeka says while rushing to their room.

Kindly, kindly share and like.

EPISODE 11

NJABULO

I drive us to Mall of Africa. This is the closest Kream to us, since the other branch is in Brooklyn.

Thandeka rushes out of the car before I could even perfectly

park. Her husband and I follow behind, rushing towards the restaurant. My jacket is off now and I have untucked my shirt to look a little less formal.

Thandeka reaches the door first. She scans the room with urgency. I can see her from the glass walls of the restaurant. I walk around the deck. A few tables are occupied but no sign of Maria and that man of hers. I walk to where Thandeka and Gundo are now standing.

"Sorry, would you need a table for three?" a young girl in a black Kream apron asks.

None of us answer. We search the room. She is not here.

"Hey, can you please help,"

Thandeka quickly asks. "Was there a table booked for Luzuko? We are here to join Luzuko."

The lady walks to a counter by the door. She goes through the books and walks back to us.

"Yes, he was here on table fourteen...but it was just a table for two. Now it is occupied by new customers," the waitress says.

"Thank you," Thandeka says before we walk out of the restaurant.

What now?

"Should we go try the movies?"

Gundo asks and we all agree to go to the movie area. Luzuko mentioned something about them watching a movie.

It is during the week, so the movie house is not too packed.

There is no sign of Maria. They are probably inside the Cinema room or they are not here altogether.

We have hit the dead-end.

Thandeka has already called

Dikeledi to tell us when she gets home. She had to tell her to call us the second she opens the door. She mustn't wait for her to say

anything.

"Now, what?" Gundo asks. We cannot go around the cinema room and yell for Maria's name. They would call the mall securities on us.

Thandeka's phone rings.

"Hello Dikeledi," Thandeka responds. My heart is beating out of my chest right about now. I am praying and hoping that she is home safe. The more we ran around the mall looking for her, the more I was starting to feel like she was not okay. I pray for her safety. Thandeka quickly puts the phone on speaker when Gundo

taps her shoulder to do so.

"Thandeka can you hear me?"

Dikeledi asks.

"Yes...yes...is she home?"

"She just got here."

Phew! I see relief in Thandeka and Gundo when they relax their shoulders.

"Is she okay? Have..."

"She arrived with...Luzuko. I haven't gotten a chance to speak to her."

"Is she fine. Doesn't she look...somehow?"

"No, she looks fine. They only greet and head for the bedroom," she says. "But, this is weird

though."

"What is weird?"

"They never go to her bedroom."

Then what are they doing there?

"We are on..."

"Thandeka...ohh, the guy is leaving now."

"Thank you, we are on our way. Just keep her up until we get there," Thandeka says as we leave the cinema house for the parking.

I don't understand this. What is really going on? I am driving as fast I could, to Maria's apartment. It is very late now but it would be a relief if we get

to see that she is fine.

I park across the street and hurry to the apartment with Thandeka. Gundo doesn't want to crowd us. Thandeka had already called Dikeledi that we are here, so she only knocks once and we both jump into the house.

"Thandeka..." Maria says from the couch. She has a tub of ice cream on her lap and Dikeledi is sitting beside her. Her eyes seem to be swollen, as if she was crying for long but she has managed to pull a normal face. "What are you doing here?"

What are we doing here? What

kind of a fucking question is that? She cannot be sitting here, watching TV as if nothing happened. As if she didn't stood me up and never cancelled our date. Her phone is sitting perfectly on the coffee table. "We were worried about you," Thandeka says.

"I said, I am fine," she says to her friend without acknowledging me. I am so angry I might say something wrong so I keep the hell quiet. Maria doesn't turn her eyes towards me. She lifts her chin and look into her friend's eye. With my eyes, I trace her other

hand which is on the arm rest.
The ring is there.

"What is going on?" I ask. I cannot keep myself shut. She is wearing a damn cheap ring while I was running around looking for her. This reminds me of that little boy that had to watch the choir sing for his girlfriend in the cafeteria.

"I am fine."

"I didn't ask you if you were fucking fine or not...I asked you what the hell is going on?" My voice is sharper than I wish.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she says with a

shrug.

Wow.

Oh, wow.

"You are wearing a fucking ring Maria," I loudly say. "Where we not supposed to go on a date? I had to wait for you outside there for hours. What went wrong?"
Fuck! I hate this. Begging! I hate it.

"Please wait for me outside.

Please wait for me outside,"

Thandeka says with her hand on my shoulder. I might have lost it.

Damn it!

Maria doesn't look shaken or hurt or anything. She looks perfectly

fine except for her red shot eyes.
I swear under my breath and
bang the door behind me.

Breathe, dammit Njabulo! I tell
myself as I stand by the door.

"What happened Maria, did
anything happen? Huh?"

Thandeka asks. "Why did you
stood Njabulo up."

"Luzuko was back from his trip. I
couldn't hurt Njabulo by cancelling
our date."

She should have cancelled on me.
Simple! Now I feel like a fool.

"Maria, you know it very well that
you don't like Luzuko at all. Tell
us, what did he do to you?"

Dikeledi asks. "You were so happy this past week...I was so sure that you moved on with Njabulo. Is Luzuko threatening you?"

"Why can't I make my own decisions without you guys judging me?" she asks, her voice breaking.

"Because it doesn't make sense at all," Dikeledi chips in. "The last time we spoke about Luzuko, you were telling me never to open for him because he is an EX. And now you show up with his ring and expect us to believe that you magically fell in love with him again?"

"Leave me alone," Maria cries out.

They are right. None of this makes sense. It does not make sense at all. We were so happy these past few days, unless if I was just blinded by fake love, all over again. Like, I fall for the wrong ones.

"Ok, sorry for pushing you too hard Maria. We just want to understand what happened. Do you love Luzuko?" Thandeka asks.
"Yes."

Wow!

"Is he forcing you into this union? Tell us, we are going to help you. Gundo and Njabulo will help you if he is threatening you," Thandeka

begs. "Say it and we will help you."
"I never gave him a chance and he promised to make things right. Njabulo and I are too different, it was not going to work."

What a blow!

This is more painful than the blows Charles Mbambo gave me a few weeks ago. This is worse.

First meeting of the day went perfectly fine. If only, I could focus my head on the issues we were discussing. Instead, I was busy trying to figure out this whole thing with Maria. How does a person change overnight? Not

overnight...mid-day?

Thandeka promised to get her talk because she believes something is wrong. We all know that something is wrong, but what is wrong? I begged Thandeka to let it go, she had done more than enough.

I have been counting hours until it is five thirty. They have a mid-week service at their church, and I am joining in.

Half of the church is filled and the worship team is singing happily, ready for the Pastor to get on stage. Maria is seated on the same pew she was seated on

when I first visited the church.
I think it is her favourite spot.
Beside her is that bastard,
Luzuko.

When the priest got on stage,
the congregation settles down. He
reads from the bible and the
congregation breaks into a loud
prayer. I also have a prayer that
I am mumbling. Forgiveness. If
this is what Maria wants for her
life, I might need to forgive her
the same way I forgave Amanda.
After a few more prayer
requests, he calls the choir back
on stage.

"Before we leave...I want to

share some great news with you," the pastor says as the choir ascends the stage. "I received a phone call yesterday morning from brother Luzuko. He told me that he is engaged to his wonderful girlfriend." The church erupts into celebration. People are on their feet, dancing around Maria. I am pissed. The choir starts a wedding song, just like the day Amanda was proposed in front of my eyes.

Just like de javu.

What is with these bastards and choirs?

"I remember when Luzuko

introduced this woman to me a few months ago. He came and told me that he has found the perfect one," the pastor says. "Brother Luzuko and Sister Maria, please stand on your feet."

I feel sick in my stomach. I feel like I could just puke all the food I ate the whole day.

From the back, I cannot see how Maria's face looks like. Is she smiling? Is she putting a façade? The church breaks into a song while I walk outside. I wish I could drown myself to sleep right now. I could drive to a bar but I need to face this man. He has got

to tell me what he did to her. It takes fifteen more minutes before I see people walking outside the church door. From where I am standing, I scan for Thandeka and her man.

There, walking hand-in-hand. I watch as they greet and hug a few congregation members.

Damn! What time do they get home if they have to greet every single person? I follow them as they go to the parking lot.

"Brother Luzuko, can I have a word with you?" I ask. They both twirl towards me. They both look like they have a seen a ghost.

What? Doesn't it suit me to be at weekday prayer meeting at church?

"Hello there..." Luzuko says, his face beaming. He has this smile that would perfectly suit a woman. Men shouldn't brightly smile like that. I bet this is what Maria fell for in the beginning of it all. "Babe, what is his name again?"

"Njabulo," Maria says and lowers her eyes.

No Maria babe, I want you to look at me.

"Yes, can I have a word with you?" I ask.

"Of course, you must be here to congratulate us."

"Maria, get into the car," I say.

"Please, get into the car."

I am not here to take her away from him. I am here to talk.

Maria opens Luzuko's car and get into the passenger seat.

"What the fuck did you do to her?" I ask. He raised an eyebrow as if I was wrong. He can excuse my language, I get carried away when pissed.

"I engaged her," he responds, still with an irritating smile.

"She doesn't love you."

"Is that what she told you?" he

asks and shakes his head. "I apologise if the demon in her made you believe there was something between you."

I move closer to him and pull him by his shirt. My grip is tight that he tries to fight my hands.

"You are the demon we have to deal with."

"I...I...I don't know...what..."

"What did you do to her?" I hiss.

"Ask her. Ask her. I didn't do anything," he says. I feel arms pulling my hands from the back. Two sets of arms.

"Brother Luzuko, what is going on here?" one guy asks while

pulling me away from him.

"Let me go," I say and they eventually let me go.

"Let him go. He doesn't know what he is doing," Luzuko says.

"I know exactly what I am doing. What did you do to her, huh?" I demand. He walks to the passenger door and opens it. He must leave Maria out of this, I am here for him.

"Please tell him what I did to you," he asks. She shakes her head.

"I am not done with you," I say while walking towards my car.

Bastard!

Gundo had to cancel today's meeting because my focus is just not there. What the hell is happening to me? I had promised myself those many years ago that love will never affect me. What was I doing falling in love when I know it won't end anywhere?

"We can reschedule to next week Monday," Gundo says. I nod.

"Dude, this is getting out of hand now. We have been rescheduling meetings the whole week."

"Sorry," I say.

"You never take these

heartbreaks well, huh?"

"Maybe you can teach me a thing or two."

"I can't help. I know how it feels to love a woman," he says and laughs loudly.

"What's funny? My misery?"

"I just remembered the longest week of my life was when my wife made me walk on egg shells...if she wasn't my wife, I wouldn't have cared...but boy, she abused me because she knew how deeply I love her," he says and laughs.

"It's a long story. I'll tell you about it when your sense of humour is back."

"Do you think I am cursed?" I ask. I mean, the girls I don't want throw themselves at me and those that I want do not want me back.

"It's called life. It has nothing to do with curses," he says. "What did she say?"

"I'll find out now," I say while getting on my feet. I leave Gundo's office to go pick my car keys from mine. I grab my car keys and wallet.

Masango's Logistics is where I am headed.

There she is in her pretty navy blue formal skirt and a white

company blouse. She is on the phone when I walk into the reception.

She widens her eyes when she notices me and continues on the phone. I help myself on the seat and watch as she assists the client. Those eyes that I fell in love with keep stealing glances of me. I still see the lust she had a week ago. The lust she had when we kissed that night before we slept in each other's arms.

"I will definitely have Ms Masango call you before the end of the day. It was my pleasure ma'am, thank you," she says and

then carefully places the phone
piece back where it belongs.

She takes a deepest sigh and
walks towards me.

"Sir, how can I help you?" she
asks, sounding and looking
professional.

Sir? Me? She is calling me Sir? I
smirk at her, she looks pretty by
the way.

"I came to talk to you."

"I am at work," she says.

"I am not going anywhere until
we chat. So, you can go back and
do your work, I hope Mr or Mrs
Masango won't mind me sitting
here," I say while relaxing back on

the couch. She walks back to the desk. I have all the time until she knocks off at 16:00.

A few people walk in and out of this small reception room. She is helping people with me watching. She is very good at pretending that I am not here.

An hour later, a woman in a red tailored suit saves my day. She stands in the middle of the reception and asks why I haven't been assisted yet.

"I came to see your receptionist over there...but she seems to be very busy," I say. She must be the big boss. I have seen her

walk in and out of the boardrooms here. She must have noticed me then.

"Maria, attend to your guest. You have fifteen minutes," she says and walks past me. I get on my feet and walk towards the reception desk. Maria angrily leads the way to a small eating area. It is empty though because it isn't lunch yet.

"You are going to get me in trouble," she mumbles before taking a seat.

"I am sorry. I just need us to talk...like adults," I say. Having me pissed and yelling wont help.

"What do you want to talk about."

I laugh. I couldn't help but laugh.

"What happened that evening when I was supposed to pick you up for dinner?" I ask.

"I am sorry Njabulo. I am so so sorry..." she says and tears are already falling from her eyes.

"Don't be sorry. I just want to understand."

"I changed my mind, okay? People are allowed to change their minds. I am allowed to change my heart," she cries. She is trying to make herself feel better. That's fine. I just want her to be honest

with me.

"Why did you change your mind?"

"We are...we are too different...."

"Didn't you know that before you begged me to be honest with you Maria? I had kept my distance very far from you but you forced out the truth..the truth about how we both feel for each other. Werent we different then?" I ask.

I think I more pissed because I had successfully kept my distance from her. I was doing fine.

Tinyiko was there, I might have been learning to fall in love with her but Maria stopped

everything. Whatever she is telling me is nonsense.

"I am sorry."

"Didn't you tell me to stop my relationship because it was wrong? Where you playing with me feelings? That night...didn't it mean anything to you?"

"I was..."

"I don't understand," I say. The ring on her finger even disgusts me. "What did he promise you? What did he do to change your mind?"

"Nothing Njabulo," she calls out, tears still streaming down her face.

"Something happened. What happened?" I beg. "Is he threatening you?"

"I am allowed to change my mind..."

"No Maria...you don't get to do that and move on as if you didn't string me along. It took everything in me to come clean to you about how I feel. It took everything in me to open my heart to love again...you know that. You made that prayer for me...and with me. There is no way you can just change your mind just like that. No way."

Her tears do not stop.

"Look..." she starts.

"Yes."

"Forget about me. I am going to get married in a month's time...and..."

"No, you are not."

I clear my throat because something is stuck there. The last time I felt like this was when Amanda went on to marry Charles Mbambo.

"Please...let me do this," she begs.

"Why?" The lump stuck on my throat is growing bigger. "Why Maria?"

"I have to do this," she cries.

"Why?" I yell and she flinches. I

am sorry my love, for yelling at you. "Why Maria? Why do you want me to let you marry him? That is what I am asking."

"Please Njabulo."

"Maria, why? You can just answer that and I will leave you in peace. Why are you doing this, huh? If he is threatening you or something, I will protect you all the days of my life. I will protect you."

What am I saying? The scary part is that I mean each and every word. If that bastard is threatening her, I will have deal with him. He will have to go

through me, to get to her.

"Njabulo please."

"Maria, why are you doing this?"

I continue to ask. . I won't get tired until she gives me answers.

Her blouse is soaking wet with tears. I hate to be the one to make her cry, but at least she can give me an answer.

I watch as more tears wets her shirt. I am dying a million deaths here. The lump on my throat keeps growing bigger. Men dont cry, so I won't fucking cry. But my throat is tight, right now.

"Njabulo."

"Why?" I ask and she finally

stares at me. For the first time since I got here, she looks straight into my eyes. Not stealing glances but staring into my eyes. Her tears are blinding her and she keeps blinking them away.

"Because..." She clears her throat without moving her eyes from mine... "Because, I love him."
There goes her answer.
"Thank you."

EPISODE 12

NJABULO

Who ever said men don't cry was in fact not a man. Holding this ish down is damn painful.

I pick my phone from the table and hurry out of Masango

Logistics. I should remember to send an invitation to Ms Masango for us to profile her business. She might make double the money she makes right now.

It is not even lunch time but I am craving for a strong and stiff drink. A drink that will wash down this lump stuck on my throat and numb a hole in my heart.

How do people do it, huh?

My phone pings. It is Tinyiko,

asking me if she could pass by to pick some of her clothes. If only I could apologise to her, for breaking her heart. If there is something I know about relationships, even when I fail in them, is the fact that you don't jump from one to another. I have already spilled the water, I cannot go back to Tinyiko and pretend I didn't mean all the things I told her. She can pick her clothes when my sister is home.

I hit the bar which is just a few streets away from the office. I order a few shots and lunch on

top of it. In no time, I don't feel anything stuck in my throat anymore.

An hour or so later, Gundo's name flashes on my phone, I hope this is not about a meeting. I can feel my head getting light.

"Sure Gundo," I say.

"Dude, where did you go?" he asks. I am still on duty so I cannot confidently tell him to come join me for a drink.

"Uhm...just grabbing a quick young lunch."

"Are you tipsy?" he asks and I laugh loudly.

"Can you relax? I am perfectly fine, and not tipsy." However, I feel the other way round. I feel pretty good and light.

"Look, Thandeka and I are coming to your house for dinner."

"Are you asking me or inviting yourselves?" I ask.

"Which ever you want to label it. See you at six."

"Who is going to cook? Zizipho only knock off late."

"We will order in," Gundo says and hangs up. He and his wife must not bother because by the time they show up at my house, I'll be sloshed and won't make a good

host.

Before I place my phone back in my pocket, I type and delete a text I want to send to Maria. This SMS could make look like a sissy but she does need to hear it. "I hate you." I finally get the courage to send to Maria. I know she won't respond. As long as she received the message. I am done with her. I am done with women. "I am sorry Njabulo." she responds back. She can take her sorry and shove it...wherever. I take a few more shots and head home. My friend is always hosting me in his house, maybe I

can just return the favour just once. I pass by the shops to grab a few drinks, including a wine for his wife. She sure likes her wine. Zizipho only shows up at half past five. She is now working at the bank and they work odd hours during month end. Nkosinathi walks in first, dragging his school bag.

"What do you want to have?" she asks while packing away the mini grocer she got on her way back from work.

"Macaroni and cheese," her son calls out while heading for his room. I am watching them from

the porch. I get on my feet and drag them to the kitchen.

"You can make food for Nkosinathi, do you mind joining me for supper with Thandeka and Gundo?" I ask. "We will UberEats something."

"Tonight?"

"Yeah?"

"I am exhausted Njabulo. I am in no mood to entertain guests."

Oh, I am on my own.

I grab a seat and watch as she fixes a quick meal for her son. Me and my sister have never lucky when it comes to relationships. We always have it the hard way. She

hasn't moved on from her baby daddy or something like that. I hate snooping in someone's life so I never bring it up. I always find it awkward to discuss the matters of the heart; I know for sure that they are complicated. Just minutes after six, Gundo calls me, telling me he is entering the estate.

Fuck! I was hoping that they would cancel. Zizipho picks her plate of macaroni and disappears upstairs.

When I open the door, Gundo walks in with a huge take-away bag from Tashas. Thank God

they brought the food, I was clueless on what to get them and I was starting to feel hungry. Thandeka follows in with two bottles of wine. Ain't they just a perfect couple?

"Where is Zizipho?" she asks while setting the bottles on the dining table. When I tell her that my sister retired to her room, she leaves us and head upstairs.

Gundo empties the paper bag. "I hoped we would reschedule," I mumble. I have already drank more than I should have, for the day. I wish I could just throw myself on the bed and die.

"Not us," he says. He opens the cupboard and picks two wine glasses. He knows his way around the kitchen. He fills the glasses with a merlot wine. Its smell makes me sick.

Thandeka only walks back to the dining room after a good thirty minutes, when Gundo and I are snacking on the wings he brought.

"You started without me?" she asks while getting on the chair.

"How many times did I call you?" Gundo asks.

How does these two do it? How did they find each other and make it work? This love at first sight

bull ish doesn't work. But maybe I would have experienced this type of love if I had given Tinyiko a chance.

"I went to see your friend earlier today," I finally say to Thandeka. I know they are here for moral support or whatever pity party they wanted to throw me.

"Yeah?"

"She said she is getting married in a month's time," I say.

Thandeka drops her fork and stares at me.

"Why does it look like I am the only one who wants to find out what is really happening to her?"

I mean, why would you fall for that?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Give her time...there is something..."

"Hold on a minute," I say and point a finger into the air. "Are you telling me that I should pause my feelings and watch her wiggle her ring finger while I figure what is happening to her? I went there and asked her a hundred times why she was doing this...the only answer she gave me was that, she loves him. what the fuck am I supposed to do?" Thandeka sighs deeply.

"She is not herself. I would have been the first person to know if she was excited to get married."

"Maybe these are compromises she wants to make. She said I am too different from her. Maybe she is scared that I might corrupt her church ways."

Thandeka shakes her head.

"Maria doesn't care what people think."

"Then how do you explain this bull ish?????" I ask and raise my hands with a shrug.

"Please..."

"You know what? Let us stop discussing about other people's

wives," I say while I get on my feet. "I don't want to discuss about Maria ever again."

I reached a mile stone.

I managed to survive a week without thinking about Maria. I call it a milestone because it seemed impossible at first.

Damn! I must learn to love with my head and never attach my heart.

Zizipho is driving to Kwazulu Natal with my nephew, and that gives me room to host a house party in my house tonight, after work.

"Why is everyone so grumpy?" I ask our security guy as I get into the building. It is a Friday and everyone should be happy. We cannot afford to host parties every weekend, but these people could do with a party...just like me.

We could all do with a party! I am in a good mood for a party. A young braai with girls having a good time in the pool. I want that. In fact I need that. I could organize a few guys to come through to my house tonight.

"Hey, Anza...is Gundo back from his meeting?" I ask from the

phone. I don't want to cross to his office for mahala. I have been working all morning and I feel like a full lunch.

"Yes, Sir," she says. "He got here minutes ago."

"Tell his PA that I am coming over," I say before placing the phone down and crossing to his office without wasting any more time. The man has been busy this week since Monday; he might want to go to another meeting. I knock on his door before opening the door.

"Njabulo? Come in."

"How is it going?" I ask and he

stares at me with pity eyes. Oh, my friend, I don't need those pity eyes. I don't need them at all.

"Just two more reports to send out and I will be done for the week."

"The more you are grumpy, the more everyone in this place is grumpy."

"What?"

"Why is everyone in the worst mood ever?" I ask. He stares at me blankly. "Nevermind, looks like I am the one excited."

"Oh, yeah?"

"I want to host a young party tonight. You are strictly not

invited, though," I say. "But I need to know where I can order the best steaks. You once said I must avoid Grace's supplies."

Gundo braais almost every week that he knows where to get the best meat supplies. I could get those juicy steaks from there.

"Why am I not invited?" he asks. He is married, that is why.

"I need single people only. It is a house party that I am hosting," I say and he raises his brow. "I don't want your wife to ban me from going places with you."

"What kind of a house party is that?"

"Like a nude pool party kind of a party."

"You know...you don't have to be ratchet just because Maria broke your heart."

"And there you go...spoiling the whole mood," I say while getting on my feet. How many times should I tell him not to bring up people's wives? "Meat supplies...where can I get a good price and best quality?"

"How many people?" he asks.

"Say, hundred?" I say and he stares at me. Doesn't he know how house parties work?

"Lewis Butcher can get you a

good price for that number," he says.

"And you my friend, are a good friend to keep," I say while turning towards the door.

"Whatever you do...don't fucking come to my house tonight."

Damn, I haven't done this in ages. My house is packed and most faces here, I don't recognize. Phuti and his party gang are here with girls I haven't met before. These are the kind of people I needed tonight.

This braai thing ain't my ish so I

got a young guy from Lewis Butcher to help with the meat. He is here sweating by the braai stand, roasting all kinds of meat. Some girls are in the pools, half naked.

Isn't it good to be single? I could pick one girl and invite her upstairs if I want. I am already eyeing one. She will be the only one to cross the line and go to my room. The rest of the party is not allowed up the stairs. If anyone feels horny, they can use any of the bushes outside my house. No one is getting into any of my room upstairs.

This right here deserve a live story on Instagram.

"Are you single and looking to have a great party? If you know my address...come straight to my house and mingle with other singletons just like me. If you are married...don't show your face to this party," I call out on the Insta live video, the crowd behind me yell as I turn the video to a group of people chilling in the living room. The more the merrier. I am a generous man.

"Can we have more champagne?" a young coloured girl yells from the pool. I think she is the one I am

picking for the night. I pick a bottle that is in an ice bucket and fill her glass. She is going to need more of those.

"Anything else you want, baby?" I ask.

"You!"

"Are you sure?" It is always great to get consent from these women.

"Yes."

"Say, in an hour's time...come upstairs, naked and ready for another kind of a party, huh?," I say and she wiggles her chest at me in agreement. Her boobs firm but dancing perfectly for me. Did

I mention it is naked pool party?
I head straight to where the braai masters are doing their job. All seems to be fine. I pick a bottle of Heinken from the cooler box next to the braai stand and head back inside the house.

When last did I play this game? A group is playing spin the bottle. How does this game works again? Oh, one person spins the bottle, and must kiss the person to whom the bottle points when it stops spinning. This is for horny people like myself.

"Can I play?" I raise my hand and join the circle. Luckily the

women standing on the opposite direction are kissable. The last time I kissed someone was weeks ago under the stars and that bull shit. Maybe I could get lucky before spending the night with that coloured girl.

One guy spins the bottles and we all chant until the bottle stops spinning. He scored a damn kiss. People chant some more as he kisses a young girl. What did I say? This game is for horny people.

What the hell?

I quickly leave the circle and march towards the door. Dikeledi

and Maria just walked in. Dikeledi fits in perfectly but Maria has a longer dress on. They are scanning the room for what? Me? What on earth are they doing here by the way?

"What do you want here?" I spit when I get to them. Dikeledi picks a bottle of Pink Lemonade from a bucket full of all sorts of drinks. "What the fuck do you want here, Maria?"

"We need to talk," she says.

"How did you find out about the party...and...how did you get my house."

"Instagram," she says.

"My boyfriend can find literally anything about anyone," Dikeledi says and disappears to the porch. Maria is staring at the girls jumping into the pool. The only thing they have on is their bikini bottoms.

Maria looks shocked.

"I said, only single people," I say.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Can I use your bathroom?" she asks.

Uhm! Damn it Njabulo! Why do I look like a sissy now? I point at the direction where the toilet is and she walks towards the

direction.

Shit! It must be packed and some horny bastards might want to keep her there.

"Maria," I call out. She turns towards me. "You can use one from upstairs."

She nods and goes up the stairs.

Think!

Think, Njabulo.

The girl from the pool spots me as she walks into the house. She is wearing a see-through black dress, showing off her wet bikini and her firm nipples.

"There you are," she says with her dreamy eyes. I am suddenly

not in the mood.

"Uhm...yeah..." I am no longer interested in this ish of a party. Damn you Maria. She throws her hand on my chest and I quickly grab it, "Why don't you get more champagne? I will be with you in a moment."

"Don't keep me waiting for long. I am ready for that other party," she says and turns away.

I head upstairs where the bathroom is.

"Maria, are you in there?" I call out and she responds, saying she will be done in a minute. My head is suddenly spinning. I open one of

the guest-room that is just opposite the bathroom. I sit on the edge of the door and keep my eyes to the door.

She opens the bathroom door and notices me in the other room. She slowly closes the door and walks towards the guest room. Without a word, she gets on the floor and seats.

She still has a ring on. Her audacity!!

"I needed to see you," she says. She changed my whole party mood.

"Why?" I ask. She should be getting married in three weeks.

"I came to apologise for breaking your heart," she says and I cannot help but laugh.

"Don't apologise my love. I am very fine," I say. I am perfectly fine.

"I came to tell you the truth about that night," she says.

"Please, promise me you won't do anything to him as yet."

Out of all days, she chose a day where I wanted to have the greatest time of my life.

"Njabulo?" I hear my name from the corridor. Which part of 'no one is allowed upstairs' don't these people get? "I am ready for you."

Oh, it is my guest.

The girl from the pool reaches where we are chilling. She has one hand on her waist, and the other leaning on the door frame.

"Did you change your mind?" the pool girl asks. Maria darts her eyes between me and the girl.

I need to nut, so no, I haven't changed my mind.

"Straight down the corridor...I'll be there just now," I say and she, indeed, turns towards my room.

Maria drops her mouth.

This is how I mend a broken heart.

"She is just a fck...thats all," I

say with a shrug, Maria's chest rising and falling. "It is not safe downstairs. Go home, Maria."

EPISODE 13

MARIA

"Wear something sexy like you did at the club. I am taking you out for dinner," Njabulo says on the phone. I am jumping joyfully – in my heart but I am trying my best to keep my composure.

"I already have a dress in mind." Dikeledi and I went shopping this past weekend. There was a buy-one-get-one-free bargain in one of

the boutiques in Rosebank. I chose a very elegant pencil dress and Dikeledi bought another short dress. This dress would be perfect for my date with my Njabulo. This man is...driving me crazy. So, so crazy that I have fallen deeply in love with him.

"Oh yeah? I cannot wait to see you in it. Look, I am going to a meeting until five. So I'll pick you up at seven, is that fine?"

"Seven o'clock it is. I'll be ready."

"Cheers," he hangs up; leaving me smiling like a crazy girl. I quickly put my phone down when I notice Mrs Masango staring at me as

she walks past the reception.
I am going on a date. I won't call it a proper date because he has already taken me to a perfect date. The day we had our first kiss. I'll never forget that night, ever in my life.

Oh, I am going to need make-up. I pull my phone and call Dikeledi.
"Hey Maria," she answers.

"I am going on a date tonight," I tell her.

"The glass house thing?"

"Don't be silly. He told me to dress like I did the time we went to the club. I think he wants to take me somewhere exclusive."

"Wena, nah?"

"I am going to need make-up. I want to look perfect," I say.

"Check my make-up bag in my room. I am only home after seven tonight. We are promoting some new techno App in my company. Overtime."

"Okay, I'll try to fleek them eyebrows," I say and she laughs. She has taught me a few tricks on how to have my eyebrows on fleek. The tricks are going to come in very handy tonight.

"Don't use the black pencil...and don't over-do it. Okay, I have got to go," she quickly says and hangs

up.

Why am I nervous about this date? It feels like our very first date. Thandeka has to be the second to know about it.

"Hello," she answers. I feel like I am getting married – the way I am super excited.

"I am going on a date tonight," I happily say. I can imagine her wiggling her body in excitement. She has been so happy for me since I told her about my first date and kiss with Njabulo. I even got to a point where I thanked her for locking me in Gundo's office.

"You deserve all this happiness," she says.

"I'll tell you about it tonight," I say before hanging up.

I wish for the day to just disappear to night. A dinner date with Njabulo Buthelezi. Instead, the day is pretty hectic. I drag my feet to have things done until I find myself in a taxi home.

Njabulo is a keeper. I knew that the moment he accompanied me to a book event. He sat with me and watched me as I excitedly discussed the book with the fellow book lovers – that right there is sexy. Thandeka

introduced me to the reading world and it has become a part of me.

The taxi stops by the gate and I hurry to my apartment for a shower. I know, if I don't start getting ready now, Njabulo will be here any minute.

I jump into a quick shower before attempting to do a glam make-up. The eyebrows takes more time because they have to fleek perfectly.

Just forty minutes later, I get into my dress. This is the shortest dress I have ever put on but it isn't short enough to

contradict with my morals.

I look dapper! I look like Njabulo's girlfriend, I really do. I still have thirty minutes before he picks me up so I prepare the clutch bag and relax.

I am super excited when I rush to open the door. He is too early but I do not mind. The earlier he is, the more we will enjoy our time together.

It is difficult for me to hide the shock on my face after opening the door.

Luzuko.

I thought he was only coming back home tomorrow. In fact, I

wasn't thinking about him at all. These past two weeks have been the best time of my life.

"Maria, you don't look pleased to see me," Luzuko says. I am not pleased at all. I try to give him a weak smile but he doesn't smile back at me.

Oh, my God. His eyes look grey, full of anger or something like that. I cannot read his face right now.

"How are you?" I ask after recollecting myself. He scans me from my hairstyle to my bare feet. My dress is probably too short for his liking, I bet.

"Where are you going looking like that, Maria?" he asks.

"Uhm...well..."

"Why do you do this?" he asks while shaking his head. He looks very scary right now and I am scared.

"Do what?" I ask. We haven't spoken about moving on and all of that. So, he doesn't know about Njabulo and I.

"Can we talk?" he asks, already walking into the house. I pray he doesn't do anything stupid.

"Luzuko, can we talk about this some other time?" I beg.

"Go put on your shoes, we are

going to a date."

"Please, Luzuko. I am going somewhere right now. Can I call you when I come back?" I ask but he marches to my room without a word. He scans the room and pick my clutch bag. My phone is on the pedestal, so he grabs it and puts it in his pocket. He picks my shoes and forces them into my hands.

What?

"Put the shoes on Maria. Put the shoes on," he sternly says. I am now trembling as he paces around the room like he has lost his mind. He is losing his mind.

"Luzuko," I whisper.

"Njabulo won't take you anywhere. He won't take you anywhere. I don't understand why you want to go on a date with him. Ohhh.. and that kiss you keep speaking about??? Oh, Lord help me. Lord, help me."

"What?"

"What is so special about him? And why do you go on and on and on about that kiss?"

"How did you know about the kiss?"

"Let's go. Let's go."

"I am not going anywhere with you."

He turns to me and his eyes change.

"If you care about your friends...I suggest that you listen to me right now. If you care about all your friends and family...I beg." He steps outside for me to lock the apartment. I am praying for my life right now. What has gotten into him? He watches as I place the keys into my purse and thereafter take my hand. He entwines our fingers and leads the way to the car.

"Don't try to be smart with me, my love," he says. Whenever we meet people, he would give people

his angelic smile. With my other hand, I keep pulling my dress down. For some reason I don't feel safe anymore.

"Please Luzuko," I keep saying. "We will talk in the car," he says flashing his widest smile. He helps me into the passenger's seat before rushing to the driver's seat.

I quietly watch as he drives down the street. Njabulo should be getting to my flat and I am worried that he is going to think I stood him up.

My phone pings in Luzuko's pocket. His phone pings at the

same time. Another double ping and thereafter the both phones ring at the same time. Only when he pulls out his phone, do I notice Njabulo's name on his screen. He beats the steering wheel and drives ahead.

OH MY GOD.

Luzuko can access my phone through his. This is how he knows about the kiss and everything else he mentioned. Now I fear more for my family and friends' lives. He is an IT technician, he is able to do this horrible stuff.

Oh my God. The things Njabulo and I discussed on the phone

these past weeks? It is enough to kill a man like Luzuko.

The things I tell my friend Tahndeka, worst! I told her everything about how I felt about Njabulo. How he kisses perfectly. I went on and on and on about that kiss like it was the only things I could utter with my mouth.

"Where are you taking me?" I ask. I am not, praying even hider that he releases me.

"We need to talk first before I take us to dinner. I booked us a table at Kream, Mall of the Africa. Have you ever been there?"

You'll like it," he says as if he is normal.

"I don't feel like supper, honestly," I say. I was starting to have a headache.

"I have something very special for you. Something very very special."

He turns into an empty street.

The street lights are not working but the moon is bright enough to provide efficient light into the car.

I reach for the hem of my dress and pull it down.

He parks the car and switch off the ignition.

"I am not going to hurt you," he says but I cannot help but pant with fear. This is not romantic or anything like that. I am scared for my life.

"Take me home."

"Listen to me and stop being a nuisance," he yells out loudly. I freeze. No one will ever believe me when I tell them that Luzuko can be like this. He has turned into a monster.

I spent so many months in a relationship with him and this is the first time I see him like this. No, this is the second time.

"What did you do with my

friends?" I manage to whisper.

"Nothing yet."

"What do you want from me?"

"You Maria. I want you."

"I told you...I cannot..."

"I am not going to be a laughing stock Maria. I am not to going to be a laughing stock. We are going to get married next month," he says while pulling a box from his pocket. "Oh my God, I couldn't wait to give you this ring."

"No."

"Please don't make this harder than I thought."

"What are you going to do."

"No, the question is, what is

going to happen to your friends that goes around match making you with other man when you have a boyfriend. If you embarrass me Maria...I am going down with them?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Your friends...the mighty Radzilanis...are going to do a walk of shame with me. they brought this upon themselves."

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?" I yell. He must stop speaking in parables. I am already in tears because I am scared. He speaks like it is normal to pack in the middle of nowhere

and dish out parables for me to connect.

He takes both our phones. He starts with mine. He unlocks it with my very own password that is known only by me.

He knows my password. He unlocks his phone too.

"Let me show you something cool," he says while scrolling on my phone. He goes to an APP and open it before giving me his phone. "Watch how cool this APP is. I programmed it after dropping a chip in your friends house."

"When?"

"The day you were in the office with Njabulo. That man, Maria, that man is going to take you to hell," he says.

Oh NO! He knows about it. That was eight months ago.

He is controlling the APP from my phone. I never know that thing existed on my phone. My eyes almost blasted when I see the video playing.

"Ohh...yes...baby...." Thandeka's voice is loud on the phone speaker. I can perfectly see her face on the screen and her husband is groaning behind her.

"This one is not nice," he says and

skips to the next video of Thandeka moving her private parts on Gundo's face. He was groaning and she was moaning. He is giving her a blow job while she seats on his face.

Oh my God.

"There is this other one that they did...where is that video?" he says while scrolling through.

"STOP!" I call out.

"You don't want to see more?"

They also do it in their children's nursery," he says while continuing to scroll.

He stops at it where I can see the both of them, Thandeka and

Gundo putting the blankets on the babies. One twin is fast asleep and the other one is not. Thandeka picks a bottle and feeds the baby. One minute later, Gundo is behind her, taking her from the back.

"They are spontaneous," he says with a silly laugh.

There are a hundreds of these videos. So, this has been happening for eight months? ON MY PHONE?

"How?" I whisper, tears going down my face.

"It is easy. All I had to do was to manipulate their baby monitors

and kid cams around the house.”

Thandeka and Gundo have those in their house to monitor the kids. They keep one monitor in their bedroom and one is in the nursery. The other nanny cam is in the living room.

So that day when he met Gundo in the corridor, he left a chip there to manipulate their app. He promises me that if I don't marry him, he is going to release the videos in all the platforms that I can think of, using my credentials. He says I must spare him the embarrassment and do what I promised him. he is able

to send the videos to all my contacts. My mother? Gundo's employees that I knew when I worked there?

No, that cannot happen.

He promised to delete after we get married.

Pathetic! He is pathetic! But he ensured me if I mention anything to anyone, it would be my fault.

He is sick!

I cannot believe this.

My life changed from that day.

It breaks my heart that Njabulo had to go through the pain of breaking up with me. I don't have a plan.

Whether I go to the police or not, he could release the pictures and videos from anywhere. He could even delete the APP. He has shown me. Whenever I log on my phone, he gets a notification. He has deleted the APP and reinstalled it, the other time when I was tempering with it. I cannot let my friend's face go public in that manner. No way. I have been depressed for the past week. Three weeks to go before I marry him and he deletes the APP for good. When Dikeledi checked dirt on him, she found so much dirt that I

regretted meeting him in the first place. When I thought he was romantic by remembering what I wore when he first time I saw him? it wasnt romantic. He was just being a psycho that he is.

"We need to tell njabulo. He will know what to do. I cannot go on seeing you like this Maria. I am tired. So, so, so tired."

"He has access to everyone's phone. Landline. Cellphone. Everything."

Dikeledi begged me until we saw a way out to go see Njabulo. His house party that we saw via

Instagram.

He is angry at me when I ask that we talk. At least we have some privacy to talk. Privacy until we are joined by a half naked woman. When she asked if he has changed his mind, he directs her to his room or one of the rooms.

"She is just a fck...that's all," he says with a lazy shrug. "It is not safe downstairs. Go home, Maria." I watch as he follows the girl.

"Who is she?" the girl asks.

"She is nobody. I said, you must come upstairs naked," he says before banging the door.

EPISODE 14

NJABULO

What am I saying?

She is nobody?

The lie I am telling is even bitter to my tongue. Why did Maria have to complicate my life like this? I HATE but love her for that. She woke all these feelings. She ignited my feelings and thereafter poured water to turn off the burning fire.

Who on earth does that?

"I wanted to give you a little

show," my guest says as she reaches for her dress which wasn't supposed to be there in the first place. It is just a layer of lace. She flashes me a smile and sticks her tongue out as she starts the little show she is talking about. She has done this a lot of times. I can see by the way she sways her hips with me watching.

She parades towards me and reaches for my zipper. I groan as she slowly unzips it. I grab her hand before it goes further down. "This is about you first," I say. I prefer it that way. If I go

straight to the deed, she will feel used. I'd be satisfied and the first thing I'll do is to kick her out.

We don't want that, do we?

She shyly looks at me and walks backwards to give me the show she promised.

Why am I so cold though? She is attractive but cold. She is freaking cold.

"Do you want me to strip orrrrr?" she asks and bites her lower lip.

Why is she here if she is going to ask too many damn questions?

She bends and shakes her boobs for me.

Something takes my attention. A piece of paper is pushed under the door before I hear footsteps walking away from the door.

"Do you want to see me naked baby?" the girl asks.

"Wait a minute," I call out as I pick the note and open it.

"WHEN YOU ARE DONE WITH YOUR SEXUAL ACT, PLEASE GIVE ME A MINUTE." When I am done with my sexual act?? I laugh out loud at the statement before continuing to read the note. "IF YOU WON'T SEE ME TONIGHT, PLEASE MEET ME AT LAZY LOUNGE TOMORROW

AT 17:00. DO NOT CALL ME OR TEXT ME. JUST SHOW UP, I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU. DO NOT TELL ANYONE ABOUT THIS."

What the hell?

I zip up my pants and hurry to the guest bedroom where I left Maria in. Where did she go?

It is still buzzing downstairs with thousands of people singing along and dancing to some club music. I am no longer in the mood since Maria's arrival. Why did she come here when all I am trying to do is to mend my heart and move on? The fucking heart she broke

into pieces.

Maria!

Where the hell are you?

Where did you go? I scan around the room for a good five minutes.

There is just a thousand of people in my house right now.

Bingo! There she is, standing by the drinks station. What the hell Maria? She picks two shots and down them at the same time.

I push the guys in my way and rush to her.

"What the hell are you doing?" I yell loudly – if only I wasn't competing with the music, I would have asked nicely. Right

now - I am yelling. She doesn't acknowledge me but picks two more shots and shove them in her mouth before I could even pull them from her hands.

I twirl around the room, looking for Dikeledi. What if I didn't come down here? Anyone would have taken advantage of Maria when she gets drunk. She isn't going to remember much after all these shots. We picked the strongest ish on the shelf.

What the hell?

She reaches for more shots but I manage to spill the clear liquid off from the shooter glasses.

"What are you doing?" she asks, only now does she acknowledge me.

"Why are you ..."

"Oh, you are not having sex? Or was it a quickie?" she asks and giggles. Am I not having sex? I would have been eye-rolling and jerking off right now if she didn't spoil the damn evening for me. I stare at her and she picks another shooter glass. I notice tears in her eyes. Why is she crying?

"Did you send me this note?" I ask, showing her what she scribbled.

"Yeah," she casually says and down

another shot. Dammit, I was staring at her and didn't notice her sneaking the drink to her mouth.

"What is going on?" I ask. It is damn loud I cannot even hear myself thinking. "Let's get you upstairs." I take her hand and lead her to where we were before we were interrupted. I think it is very stupid to fall in love sometimes. I was so mad at her I didn't want to see her, and here I am taking her hand so that she could talk to me. I am freaking worried about her. She must be very proud of herself for

stopping me from banging an attractive woman.

She gets into the room and takes off her shoes.

"How many shots did you take?" I ask as she stands in the middle of the room, staring into space.

"Ten."

I don't know if that is true or if she just too drunk already. No one is administrating the drink station so she could have easily drank ten shots.

She reaches for her dress and tries to take it off.

"What are you doing?" I ask while staring at her. She struggles

with the dress but I can see her thighs and a black underwear that she is wearing. Her act turns me on. From a zero to a hundred in a minute.

"You want sex? Let's have sex. Since I am a nobody to you....can I offer you sex so that you can make me feel special?" she says. Okay, the alcohol is taking over now. I laugh out loudly, helping her fix her dress. I am not going to have sex with her. And I am sorry for calling her a nobody.

"You know what, sit down here. I'll be right back. You need water," I say and she sits on the

bed. I close the door and hurry to get her a bottle of water. I scan the room for Dikeledi and there she is dancing with a group of half-naked girls.

How is she Maria's flat mate?

She is damn crazy. I head back to the guest room, only to find Maria sleeping on the floor.

Shoot me right now. Just shoot me. Waking her up is just a waste of time.

I pick her from the floor and put her to bed.

Jeezz!!

I bet whatever important thing will have to wait then. I switch

off the light and close the door before hunting Dikeledi downstairs.

She jumps off from the table when she sees me. Jeez! She is a party animal. How does she get along with

"This is the most epic party I have ever attended," she says while fixing her dress and standing next to me.

"Where is Maria?" I ask and she frowns before I see panic in her face.

"She was with you," she says while looking around.

"She is drunk."

"What?"

"She took ten shots," I say. She covers her mouth with her hand.

"What could have happened if I didn't find her first? What are you doing here anyway? This is for singles."

"Where is she? She wanted to talk to you. We had to talk to you."

"She fell asleep," I say.

"My boyfriend is going to pick me in an hour, I'll wake her when he gets here."

"I'll bring her home when she wakes up."

"Make sure it is before ten. I

beg, please talk to her. And please don't tell anyone that she was here. Not Gundo, not Thandeka, don't even tell it to yourself. No one must know," Dikeledi says before dancing away to join her new friends.

How are these two...friends?

The last group of people left my house at 01:00. Thanks to the security officers who came to complain about after-hour noise. Had I wanted to party until morning, I would have paid them off of something.

Jeez!!! This place is filthy.

I gulp a glass of water before dragging my feet upstairs. I pass by the guest room where Maria is still sleeping. She is snoring and the blanket is on the floor. She might have kicked it off.

Maria!

Why does love have to be complicated? Watching her makes me feel turned on. My boner fights to be released from my pants.

Damn you Maria. I missed a few rounds of good sex. That was the whole point of this freaking party. My guest was pissed that

I disappeared downstairs the whole night. Her friends had to leave with her and I could not keep her here. Too bad for the both of us.

Dammit! Since when am I soft? I cover her with the blanket again before heading for my bed. There is something not sitting well with me. The reason why Maria and her friend came here is not sitting well with me.

I am woken up by a toilet flushing. I didn't close my main bedroom door so that I hear when Maria wakes up. She might

not remember much. I grab my sweat pants and hurry to the guest bathroom. There she is, Miss Ten shots. Her face is buried in her hands. She looks drained. Of course that is what you get after taking ten shots or whatever number she took.

"Are you alright?" I ask and she lifts her head. Her eyes land on my abs. I do have fine polished abs so she is forgiven. She buries her head in her hands again.

"How much did I drink?" she asks.

"You tell me?" I ask with a smirk.

"You told me you took ten shots."

"Ten?" she asks before

massaging her temples. That smart head must be pounding.

"You don't remember, do you?" I ask. She blacked out.

"I remember you going to have sex with some girl," she says and I laugh. She doesn't remember anything but that part, right?

"Let us get you coke with ice. I hardly ever drink to your point, I wouldn't know how to nurse what you are feeling," I say. She pulls herself up. She follows me to the kitchen.

She looks around the kitchen and the living room. I know. It is filthy and doesn't look decent

enough to be a home. I fill her glass with ice and coke.

I leave her to it as I head to my room to get my phone from the bedroom. I need to call the cleaning services to come and clean this mess up.

"You have few minutes before you go home. Dikeledi told me you need to be home before ten," I say.

Probably her husband will be pissed when she isn't home.

She panics and quickly jumps up.

"What is the time?"

"Quarter to ten," I respond. Her home is not that far, I can drive her in few minutes. "I will drive

you there and we can have a chat in the car."

"No...no...no..." she says.

What is going on here?

"What is going on?"

"He cannot see you there or else he will flip." So, he is threatening her, isn't he? I stare down at

her, almost in tears but still

drunk. "I left my phone. Can you

give me money for a taxi? I don't

have my wallet. Oh, my God."

"At least tell me what the hell is

going on?" I ask and my phone

rings. "Hello?"

"Hello?"

"Njabulo, my name is Tshedza. We

spoke yesterday when I was

dancing with the bikini girls. I wanted to remind you about ten o'clock," someone says. I only spoke to Dikeledi.

"What about ten o'clock?" I ask.

"Uhm...Njabulo...we spoke about this last night at the party. Ten o'clock, don't be late. Please...don't be late," she says.

What the fuck is going on here? I place my phone in the pocket.

"What is going on?"

"Luzuko cloned my phones...and all other phones that belong to people I know. He was at a night prayer last night and he told me he will come visit me at ten in the

morning. I need to get home before he gets there."

What the hell?

So, the girl who just called was asked to remind me to bring Maria before ten.

Okay, think Njabulo.

Think!

"Wait here," I say while rushing to my bedroom. I pull Nkosinathi's phone. I took his phone on Thursday evening when he showed me his school report. Since he dropped his Maths marks, I confiscated the phone until further notice. Thank God the battery is still on and his mother

and I know the password.

Flip! It doesn't have airtime. I quickly load airtime before calling.

"Anza, please order an Uber using your account," I say before dishing up the addresses.

"I'll order one right away, Sir."

The Uber will take Maria to the McD not far from her apartment. She will be late for her ten o'clock meeting with her freak of a boyfriend though. I know Dikeledi will come up with an excuse.

She is sitting on the kitchen stool with her head rested on the counter. She is still drunk.

"Uber will be here in 5 mins," I

say. "What is going on?"

"Please don't do anything as yet. We need a plan. Please help me. I swear if I wasn't stranded, I was not going to come to you. I need your help."

"I'll help you," my mouth speaks before I could process it.

"Luzuko has videos of Gundo and Thandeka and he might share them to all social media using my name...and he will only delete them when I marry him."

"What videos?" I ask.

"Sex tapes," she says and I smile. No, I don't mean to laugh, but where the hell did he get Gundo's

sex tapes.

"Where are they?"

"On my phone. Please meet me at Lazy Lounge at five, I need to think on our next move. Don't tell anyone. Don't call Gundo or Thandeka and don't call me.

Please meet me later," she begs.

"Fine," I say.

Her Uber is here.

Gundo and Thandeka's sex tapes? Where the hell did he get these things? I pray these are tapes of them together or else, they are doomed.

But what kind of fuckery is this?

My house is sparkling clean right now but I have been on my feet the whole afternoon. I am trying to pray that the guy didn't lay his hands on Maria when she got home late. It is 15:00 and I am counting down hours to meet her. I swear, if he lays hands on her...I might need to deal with him - man to man.

Why does it hurt to love someone? Why is it confusing? Days ago I didn't want to see her because of the bull ish she told me. How many fucking times did I ask her if she was in trouble?

Women!

I am using Zizipho's Polo so that I stay as basic as possible. I know I am almost an hour early but I could not help it. I am curious. I want to know if Maria is fine or not.

This is a very quiet lounge. I wouldn't even pick it even if I didn't have money. It all whites and the music here sucks. It doesn't help that it is a Saturday afternoon. Everything here sucks. "Beer on tap and a full plate of wings." The waiter disappears after taking my order and only returns a few minutes later with a draft of beer.

Only thirty minutes later does Maria show up. It is four thirty, so I bet she wanted to wait for me here. I watch as she takes a seat in a dougy corner. What is she wearing? Sunglasses and a hoodie. What the hell happened to her?

I cross the room to where she is seated. She startles when she notices me.

"Take off your glasses," I say as I get on the seat. She looks around.

God help me, I am going to kill him. I fucking care if whether he laid his hand on her or not.

"I thought I said five o'clock," she says.

I couldn't wait.

"Take off your glasses," I repeat.

I watch as she pulls them off. I

trace her chocolatey face to look

for any trace of a mark that is

not supposed to be there. She

frowns and takes off her hoodie.

"Did he give you any problems?"

There are no marks.

"No...he was also late. He found

me sleeping," she says.

Pheewww!!

"How are you feeling?" I ask. She

looks like a mess. She looks half

drunk. Miss Ten shots.

"I am just exhausted," she responds. "Put a gun on my head the next time you see me take alcohol."

"Oh, yeah?" I ask. "Have some hot wings and orange juice."

I raise my hand for the waiter to take her order. He brings her food in a little while. I am dreading to ask what the matter is.

Sometimes I feel like we mess everything when we talk.

Sometimes we just need to stare into each other's eyes and then go home. I trust Gundo and his wife to do that.

"You know you must stop drinking

alcohol?" I say after what seems like forever. The important thing can wait.

"What did I do?"

"You offered me to sleep with you. I was tempted," I say. I get turned on thinking about it.

"You should have. I am no longer saving myself for the special occasion. Whats the use? I got tangled with the devil," she says and my mouth goes dry.

Focus Njabulo. She was drunk.

"What is he doing to you?" I ask. She doesn't have the ring on today.

She tells me the story from the

beginning. From when he showed up before our date. I smile again when she mentions the nudes.

This can be solved, I guess. It shouldn't be a train smash.

"Why didn't you come to me when this happened? You broke my heart for nothing...how many times did I ask you if you needed help?" I ask.

Why?

Women!

"I am sorry Njabulo. I had no clue what to you. I was confused. But I know even if I marry him...he is still going to threaten me. I don't know what to do."

"So, he cloned my phone," I ask.

"He goes through my things and is like that?"

She nods.

Does this guy know who I am?

"Does he know the hell I am?"

"He knows you," she innocently says.

Jeez!!! I smirk at her. That was meant to be a threat.

She sips the orange juice.

"I have until seven when he returns home from a family gathering. I left my phone and if he calls and not find me...he..."

She eats while I watch her.

"Please don't say anything to

anyone until there is a plan. He warned me not to dare or else he will release the sex tapes one after another."

"Maybe we should let him release one video," I say. She shoots her eyes at me. What? "What? I want to see something."

"What? No."

"What did you see? Did they have a doggy style? What? Does your friend scream loud or something?" I ask and she blushed before laughing.

First time I see her smile since the day I went to see her at work.

"Are you going to help me? I don't deserve your trust after lying to you and I understand that you hate me so much for breaking your heart. I deserve it. Please help me. Would you please sit with Gundo and find a way out?" he says.

"I'll see what I can do," I say. She eats her food quietly until she asks, "Was she good in bed?"

"Excuse me?"

"The girl you were doing sexual acts with at the party. Is she good in bed?" she asks.

Hmmm.

Sexual acts. Who calls sex, sexual

acts?

I stare at her as she fails to look at me.

"Is Gundo and Thandeka good at sexual acts?" I ask instead.

I am sorry. I just can't get used to the fact that there are Gundo's sex tapes out there.

WTF!

"This is not a joke Njabulo," she says without a smile. She is really traumatized.

"Are they good though?" I ask.

"Yes," she says with a blush.

EPISODE 15

NJABULO

She is damn beautiful when she smiles. Damn Damn beautiful, I even forgot that I was so angry at her. So angry I was prepared to write her off from my life.

Imagine? I would have shut her off from the face of earth. I was not going to use her or hurt her, I was just going to live my life like she never existed.

What now?

That jerk of a boyfriend needs to be taught a lesson. No man snoops into my private life like I am a sissy. I might look like one, but I ain't that.

She is complaining about a pounding head and feeling so sick. That is what you get when you down ten shots in less than fifteen minutes.

"By the way, why did you kill yourself with those shots?

Stress?" I ask. If she wanted to have a great time, she would have joined her friend dancing on the tables - sober.

She stares down at her thumbs.

"You can tell me," I say. I am the least person to judge anyone.

"I just wanted to numb the pain," she says. Fair enough. "I couldn't stomach the fact that

you were having sex. Crazy, huh?
But it worked. I survived, see."

I smirk at her.

"So, you were crying because I
was having sex?" I ask.

"I wasn't crying," she responds.

"What do you call water falling
down from your eyes? No, what do
you call salty water falling down
your eyes?" I ask and she gives
me a small smile.

"I was just hurt...that's all."

Why am I happy that the poor
woman was hurt because she
thought I was banging another
woman? I meaann!

"Your letter took all my attention

away when I was about to score some...do you know that?" I ask. She darts her eyes to me. Is that a little smile I see?

Maria!

"I need to get going. I need to leave before he starts calling and all," she says.

And she had to spoil this beautiful moment. I official hate this Luzuko guy.

"Look, prepare for a vacation on Tuesday, for a week. You are going to Mpumalanga," I say. She stares at me with widened eyes.

"What? I cannot go with you..." she says.

"Oh, you want to go to a vacation with me? You just need to say baby and I will take you," I respond. She beams at me while shaking her head.

"What vacation are you talking about?"

"Just prepare yourself for a week."

"But how?"

"Leave everything to me," I say before she puts her sunglasses and hoodie back on. It is sad to see her like this. That damn jersey doesn't look good at all. I dart my eyes to the legging that she is wearing. I didn't know she

wears this.

It suits her.

"You should always wear those," I say. She drops her eyes to the leggings and shakes her head.

"Why not."

"They show off..."

"That is the whole point."

"I need to go. Thank you for the wings and for meeting me.

Please...help my friend," she says.

"I'll help you," I respond. Why would I help her friend, those two can get over the sex

tapes...but Maria cannot be

married to that idiot when I am still here.

"Thank you," she whispers and then rushes out of the restaurant. My heart sinks.

I need a plan.

Think, Njabulo, think!

I order another draft before heading to my empty house.

Zizipho and Nkosinathi must come back already.

Gundo and Thandeka were in Venda this past weekend. They should be on their way from there now so that Gundo doesn't miss our Monday afternoon brief with Phuti. I couldn't talk to him over the phone since our phones are

cloned by that clown.

How messed can one ever be?

This is crazy.

It is Monday morning and I am already in the office at eight. I need to sort this out and I need to sort it out real quickly.

"Sir, did you call for me?" Anza asks.

"Make an appointment for me with Mrs Masango of Masango Logistics," I say. I emailed you their number. It is very urgent and it is regarding free marketing coverage from us. Whatever time she is available, I will meet her."

"I'll get to it right away," she

says and hurries out.

She is the only one who can help me out right at this moment. In a few minutes, I get a notification from my calendar.

'Meeting with Mrs Masango at 10:00 at Masango Logistics.' I hired an effective assistant. I thought I wasn't going to score a meeting so soon. Maybe it is the free marketing that she wants. She is a business woman. She knows exactly that there is nothing for free.

Phuti walks in minutes later, telling me about rescheduling our afternoon brief to during the

week. That is fine with me. My head is not here. My mind is far away.

At nine o'clock I head to the only meeting that matters today. Masango Logistics is not far from our office park so I should be there early enough to sit by the reception and watch Maria for a little while.

The streets are as empty as I thought they would be. The traffic has dried out so I make it to Masango Logistics at nine thirty. If things were normal, I would be taking her breakfast and flowers. I mean, she had

ignited that man in me. There is just this little obstacle standing in our way.

Am I happy that she is not really really getting married? Hell yeah. Weird, I know...but man, am I looking forward to deal with this man and claim her.

She would rather protect someone else's reputation. If she cares about her friends this much, to point of protecting them, how much more can she love her husband? Or her family?

To be honest, it would have been a different case if the whole thing was presented to me. I

would have told him to go ahead.
Does that make me selfish?
Maybe. But survival is all I know.
I have been alone for so long to
know that I won't die.

"Good morning, I am here for an
appointment with Mrs Masango,"
I say with a smirk. She lifts her
eyes from the desktop and widens
her eyes. She looks beautiful while
at it. If only she knew the
dreams I had last night. If only.

"What? What are you doing
here?" she asks. Her colleague
stares at her before flashing a
smile at me. People are watching.
She mustn't give away.

"I have an appointment with Mrs Masango," I say, sternly looking at her. she clears her throat and move her eyes to her colleague.

"Ahh, that will be the ten oclock meeting correct?" the colleague asks. I nod. "Mr Buthelezi."

"That is me," I say.

"She is still in a meeting but she will ready for you at ten," she responds.

"Not a problem. I will wait for her," I respond while heading to the couches. She is trying her best not to look at my side. I cannot resist so I am watching

her. So the receptionist here wear uniform. I must give a point to her boss, the uniforms are pretty cool. Maybe if the pencil was not below her knees, she would turn all men around. Her blouse is tucked into her skirt and damn that skirt shows off those curves. Those curves I saw when she lifted her dress the other night.

She flashes a smile at me when I catch her looking at me.

"Sir, Mrs Masango is ready for you," the other lady calls out.

Of course! I am not here to watch Maria the whole day.

Mrs Masango is sitting behind her laptop when I walk into her office. Quite a small space for a CEO but it is vibrant and dope. "Good morning," she says while getting on her feet. I shake her hand before taking a seat.

"I have a great proposal for you," I say when she is settled on her chair. She is interested and that is exactly what I want from her.

I lay out what Gundo and I will do for her business. She needs a spread in our business magazine. I bet you, the reason she hasn't approached us is because she

cannot afford our services and here I am offering them on a platter. Our magazine is in the top ten rating of Africa's magazine. Who would say 'no' to our services, huh?

She listens attentively when I tell how much we can move her company from a ten to a hundred - guaranteed.

"Tempting," she says after I sold her the dream.

"Right?"

"What do you want?" she asks. I laugh. She is smart.

"I want something very simple and this stays between us," I

say. She is unsettled. "Oh, no ma'am...I wouldn't do anything to compromise you."

"What then?"

"I am a family friend to Maria and her friends cannot afford to take her on vacation. I want you to book her a week into a lodge. It must be a surprise so what you can do is to send her an email that she needs to go to Mpumalanga for a workshop. You can leave the rest to me."

"I am not following," she says.

"Book Maria into an all expenses paid vacation for a week...say from tomorrow until Sunday? It

must be a surprise and she must know is you sent her to a workshop. Simple as that," I say. "Why?"

"Ah, Mrs Masango, you are getting too personal right now," I say. "Bare in mind that this vacation can cost you a good ten thousand or less... that is not even a quarter of our basic service."

She stares at me.

"Fine."

"It must be a surprise. And anyone who asks must be told she is gone to a workshop," I say.

"Deal," she says.

"Thank you. I knew we could do business with you," I say. I get on my feet. "Can I use your office for a minute? I need to have a minute with Maria."

She stares at me.

"In my..."

"Please," I say and she gets on her feet. She is a clever business woman, I even wonder where Mr Masango. She knows that one washes one's back.

She gets on her feet and I do too. I walk towards the window while she walks out of the office. She doesn't much of the view.

Just the parking lot and a few of

other office blocks.

The door opens and Maria walks inside. Oh, she is wearing quite a sexy pair of shoes. I cannot help but scan her from her head to toes.

"Did you ask for me?" she asks while closing the door. I walk towards her and stand in front of her. She sucks in a breath when I butter her with the door, the same way I did when we were in Gundo's house. This time I plant my lips to her. She closes her eyes the moment my lips got to hers. She lets out a moan as I kiss her. I cannot help it but my hand

lands on her curve. She sighs deeply while kissing me.

Dammit! My boner starts growing in my pants but she doesn't seem to mind. I close my eyes and part her lips with my tongue. She allows me to slide my tongue inside. She sucks it while I caress her curves with both my hands. My dream. She was doing things to me in my dreams. I quickly pull away before I could nut in my pants. I still have a meeting to go to.

She pants with her eyes closed. She is a real beauty.

"I couldn't resist that," I finally

say when she opens her eyes.

"Uhm..."

"I need to get going," I say and kiss her deeply before pulling the door open. "See you soon."

The Radzilanis finally arrive at a restaurant just opposite our office park. They kept me waiting for half an hour. I cannot complain since I managed to respond to a thousand emails that I had.

"How was Venda?" I ask as the waiter places their drinks on the table.

"Hot and tiring," Thandeka says.

"I hope whatever you brought us here for is very important."

"Have some wine," I say. I will wait for her to finish a glass before I dish the information. Thandeka picks her glass and sips. That right. She cannot be sober when I tell her what is going on.

"Do you remember, this restaurant?" Gundo asks his wife. He is having a glass of whiskey. If I were him I would drink a few of those - neat.

"I remember," she says. "This is where we had our first date ever. You invited me for drinks and I

ended up going home with a box of pizza."

"Yoh, I remember you gave me a hard time," Gundo says.

"What was I supposed to do? I thought you were Rudzani and the stories I have heard about him were just too scary."

"Wait," I say with my hand in the air, "Did you once confuse Rudzani for Gundo? Are you kidding me? Those people are too different."

"I didn't know. It was partially Maria's fault," Thandeka responds with a laugh.

"Imagine! I was crucified for my brother's sins," Gundo says.

Gundo and Rudzani cannot be placed in one sentence. It is even scary that they are brothers.

The waiter brings our lunch. My couple here is happily sharing their stories of how she used to confuse the brothers. She doesn't know the truth that awaits her.

"I need to nap," Thandeka says.

"I'll get to straight to the point," I say.

Maria has told me the story from the beginning so I dish it out to them. Luzuko has their sex tapes which he is ready to release anytime if Maria changes her mind about getting married to

him. I know. It is twisted. I wish you could see their faces when I repeat myself.

"What the fuck do you mean he has our sex tapes....HOW?" Gundo yells. He looks around and composes himself.

"He does. He hacked your baby cam," I say.

"What the?????" Thandeka whispers loudly. She would be swearing if she didn't mind about her morals.

Can they relax?

It is just a sex tapes of them having sex in their house.

"How?"

How many times should I explain myself? The dude hacked their baby monitor.

"No way," Gundo says.

"Apparently Maria saw the tapes," I say and Thandeka drops her mouth.

"Oh, my God," she says.

"That is why she couldn't tell us what was wrong. The dude promised to share them if Maria decides to get help."

"Is he crazy?" Thandeka asks.

"That crossed my mind," I say. It really did. The guys must be crazy.

"What are we going to do?" Gundo

asks. It looks like he has seen a ghost.

"Why don't we let him release them? The guy has a reputation to protect," I say.

"What?" they say in unison. I didn't know that when you are married, you think the same way. LOL.

"What is wrong?"

"Have you lost your mind?" Gundo asks.

"What? You guys are married...what is there to hide?" I ask and they both look at me like I am crazy. I really don't understand the fuss but maybe I

am a special case.

"So the mother fucker bugged my house the day he came to my house?" Gundo asks. It is these house parties he keeps hosting.

"He did."

"What are we going to do?"

Thandeka asks.

"Gundo and I are going to get this guy. I need you to go to Mpumalanga for a day or two to spend it with Maria. She needs you."

"Huh?"

"I got her booked in Mpumalanga from tomorrow. Can you please get there to see her? She needs a

friend. Gundo and I will sort this mess."

"Ncoohhh," Thandeka says.

"What?"

"You love her, don't you?"

Thandeka asks.

They know that I don't care much about their sex tapes – they had sex, its life. I am worried about my girl.

"Is that even a question?"

"Oh my God, Njabulo is in love,"

Thandeka says.

"I see you want your sex tapes to be posted on Facebook," I warn her.

"Njabulo is in love," she repeats.

"Damn yes, I am. Now, Thandeka can you go see her during the week while I fix this mess with this guy? I just need a week."

INSERT 16

MARIA

Does Njabulo always kiss like this? Like all the time? I cannot seem to focus since this morning when he kissed me in Mrs Masango's office. He left the office while I still yearn for more. I wanted more of that kiss. I have been day dreaming about since he disappeared.

"Are you even listening to me?"

Nomusa asks. I didn't even hear a word. She shakes her head while grabbing a few files from the reception table. I watch as she crosses the room to where we neatly file all the paper work for the reception. We are going to be knocking off soon, so she is making sure that everything is neatly packed away. I am still sitting here - day dreaming about the man that makes me smile.

The reception phone rings, making me jump just a little bit.

"Masango Logistics, good afternoon," I respond and

thereafter clear my throat. I need to be professional, all the time.

"Maria, come to my office, please," Mrs Masango's voice chips in. Oh, I didn't even notice her office number on the screen.

"Yes, ma'am," I say before dropping the line and rushing to her office. It is almost three thirty and if she is giving me a new task, I will have to finish it before knocking off. I knock softly before she tells me to come in. I open the door and grab a seat while she finishes typing on her laptop.

"What major tasks do you have this week?" she asks.

"No major tasks this week, ma'am," I quickly respond. For some reason, she makes me to panic. A lot.

"You are going to attend a workshop next week. Someone will pick you tomorrow at 12:00 to drive there. You will be back next week Sunday."

"Uhm...what workshop, ma'am?" I ask. She lifts her eyes to meet mine. "Oh...sorry. It is not a problem at all."

"What is your personal email address?" she asks and I give it

to her. She gets busy while I watch. A workshop in Mpumalanga? "I just sent you an email with all the details. You do not have to come to work, the car will pick you at your apartment."

"Okay, thank you."

"I'll see you on Monday. You can be excused," she says and I get on my feet without hesitation. I want to ask more questions but I might annoy her.

Wow!

Thank goodness, Nomusa is already gone. I know she would be jealous of me going to Mpumalanga for a week. I pick

my handbag and hurry home to pack my luggage.

I wish I could tell Dikeledi what I think this vacation is about. It has everything to do with Njabulo. I wish I could call him and thank him for whatever sleeves he pulled for me to go to this workshop. Is there even a workshop? I would have known. Nomusa normally gets these emails from the service providers inviting us to short-courses and all. There was nothing that came from Mpumalanga. Nothing suitable for a receptionist or an administrator.

This is all Njabulo. I just remembered, he told me that I am going on vacation. He told me that when we met on Sunday. "I wish I were you," Dikeledi says while folding my floral dress. She drops it in the luggage bag. She is helping to pack for a week. I don't even know what to pack. Is it a formal setting? Is it casual? I know nothing. But I am surely packing for a heavenly lodge. I browsed through the pictures of Dawson's Lodge. I am going to have the best time of my life. In fact, this is my very first vacation and it had to be solo.

If only Njabulo could join me.

"This is work-related Dikeledi," I say.

"Still. I want a vacation," she sulks.

A knock on our main door forces us to stare at each other. Luzuko.

Dikeledi continues to fold the clothes that I have set aside on the bed. I drag my feet to the door.

He flashes a smile when I open the door. His smile is no longer as warm as it used to be. It hides the monster in him.

"Luzuko?" I say. I feel guilty. It is the way he is staring at me. As

if he can tell that I had a magical kiss with Njabulo Buthelezi. I drop my eyes to the floor before he could see through me.

"Can I come in?" he politely asks. I nod and move for him to get in. he scans the living room - Dikeledi and I have turned it upside down. I was fitting and parading on some of the clothes she wants me to keep. "Are you moving?"

"No," I quickly say. "I am just going to a workshop that Mrs Masango wants me to attend."

"What workshop?"

"Work. It is work," I say. I hate

that I sound guilty. It is the truth that I know it has everything to do Njabulo. It is not entirely work related. He stares at me. "I'll be back on Sunday."

"You are going for a whole week?"

"Yes."

"You cannot go," he says.

Dikeledi walks out of the bedroom and passes through to the kitchen. She might have heard that tone. Such a scary tone.

Why can't I go?

"Mrs Masango has already paid for everything," I say. The best way to deal with him, it to make

him think he is in control. I try my best to make him think that way.

He pulls his phone from his jacket and sits on the couch. He scrolls it a few times – probably looking for evidence. My heart is pounding. What if he picks that Njabulo has something to do with this? No man, Njabulo has this figured out. He would put me in trouble. I clear my throat and say, "It is just a week. I'll be back before you know it."

"Maria, are you sure you are going to the workshop?" he asks. He has found an email from my boss.

"I am going to the workshop."

"We were supposed to go to Venda to meet your mother. My uncles are ready."

"You need to send my mother a letter to inform her about your intentions."

"There is no time."

"What is the rush Luzuko?" I ask.

"When you come back from your trip, we are driving to Venda to talk to your mother. And you must start planning for the wedding," he says. I must start planning for a wedding I don't even want. For a wedding I won't even

attend.

There is noise from the kitchen.

Dikeledi is washing the dishes and is intentionally pissing Luzuko off.

I would kill for anything to make him go. He shoots his eyes to the kitchen and then back to me.

"Would you like to grab ice cream...or supper?" he asks.

Oh no!

"I need to have an early night.

The transport is picking me up

very early and there are some

study materials I need to work on

before the workshop starts

tomorrow."

He gets on his feet.

"Please walk me out," he says. I walk out of the door first and he follows behind me. He stops and takes my hands. "I love you so much Maria. I want you to know that...I am doing this because I love you. You may be blinded by the world and when that is the case, you won't see the beauty of our relationship. I love you."

I swallow hard and nod at him. I don't love him at all.

He drops his lips to kiss me. I close my eyes and pray not to flinch. He mustn't know how badly I hate this moment right here. I suck in a breath and he kisses me.

"I love you, okay?" he says after that cold kiss. I pull a smile as he lets go of my hands.

Phew!!!!!!

Dikeledi hurries to me just when I enter the door.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"Yeah."

"This guy freaks me out," she says.

He is a monster! That's what he is.

Oh my God! I cannot believe Mrs Masango...or Njabulo booked me into this place. This is what we call Heaven on earth. Wow!

The drivers picked me right after breakfast and we had been on the road for four hours. I follow him as he pushes my luggage to the reception.

The receptionist checks me in before someone shows me to my cottage. I am booked a cottage, huge enough to fit a family.

Why can't I call Njabulo and tell him I arrived safely? Why can't I call him and ask him to join me if he could? For some reason, I long for his touch.

That kiss!!! That magical kiss. I laugh at myself for allowing myself to long for a man. Luzuko

does not have that effect on me.
"Did you arrive safely?" Dikeledi asks when I call her.

"I did. This place is beautiful," I say. I have to always mark my words when I chat on the phone. Someone might be very offended. I tell her about the classes that I am going to attend tomorrow – of course, the classes do not exist. I am just making it up in case Luzuko is listening.

There is no workshop here. I am just here to relax.

Wednesday and Thursday, I spent the entire day in bed with a new novel from Thandeka's shelf. I

wonder if she remembers that I took a few books a while ago.

This a perfect place for me to read and lazy around. I stayed in the bed to also regain my strength. I felt like I needed a rest from life. I am not bored – not at all. I just needed to be alone.

The lady at the reception told me that I am allowed to book whatever activity I want – Mrs Masango will settle the invoice. She suggested a few activities but I was not in the mood.

I think I am too exhausted from what Luzuko is putting me

through. I am sick and tired. He called me a few times and I always ignore the phone call, to only call him back so that I can easily hang up. He makes me sick. What is Njabulo working on? - If he is working on something? I pray that that the Luzuko issues is getting solved.

It is a Friday morning and I know exactly how I am going to spend it. I am going to chill by the pool. I saw a few people sitting around the pool - I should join them. I could also join the hiking team to trek up the mountain during sunset.

I change into a swim-suit – a swim suit I wouldn't dare to wear in front of people I know. It is one of the pierces that Dikeledi forced me to pack. It wouldn't kill me to get into the pool. No one knows me here. I can be whatever I want.

When a knock drums on the door, I pick a wrap from the bed and wrap it around my waist. It could be room-service but I didn't order anything.

"Surprise!!!"

"WHAT? what are you doing here?" I call out as my friend beams at me. A small luggage bag

stands beside her. "Thandeka?"

"Do you mind if I crash in your cottage?" she asks before I jump on her. I pull her into a tight hug, without minding the flowers she has in her arms.

"Oh, my God. I am so happy to see you," I say after letting her go. She smiles at me. I quickly grab her bag and lead the way inside.

"Going for a swim?"

"Yeah," I say. "I cannot believe you are here. What are you doing here?"

"I am here to deliver the flowers from Mr Buthelezi," she says.

Only now do I acknowledge how beautiful this bouquet is. I am not really crazy about flowers but I love this gesture. I take them from her arms. Red roses. "He sends his greetings. He says he misses you."

"I miss him too," I respond while setting the flowers on the table. I will get a vase from the reception. "Are they already working on something?"

"They are on it. But he said I must stress you about Luzuko...so I am here on vacation with you."

"Apparently I am here for a workshop," I say while laughing.

"That was the best way to get you out of Johannesburg. Can I change? I also need a swim," she says while grabbing her luggage bag.

My friend has turned this vacation into a catch-up session. We stayed up in bed and watched a number of movies from the TV. Some were boring and some were good enough to keep us company. It is Saturday afternoon and Thandeka suggested that we do a picnic. The restaurant organised a picnic basket. Thandeka is having more fun than I am. I

bet this is her first weekend ever without her little family. It is a pity that we cannot share the pictures of our mini vacation. We cannot even take pictures together.

"I am bringing Gundo here for his birthday," she says after sipping her wine.

"You guys love nature. This will be perfect for his birthday," I respond.

"Are you going to bring Njabulo one day?" Thandeka asks. I blush. I like the thought of Njabulo and I together, in a place like this. I nod at her. "Maria, why didn't you

tell me?"

We are getting serious now. I was running away from this chat. "I didn't want to scare you. I wanted to have a plan first," I respond.

"I understand. I was just worried sick about you," she says.

"I pray that this gets solved," I say. I pray for a perfect life with Njabulo.

"Your mother called me this week, asking that I talk to you," she says.

"What?"

"She is also worried sick about you. She says that it feels like

there is something that you are hiding from her. She didn't want to push you too hard...but she can sense that something is eating you up," she says. I have been trying to act normal whenever my mother calls me. She would call for prayer on weekends, but I would be cold towards her. I didn't want her to force the truth out of me. "Enough about this," I say. I feel depressed just by talking about this. "Why don't we go change into something sporty for quad bikes?" "You? Quad bike?" Thandeka asks.

"You think I cannot beat you on

Quad biking?" I ask while getting up.

When we get back to the cottage, I search my luggage bag for a pair of leggings. Thandeka is already in a sporty wear so she is seated on the bed, browsing a magazine.

"You should wear more of those," Thandeka says when she notices me in leggings. Njabulo said the same thing. Maybe I should consider it. These are two people that trust.

"Don't you miss the boys?" I ask. She hasn't spoken to her husband and kids since she got here. She

shakes her head with a smirk on her face. She is surely resting from her busy family. Plus, it is just two nights away from home. One night down, one more to go. My phone starts pinging from the bed. One ping is followed by another until we both look at each other. I jump for my phone to notice a thousand whatsapp messages flying in.

"What the hell Maria?"

"Is this not your friend?"

"Maria, why are you sending this to me?"

"Is that not Thandeka and Gundo?"

My phone rings and it is my mother. My heart is pounding. My heart is pounding. Thandeka stares at me. More messages are flying in and different tunes are ringing. Some are coming from Facebook.

"What is going on?" Thandeka asks.

My phone rings again. It is my mother. She is not going to stop calling me. Thandeka is getting on her feet.

"Hello Mma," I quickly answer.

There is no running away.

"What is going on with you?" she yells loudly. "How can you send me

a video of Thandeka and her husband in bed?"

Oh my God! I freeze. My phone slips from my hand. Luckily, the floor is carpeted.

Thandeka picks the phone from the floor and swipes the screen. She starts to tremble. It is written all over her face. She is shocked. She doesn't even move her eyes away when her voice feels the phone. she is calling Gundo's name in pleasure.

Oh my God. Oh, my God.

"He sent my video to all your friends," she says and drops to sit on the bed.

Oh my God...

She keeps staring at the screen. I wish for this to be a dream. Her screaming voice is disturbed by the phone loading more notification. People are probably watching and asking me why I am sending them my best friend's sex tape.

I grab the phone from her hands. She seems to be shocked. She must be shocked. I quickly dial Luzuko's number. How did he know that are after him? Did he know that Thandeka is here? She left her phone in Joburg so that he doesn't track it.

He picks it up before it could even ring.

"Luzuko? What did you do? What did you do???" I call out, my voice breaking.

"Who is trying to tap into my IP address? Who?" he asks as cold as I have ever heard him.

"What did you do?" I cry out.

"What did you do?"

"Who did you tell? Who did you tell?"

"What kind of a man are you Luzuko?" I cry out. Thandeka is pacing the room now. I had so many contacts on my phone. When I tried deleting them, I couldn't.

There are Gundo's workers on my phone list.

Oh my God, Luzuko.

"You are pathetic," I hiss at him.

"Don't talk to me like that Maria."

"How could you?"

"Why do you always go against my wishes?" he asks. He sounds like he is pacing around the room.

"Was it necessary for you to do this?"

"Who did you tell? Why do you like to test me Maria? Why?"

"I didn't..."

"Don't lie to me," he yells. I shut my eyes and swallow hard.

"Luzuko!"

"I told you not to tell anyone. I told you. Who did you tell?" he calls out before I hang up. I do not know what to do.

I am even scared to open the video. I saw a thousand of those and I wouldn't wish the world to see any of them.

The water is spill. The damage is done.

My phone rings. It is Gundo. I hesitantly pick it up.

"Hello," I say.

"Where is my wife? Get her on the phone," Gundo calmly says.

Thandeka is panting in the corner

of the room. "Put my wife on the phone, right now."

"Gundo," I whisper as I give Thandeka the phone.

He doesn't care that Luzuko might be listening. He is worried sick about his wife.

"Hello, babe," Thandeka responds before breaking into a cry.

EPISODE 17

NJABULO

"What are you saying?" I ask.

"Should we go ahead or not?"

Gundo walks around the kitchen,

with his wife sitting quietly on the chair. She is drinking her fourth glass of wine and the IT guy is playing his fingers on his laptop.

"So, this man watches my children sleeping...all the time?" Thandeka asks. She is not sober and she is not drunk.

"That is why I say, we take the risk to get this fixed," Gundo says. We have been trying to find angles for day.

"And have my love making sessions scattered all over social network?" Thandeka asks. Her voice is shaking.

"What are you worried about?
The sloppiness of the deed
orrrrrr?" I ask. Gundo and
Thandeka both throw daggers at
me with their eyes. I raise my
hands in surrender. I wanted to
assist in taking a decision. If it
isn't sloppy...then why not release
them. If it is sloppy, then I will
have to fight for my friend's
dignity.

Gundo stands in front of his wife
and takes her hand.

"Babe...we are going to get over
it," he says.

"No...no...Gundo...no..."

"I cannot let the bastard invade

our privacy like that. He watches our kids, every day. We need to tap into his computer to get all the evidence we want to bring him down."

"Why don't we move into a new house?" Thandeka asks. "We can take the kids to your house for a while and move.."

"Babe, he is going to find out."
This is tough.

"I won't survive this Gundo. How am I going to walk around, knowing that people know how we do our things? The things we do in our bedroom?" Thandeka says. What things are these?

"Maybe we could do this at midnight when he is sleeping," I say.

"That is not a problem. My problem is the automated command that he might have set if anyone attempted to do anything. He might have built a wall around his address that would trigger the armed response...something like that," Petrus, our IT guy says.

"No...no... come with another plan," Thandeka says. She gets on her feet and walk out of the kitchen. They came over to my house. I don't know now.

"She is leaving for Mpumalanga on Friday. We can do this on Saturday. I cannot have that lunatic have his way. And reporting him to the police is just a waste of time. We have to work with them instead," Gundo says. He is a sick bastard.

Thandeka walks back and asks if Gundo could take her home. I bet she is taking this in a bad way.

Petrus and I work for more hours, trying to find a way around Luzuko's APP. I should give it to him, he is smart and his APP is perfectly developed with 1000% security. If he could launch this,

he would make millions from his back-yard.

On Saturday morning, Petrus shows up with his laptop. If you meet him in the street, the first thing you would tell him when he greets you is, 'I don't have any money.' He looks poor but his work makes him millions.

He sets his laptop in the kitchen while we wait for Gundo to arrive. I need a stiff drinks.

"Want something to drink?"

"I don't drink while I'm on the job," Petrus responds. Oh yeah? I have a bar in my office.

"Good for you, Sir. Good for you,"

I respond.

Gundo walks in with a six pack of Heineken. Isn't he going to need more than that? He looks frustrated.

"My wife is going to kill me...but let's do this," Gundo says. The man has got balls and he deserves a bells.

Petrus works his magic on his laptop. His hands moves fast as he cracks the code or whatever ish he is doing.

"Damn it," Petrus swears before our phones ping. The bastard!

"Automated command."

"Dammit!!!!" Gundo swears before

he dishes a million swearing words while pacing the kitchen.

The bastard!

"The damage is done. Can you crack into his system?" I ask.

"Just give me a minute," Petrus says. His fingers are speeding like lightning. The damage is done. We just need to copy the data and wipe the videos from the face of earth. It is just unfortunate that those who have already opened the video have seen it. The rest will not be able to do so. Gundo gulp the whole bottle of beer before calling Maria's number.

"Number busy," he says.

Can he finish already? I cannot wait to get my hands on this bastard.

"Where is my wife? Get her on the phone. Put my wife on the phone, right now," Gundo says. He must be calling his wife.

"Babe...listen...no...no...I understand and I am sorry.

Please stay there a little longer. I'll fix this. I assure you, we are working on it. Yes. I love you."

He drops the phone on the table and swears.

"He is on the move now..." Petrus say.

Yes! He was able to tap into his phone APP.

"Let's go," I call out while grabbing my car keys. I am going to kill this man with my bare hands.

I park the car on the opposite side of the road. Petrus keeps updating us on how close he is to his apartment. I remember his car from the evening prayer meeting I attended at their church.

So, he fakes his commitment to church and God? How sick can one be?

"He is here," Petrus says. Gundo and I jump out of the car and cross the street before the gate closes. I follow the car while Gundo takes the other turn, to go have a chat with the security guard. The guard has been yelling at us for tailgating. The prick didn't see me. He parks his car and grabs his items from the passenger seat. He only lands his eyes on me when he jumps out of the car.

"Good day, to you too," I say before punching him on the face and pulling my gun out. Damn, I am too excited that I get to use

my licensed gun for the first time
– and for serious things.

“What are you doing?” he hisses,
blood staining his teeth.

“I am here to visit you,” I say
while showing him to lead the
way. You know the problem of
staying in the burbs is that, you
are on your own. His apartment is
in a gated complex with just a
few houses. No one is out here to
mind our business or rescue him. I
tap him on his shoulder with the
gun and he walks towards his
house. He unlocks the door and
walks inside.

Oh! Such a normal family guy,

whose home is beautiful. When Gundo joins us, he takes the key from the door and lock it.

"You are pathetic, do you know that?" I ask. He laughs and that forces me to hit him with the back of the gun. He groans as he tries to get up from the floor.

"What do you want?" he asks.

What do we want? To kill him. He has done the damage already.

"Nkele is already on his way,"

Gundo advises. He is looking down at this bastard with so much rage.

"Your wife is quite an entertainer," Luzuko says and

laughs. Gundo lets out one kick to his stomach. Oh, I didn't know he had it in him. I bet you must never dare mess with a man's family.

"You are sick," Gundo spits.

"You are all going down with me," he says.

"What did you say?" I ask.

"You are going down with me...mostly you," he says. I give him a hot clap with the back of my hand. What he does is to laugh the pain away.

Just perfect!

I walk around the room, searching for his laptop. His

bedroom is filled with Maria's pictures on the wall. These were not meant to decorate the room. He is just too obsessed with her. In the corner of the room is a work station with a laptop. I open the drawers to get hold of any gadgets. He has a number of phones in his drawer. I open all the drawers from his pedestal. Oh... damn!

There are a number of bottles of Antipsychotics meds – unopened containers of medication. The fucker has not been taking his meds. Hundreds of medication. Some bottles are empty and some

half empty.

"You are a sick bastard," I say when I walk back to the living room. He stares at me. There is no sign of abnormality other than his disgusting wide smile that hides what is going on in his head. Gundo is on his phone.

"Did you check on Petrus?" I ask. He must be done taking down the fire.

A bang on the door takes our attention. I peep from the window before opening the door. It is Nkele and his two partners. I know this police guy through Zizipho's friend.

"Did you have to fuck him up?"

Nkele asks when he walks into the room. Luzuko is sitting on the floor, his face re-arranged.

"I didn't do anything," I respond.

If I meant business I would have fucked him up. Gundo has so much to lose and I have nothing to lose. I give Nkele's laptop to his partner and show them where to get the other gadgets. Nkele pulls the guy up and pull the phone from his pocket.

"We will take it from here," Nkele says before dropping him back to the floor. I hide the gun and lead

the way out of the house,
followed by Gundo.

Gundo is drained by the time we drive to his house. I am exhausted too. I think we have done enough for the day. The twins are happily playing in the middle of the living room and the moment they notice their father – the room is filled with joyful babies. This is life.

Gundo briefly hugs them before he hurries to his room to pack up a few clothes for himself and more clothes for his wife.

“Uncle Njabulo...do you know

Mathematics?" Ciara asks from the dining table. The school books are all over the table.

"Mathematics?" I ask. Of course she said mathematics; I am just looking for excuses to give her. I hate primary mathematics. Its principle is just different from how the normal mathematics is.

"If you want to learn anything about business management and marketing, I am your guy," I say and she frowns. "I'll teach you that when you grow up."

I walk up to where she is seated. I sigh deeply. Can't I do serious issues like killing a man for the

first time? Now I have to count how many eggs the chicken laid.

"Daddy always gets it right," she says.

"Your daddy knows everything," I say.

Thank God Gundo walks down the stairs with his brown leather overnight bag. He needs to get away from the world for a little bit. I am driving him to

Mpumalanga so that I can come back with his car. He will drive back with his wife when they are ready to face the world. I will stay put with the company and I will always come by to check on his

family.

I think Maria should also take time off from work. Mrs Masango can sort that out.

"Please lock up the door. Njabulo will come by tomorrow afternoon to check you and the kids," Gundo says to the nanny.

It is already evening when we drive to Badplaas. I am so exhausted from the events of the day but I am doing all this effortlessly. I think this is what they mean when they say, you can do anything for the people you love.

Gundo has been part of my life

since our varsity days. He took me in when I had given up about life. He deserves my loyalty. Maria is the other reason why I am doing this. I want her in my life and if this is what it takes to claim her, let it be.

Maria's phone has been off since the afternoon. It should be after midnight right now. The security personnel do not give us a hustle when we reach the lodge. We had called in to inform them of our arrival time at these odd hours. "The lights are off," Gundo says as we march to the cottage which the security directed to us.

Gundo softly knocks a number of times until we notice a light beaming from the window.

Someone is up.

"Who is it?" Thandeka is up.

"Gundo," he responds and the door flies open.

"Babe...did you drive the whole night?" she asks while fastening the gown. She greets me while leading the way inside.

"I had to," Gundo says. "How are you holding up?"

"You promised you were going to find another way to solve this thing," she says. Gundo sighs deeply before following her to her

room. If that is Thandeka's room, that should be Maria's room.

I am tempted to find myself in there. It would be unfair of me to disturb her from her sleep. I'll take the sleeper couch which is in the living room.

If only they could stop debating about what happened yesterday, I would be falling asleep right now.

"I told you Gundo... I won't be able to survive it. What if people circulate it to your employees? Everyone from our village? Do you know the damage?" Thandeka

asks. She panics a lot. But I think every woman panics.

I take off my sneakers before throwing myself on the sleeper couch.

Oh, what a day!

Where to from here?

"Njabulo?" a sweet voice calls out, forcing me to jerk up. It is Maria standing by the door to her room. Thandeka and Gundo are still debating about what is right and wrong about how we handled the whole situation; they might have woken Maria up. It isn't going to be easy for Thandeka.

"Hey, you are up. I didn't want to

wake you up," I say. She is wearing a sleeping shirt like those that Zizipho wears while watching TV at home. I despise them. If a person cannot sleep naked, at least something silky or lacey should do.

What am I saying? I am in her space. She didn't even know I was coming and it isn't like she is going trying to seduce me.

However, if she is seducing me with that shapeless sleep wear, it is working. I wouldn't be feeling the way I am feeling right now.

"Are you guys okay?" she asks. I should be the one asking them.

"I guess," I say. I might be lying. I am exhausted.

She stares down at the uncomfortable couch. I know right? It will just make worse.

"Do you want to use the bed?" she asks.

"Maria, are you asking me to come to bed with you?" I ask. She smiles. That is the only thing I wish to see on her face – a smile.

"I am asking if we should swap places. You need the rest and I bet you, I am not going to fall asleep again," she says.

"So, you don't want to get to bed with me?" I ask.

"Njabulo..."

"It is just an honest question," I say while getting on my feet. If I have to drive back after a few hours, I might need the bed. She walks back into the room and open the closet to get more blankets. I take my jeans off and pull the shirt off. She doesn't turn towards me until she is sure that I am in the blankets.

"Can you tell those two to shag it off and sleep?" I ask. I thought their debate won't take long.

"Thandeka is not taking it well," Maria sadly says. "I feel so bad that I brought Luzuko into their

lives. I feel so so so bad."

"Maria, you didn't know," I say. He looks like a normal champ. A good champ for that matter. I don't even think his pastor knows about his other side of life. It would have been great if this Pastor had a descending spirit to sense this ish from far.

"I cannot even switch my phone on. My mother and a lot of people I know got a video from me and people are swearing at me.

Thulani is so angry at me.

Everyone is just angry at me."

"I am sure they know that you were hacked. I mean, you wouldn't

intentionally send those videos to people," I say.

"What do people know about being hacked? You should have seen the thousand messages that people sent me."

"Give it a week. it will die down and people will move on," I say.

"I regret taking Luzuko to their house. Did you see that video? It is disgusting to watch," she says.

"What were they doing?" I ask. I didn't watch the video.

"Njabulo, please!" she sternly says.

"Okay, come to bed. Let's sleep."

"With you?" she asks with a frown. What? Am I that

disgusting?

"Why are you frowning?" I ask.

"This bed is too big enough for the both of us. I swear I won't be turned on. You will look that side and I will look the other way."

She stares at me before she gets to the other side. Instead of doing what I promised, I move closer to her and let her stare into my eyes.

"What should I do to fix this for Thandeka?" she asks. She is really worried about her friend.

"We fixed everything."

"What did you do?"

"We fixed it," I respond while caressing her arm with the back of my fingers. Her skin is too soft. "How?" she sweetly asks.

"I called a few guys to arrest him. and the IT guy wiped the video away. The only challenge is those people who opened it on whatsapp. If it wasn't a violation to tap into each phone...he was going to do so. So, I can say the damage is done...but not that much. I wish I could kill him...but I am not a killer. I am just a regular guy."

"Thank you," she quietly say.

"Anything for you, Maria," I

respond. I mean it. I have fallen in love with this woman and I will do anything to protect her. We both stare at each other for a long while, listening to Gundo and Thandeka...still chatting.

"They just need to shag like they always do...and they'll be fine," I repeat and Maria laughs. "You are so beautiful, Maria."

Why is she a virgin though?

"Thank you," she whispers.

"Now that you are a free woman from that lunatic, can I ask you out?"

"Give it a shot."

Give it a shot? I widen my eyes

and she giggles.

"Okay...Maria, would you officially be my girlfriend? I will take care of you...and be by your side through whatever ish the world will bring to you. I want to be the first guy you run to when the world turn its back on you...and..."

I didn't get to finish my request before she slams her lips on mine.

"Yes," she mumbles before continuing with a kiss.

Damn! I am officially taken.

"Oh, yeah? Are you sure?" I ask
- just to be sure.

"Yes!"

EPISODE 18

MARIA

Just like the night after our first kiss, I wake up beside him. He has snuggled me in his warm arms. Unlike the last time, today he is shirtless and Lord, his warm body is turning me on. He smells great too.

I close my eyes and try to get myself to fall asleep again.

It doesn't help so I stare at Njabulo as he softly snores.

I feel safe in his arms though. I

feel like nothing and no one will get to me if I stay here.

He sighs deeply – still deep in sleep. He must be very exhausted. I wonder how Thandeka is. I couldn't sleep when I heard them fight in the other room.

It is already morning but Njabulo is peacefully sleeping and I don't want to wake him up. I quietly get out of bed. Maybe I could take a walk, just to clear my head. I take a quick shower before getting into a pair of leggings and a t-shirt. I honestly look hot in these things but I don't feel comfortable. I feel like

I am exposing too much of my body.

Njabulo is still sleeping when I walk back to the bedroom.

I respect an exhausted man! My man! I giggle at myself. He is such a romantic man for asking me out the way he did.

I stand by the door that leads to the living area and stare at Njabulo. How much gym does he do to look like that? His body is firm and his stomach is firmer.

Stop looking Maria! I quietly rebuke myself since I am turned on by just staring at a man. He has that effect on me.

I need coffee! Then the walk!
I open but quickly close the door
again. Gundo is sleeping on the
sleeper couch. I guess they didn't
resolve whatever argument they
had last night.

"Did you just see a ghost?"
Njabulo asks. I have my back
against the wall. The thing is, I
didn't expect to see Gundo
sleeping on the couch and I don't
think I will ever look at him in
the eye ever again. My head is
filled with his imagine. Disgusting,
I know. I do not think I will ever
look at him in the eye. It is going
to be awkward!

Oh my God! How is he going to survive his employees? I saw that two of them saw the videos but what if they forwarded it to other people?

My heart is racing when I think of this. This is chaos! Chaos, chaos, chaos.

"Good morning," I say and flash a fake smile at him. My heart is still racing.

"What is wrong?" he asks. I stare at him without a word - I am suddenly speechless.

"Uhm...nothing," I respond.

"Uhm...you can tell me anything. You are my girlfriend now,

remember?" he says. That makes me smile.

"Well, I was just not expecting to see Gundo sleeping on the couch."

"Oh, they didn't shag the argument off?" he asks. Why does he always revert back that way?

"What?"

"Do you think...that could solve a problem?" I ask. I mean, how?

"It always works. You'll see," he says with a smirk - making me shiver with excitement. Why am I even excited for such a thing.

"Why are you up so early?" he asks while getting up. I quickly turn so that I do not get to see

his briefs.

"You can look you know? The next thing, you'll be the one commanding me to take my clothes off," he says. I don't think so. I hear the bed squeak a bit when he gets off.

"Njabulo?" I call out because I think I can hear him walking towards me.

"What?" he whisper to my ear.

Oh, my God. His chest touches my back before his arms lands on each side of my waist.

Oh, this man is going to make me lose my morals and my mother will kill me for that.

"What are you doing?" I ask. I am nervous because him standing so close to me is making me wetter by the second.

"I just want to give you a morning hug," he says before I feel his hands on my shoulder. He turns me to face him.

I am shy - I don't know why. Maybe, I am just smitten. The hug comes with a few kisses on my neck. Fair enough! It is morning.

"Are you staying here for a few days?" he asks.

Stay here and share a cottage with Gundo and Thandeka? Hell

No.

"I am leaving with my boyfriend," I say and he breaks the hug to stare at me.

"Good choice," he says.

I make the bed while he freshens up - this will give Gundo enough time before Njabulo wakes him up. What went down though? I feel so bad for everything that has been going on. Njabulo comes into the bathroom, minutes later, dressed in his last night's clothes. He proceeds to the living room to wake his friend up. I wonder how he manages to find humour in everything that he does. I

couldn't help but laugh when he asked if he should plead with Thandeka to help him, Gundo, with the boner that is visible on his pants.

Who says that?

"I am going to drive back to Joburg after breakfast. I will go with my girlfriend so that you guys have the house to yourselves."

Wow. I will go with my girlfriend – that line made me smile.

"Sure, please check on my kids when you get there," Gundo says. He didn't even noticed that Njabulo called me his girlfriend. I

think he is too drained to notice such.

"Can I have the petrol card?" Njabulo asks. He sounds a little far from the living now. He is probably at the kitchen.

"Are you kidding me?" Gundo asks.

"I just told you I have a girlfriend and you didn't acknowledge that. I need to have enough money for those girlfriend allowance typer things," he says. Really Njabulo, really? I laugh.

"Good for you," Gundo says. "Can you guys move your things from the bedroom? I would like to take a nap."

"Maria is traumatised by what she saw on those videos...I wonder..."

"I don't have time for your jokes, Njabulo. I have no fucking time for your jokes. Do you know what this is doing to my wife? Do you know that? Just shut the fuck up man. Fokof, man!!!!," Gundo snaps.

I flinch. Maybe it was too soon for Njabulo to talk about this in this manner. He has a way of dealing with things and it is foreign to everyone.

"Hold up, man," Njabulo say. "My bad. We are in different spaces

right now...my apologies."

"Look... I am just worried about her...okay? She didn't want me to go ahead with the plan and I feel like I have failed her. Worse because she begged me not to go with the plan which we went with. I am sorry I am not happy for you...for winning Maria in this whole saga...I just have a lot to deal with right now."

"I am sorry," Njabulo says. This is the first time I hear him to be serious.

Gundo is really bothered. He doesn't sound like the Gundo we all know.

This is all my fault!

Njabulo walks into the room and asks me to pack my things because we were leaving for Johannesburg. There is no need for coffee and breakfast anymore. "I am sorry for putting everyone in this situation," I say. He has been quiet the whole time when I was packing my clothes in the luggage bags. Things just turned sour.

"Can we get out of here before my sense of humour dries out completely? I am not attractive when I am sour," he says with a smirk. He is right. He is lovable

when in a great mood. "I'll take the bags to the car."

"Can I talk to Thandeka?" I ask. I don't know if Gundo is still sitting in the living room or if he left for the bedroom. Njabulo pushes my bag out while I follow behind. I mumble my greetings before I head for Thandeka's room.

I knock a few a times before I open the door. I was worried that I would be waking her up. She is seated by the window with a book in hand.

"Thandeka, are you okay?" I ask while closing the door. She lifts

her eyes to me and nod. She looks as sad as Gundo.

"You look nice," she says.

"Thank you," I say while sitting on the edge of the bed. It is already made. "Thandeka, I am worried about you and Gundo."

"Don't worry about us," she says.

"I heard you last night, Thandeka," I say and she shakes her head. "How am I going to leave...knowing that you are not fine? I am worried about you...mostly because this is all my fault Thandeka."

"It isn't. This has nothing to do with you. Believe me."

"I am leaving with Njabulo. The first thing we will do when we get to Joburg will be to check on the kids," I say. She smiles. At least, she smiled.

"Thank you."

"Please...don't shut Gundo out. He is..."

"Stay out of it Maria."

As promised, the first thing we did when we got to Joburg yesterday was to go to check on Thandeka's children. Everyone was fine and I got to help the nanny with the kids the whole afternoon. Ciara had a lot of

questions about her parents'. Njabulo had perfect answers for her so by the time we left her, she was happily playing with the twins. She was excited that he is going to be the one to take her to school the week, meaning she can have waffles with her anyday without Thandeka finding out. Thandeka is a bit strick with her kids so a week of freely living came as an excitement for Ciara. She is only a kid.

I pray that Gundo and Thandeka work things out and go back to where they were before this whole saga. Her phone is still not

working - Gundo's too.

A few of my colleagues have been giving me weird looks. When I recall, Nomusa and Mrs Masango are the only people who had my cell number from work. It means the videos were forwarded to other colleagues. Mrs Masango wouldn't do that. Maybe they saw the video on Facebook. And to think I wasn't too active??? It is too sad.

"Maria, can you please come to my office?" Mrs Masango says before leaving for her office. I didn't even notice that she was standing in front of me. I panic

when I realize that my boss just ushered me the office. I hurry behind her.

"Yes, ma'am?" I say when I close the office door.

"I was told that you need some time off," she says.

By who? Njabulo right? He shouldn't have. I don't want to get in trouble with my boss.

"No...ma'am..."

"He is right. I was standing in front of you for five minutes and you didn't even notice me," she says.

"I am so sorry, ma'am," I say. It has been too brave of me to come

to work today. I just didn't want to bring my personal issues at work. Unfortunately, Mrs Masango knows what is going on. "You can put leave for a week or so...and deal with whatever is happening."

"I don't want to look like I do not appreciate my job. I was away for a week...and now..."

"It is not like I was given a choice," she says and laughs.

"That man of yours thinks he controls everything and he thinks he can control my company too."

"Oh my God...he shouldn't have done that..."

"He has a point though," she says. "Your heart is not here." My heart is at home. I want to go home to my mother. She doesn't understand what is going on. I called her last night with Njabulo's phone - he threw my phone away before we left Mpumalanga. She thinks Joburg has changed me. It is probably what everyone is telling her. Everyone who received a video from me.

I am worried about Thandeka and Gundo. I am worried about everyone. My head is all over the place.

"Can I take a week off? I will be back next week Monday."

"Sure," she says.

Mrs Masango is not as scary as we all think. She is considerate.

"Thank you Mrs Masango, I really appreciate," I say before walking out of the office. Nomusa is standing by the door. Is she eavesdropping? She quickly turns on her heels and hurries to sit behind our reception desk.

I settle on the chair and fill-in my leave on the system before getting my handbag. I pray she is not spreading rumours about me. I just pray.

Njabulo rushes to my apartment when I tell him that I need to go to Venda. Thank goodness, he also thinks it is a great idea. I bet, anything to keep me sane will do.

"Promise me, you will check on the kids already," I say.

"Do I have a choice? Ciara will never forgive me if I decide to Uber her to school.

"Thank you," I say.

"Tell your mother that I am coming to marry you," he says and quickly frown when I don't smile,

"Too soon, huh? Too soon neh?"

"Sorry. I..."

"No, don't worry babe, everything

will be okay."

"I am worried about Thandeka and Gundo," I say.

"Maria, Thandeka and Gundo survived that evil ex-wife, Diana. If they could survive her...then they can survive anything.

Right?

If they survived Mashudu's muti...then maybe no test will succeed in breaking their perfect union.

He drops me at the taxi rank to catch a taxi to Polokwane. He gives me his business card so that I can call him whenever I get a chance. Isn't it thoughtful

of him? I don't know his number by heart and for now I am phoneless. I take his business card and carefully place it in the back pocket of the jean dress that I am wearing.

Luckily, it is still early and the taxis are still there. He only drives away when the taxi drives out of the rank.

When I reach Thohoyandou, I got the last bus to the village. If I didn't find this bus, it was going to be chaos. It is already late but I know I am safe. Even though it will reach the village after

eight, the bus stop is just by the main road leading to my house.

It is dark for anyone to notice me - so I am safe.

On any other day, I would have heard my mother talking loudly when I enter the yard. It is eight thirty and it is already quite in the yard. It is so unlike my mother and brother who always needs my mother to yell at him to get some work done around the yard.

I knock on the kitchen door before walking into Khangwelo having supper with our cousin.

"Haw, Maria," he says. We don't

hug like other siblings but he looks happy to see me. My cousin greets from the table. He is in high school and he oftens come around when my mother is not home – so that Khangwelo doesn't have to be alone.

"Where did Mma go?" I ask.

"She is in her room," he responds.

"In her room?" I ask while dropping the bags. Why am I panicking? Maybe it is because I know that my mother is the last to leave the house. She locks up when my brother goes to bed. I proceed to her room.

"Mma," I call out while knocking.

If she was praying, I would have heard already. She doesn't respond so I open the door.

"Mma."

"Maria?" she calls out. The lights are off so I switch it on.

"Mma, are you okay?" I ask. No, she doesn't look fine at all. "Mma, what is going on?"

"I was just feeling a little...sad," she says while sitting up.

"What is going on?" I ask. She is not herself. She looks sick.

"I was trying to call you," she says. "We need to pray. We need to pray very hard. The devil has a hold on you now. We need to pray."

She looks so weak and this breaks my heart. It reminds me of the last time when she was like this. When I had to put my life on hold for her. She was stressed and then stress called high blood sugar...and then it was stroke. Things were bad and they started like this.

"Mma... why don't you rest?"

"What got into you Maria? I thought Johannesburg was not going to change you. What happened? What happened, my child? I used to pray for you every day...every day of my life."

"Mmma..."

"How is Thandeka and her husband? Oh my God...may God be with her and her husband. What did she do you to deserve that kind of betrayal?" she says.

She shouldn't have seen that video.

I hate you Luzuko! I despise you Luzuko. With all of my heart I hate you.

"Mma...listen..."

"The devil has gotten you," she says. Explaining to her won't work. It is just a waste of time, really.

"Mma, can you rest? We will chat tomorrow?" I ask before walking

out of the room so that she doesn't have another chance but to stay in bed.

Khangwelo is washing the dishes when I return to the kitchen. My mother taught us well. Just when I want to ask to use his phone, do I realize that my brother and cousin received the video too.

Somebody, shoot me right now!
Shoot me!

"Can I use your phone, Khangwelo?" I ask.

"Sure," he quietly responds. That was just a dismissal response. I pick the phone from the table and

walk outside. I don't know. I feel like crying hle!!! It has been a hectic long day and I am so exhausted from travelling.

I walk towards the gate so that no one hears me when I sob my sorrows away! I pull Njabulo's business card from the back call and dial his number. He answers at the third ring as if he was waiting for a phone call.

"Njabulo, hello," he answers.

"It is me," I say. I hear him take a deep sigh.

"How did you travel?" he asks. it is late, he must be in bed or getting ready for bed.

"I travelled well. I am just tired."

"What is wrong?" he asks.

Isn't nice for your man to know that something is wrong even when you try to act otherwise?

"Nothing."

"DO you want me to drive down there to find out what is wrong with you?" he asks. I laugh. We wouldn't want that.

"No. There wont be no need," I say.

"Then tell me what is bothering you."

"My mother doesn't seem too well. This whole sex tape is deeper

than I thought. She thought Joburg has swallowed me."

He sighs!

"Babe, this thing will blow up."

"She was once hospitalized...and I am worried that if it gets to that...then I will forced to take care of her," I say.

"It wont get to that," he says, with confidence.

"What if it does? I once packed up from Joburg and came back home because...she wasn't well."

"Then, I will relocate too. You are not going to slip away from me ever again. If that happens...then I am coming there

and run this company in Zwigodini village...whatever fuck you call that village," he says. I laugh out loud with tears running down my face. Zwigodini is right but the way he pronounced it too wrong!!!!

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah! I will move Gundo's company to Zwigodini because I love you," he says.

"I love you too," I respond - first time I confidently said it to a man.

I love him. I do.

EPISODE 19 (unedited)

NJABULO

I have been waiting for Maria's call the whole day. Why didn't I buy her a phone before she left for Venda? The thing is, her trip was unplanned and it would have been selfish of me to delay her by going shopping first. I can always get her a phone when she returns. I had to throw away her phone when we were in Mpumalanga. I wasn't going to just watch people torturing her with questions and all. She doesn't owe anyone an explaining but of course, it is Maria. She sees a

need to explain herself to the world.

I do not even know if she travelled well or not. That sucks! It sucks because I am worried about her. I pull a white shirt from the closet and put it on. I could pull laptop and work on an upcoming project but I am exhausted. This whole saga has drained all of us.

My phone vibrates on the night stand. I jump to answer it.

"Njabulo, hello," I quickly answer the phone.

"It is me," she sweetly says. She has been gone for just a few

hours but I already miss her.
Maybe I am just worried about
her. I am worried about how she
is. Her name is damaged.

Sigh!

"How did you travel?" I ask.

"I travelled well. I am just
tired," she responds. I can sense
worry in her voice. She is not as
bubbly. She isn't the Maria that
hugged and kissed me a few hours
ago. Something is wrong.

"What is wrong?" I ask.

"Nothing."

"Do you want me to drive down
there to find out what is wrong
with you?" I sternly ask but she

laughs at me. I could if I want. I have learnt that from my friend. When these women bark, you drop everything. Happy wife...or female human being...happy life.

"No. There won't be no need," she responds.

"Then tell me what is bothering you."

"My mother doesn't seem too well. This whole sex tape is deeper than I thought. She thought Joburg has swallowed me."

I sighs! Mothers and over reacting!!!!!! But I know it won't be easy to explain to these people.

"Babe, this thing will blow away."

I still feel that in a week's time, people will be focusing on a new interesting story.

"She was once hospitalized...and I am worried that if it gets to that...then I will be forced to take care of her," she responds. I trust her to drop everything for her mother. She is that kind of a human being. She puts the whole world before her.

"It won't get to that," I say.

"What if it does? I once packed up from Joburg and came back home because...she wasn't well."

"Then, I will relocate too. You are not going to slip away from me

ever again. If that happens, then I am coming there and run this company in Zwigodini village...whatever fuck you call that village," I say and she loudly laughs. It is good to hear that laugh. A sweet laugh. I can only imagine that smile on her face.

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah! I will move Gundo's company to Zwigodini because I love you," I say.

Maybe I won't literally relocate Gundo's company to their dusty village, but what I am trying to say is the fact that I can do anything to be with her. I can

move mountains to be in her life.
Believe me, I would do.

Maria is special. Very, very special.
"I love you too," she says and
that makes my dick to twitch.
Wow! It feels good when a woman
you are deeply in love with loves
you back.

I am ready to do this life with
her.

"You do?" I ask. This days, it is
great to be sure. What if I didn't
hear her properly???

"I love you."

"I miss you already."

"I miss you too."

"If only you knew how much your

voice is turning me on Maria," I say.

"Don't tell me you are horny," she says.

"Do you have to ask. I am forever horny," I respond.

"Always horny?" she asks before we hear someone calling her name from the back. The owner probably wants their phone back.

"I have to go."

"Call me tomorrow or let me know when to call."

She blows me a kiss before hanging up.

I don't know if there are employees who saw Gundo's tape. I don't want to know and I am not going to bring it up. I didn't spend too much time in the office yesterday, so I didn't do anything. Phuti is on vacation leave this week. Anza walks into my office with a pile of paper. A contract I had prepared for Mrs Masango. She kept her promise and I have to deliver. She is good business woman. She didn't even hesitate when I asked her to release Maria for a week. I thought it was going to take a lot for me to convince her.

Anza places the contract on the table and walk away. I could call Mrs Masango to come to a meeting this afternoon, but I am not in the mood.

My head is all over the place. If it isn't on Gundo and his wife, it is on Maria and her mother. When she called me this morning, she told me that her mother didn't go to work. She promised to call me again in the afternoon, to update me on the progress. My mind is also on that Luzuko guy. I have no interest in what happens to him unless they lock him into jail and an institution. He is a danger

to himself and the community.

"Would you like me to assist with anything?" Anza asks. She is standing at the end of my desk.

"No, thank you," I say before she twirls and leave my office.

I get on my feet and walk towards the window. It is a busy Tuesday. It is not even lunch time but the streets are busy.

Damn, I am already tired!

Waking up early, to drive to Gundo's house to pick up Ciara is tougher than I thought. If she has to be at school before seven thirty, I need to wake up two and a half hours before then. She

loves school, though – just like my nephew. The driver's job is tiring but it the least I can do for my friend right now.

This is killing the both of them. He wouldn't have snapped at me if it wasn't. He never snaps on people unless he is really pissed.

"Where is he? I have been trying his cell number since Saturday.

What is going on?" I hear a familiar voice.

I shake my head while heading to the door. She is still as dramatic as before.

"What is the matter, Diana?" I ask while leaning on the office

door. She turns towards me and stares at me from my head to toe before giving me a smile.

"Njabulo!" she says.

"The one and only," I say. "Come on in...and stop yelling at my employees."

She walks towards my door. I walk in first and she follows in.

"Was there no budget to revamp this office?" she asks. I look around the office.

"I like it like this. You have a good style, I must say," I respond. Diana had always had style. She had always been a woman of arty things. The way

she dresses and her space was always arty. I just wonder how she is managing now that Gundo is not funding her.

"Where is Gundo?" she asks.

Did she see the sex tape? That is the first thing I ask myself when I realised the possibility.

Imagine! That would be so messed up.

"He is away on vacation," I say. I don't have to mention that he is on vacation with his wife. I am not spicy like that. I'll leave that for women.

"Is that the only reason he is not picking up my calls?" she asks. I

shrug. How would I know? I don't know what the reasons are.

Maybe he doesn't want to upset his wife. Maybe he is honestly attending to his phone. How would I know? "His wife's phone is off."

"I can help," I say. As long as it doesn't have to do with money.

Imagine what kind of a man will that make me if I give my best friend's ex-wife money?

"It was supposed to be my weekend with Ciara. I am going to Kimberley for the weekend. I could take her with her if she wasn't needed at her cousin's birthday party. I received an

invitation and I need to RSVP by tonight," she says.

Are kiddies birthday parties this serious?

"Well...uhm...I am sure will Gundo will be back by then," I say.

"And if he isn't? Can I send someone to pick her up for the party?" she asks.

"No. if he isn't back...I will take her myself," I respond.

"You?"

"Yes, me," I say before letting out a huff of laughter, "Don't you trust me with your daughter?"

"I don't know I can trust you with my daughter."

"I make a great uncle. Ask her the next time you see her...she will tell you that I am the best uncle ever."

"Where is Gundo?" she asks.

"Why do you care?" I ask and she shakes her head. "Like I said, he is on vacation."

"I see," she says while getting up. The dress she is wearing is short. Too short for a baby mama to be consulting with the father. Maybe it was meant to seduce Gundo; I don't know. I really do not know. She walks around my office - which was once hers. I watch as she picks my photo

frames from a small cabinet.

There are just a few pictures of my nephew and some belong to my grandmother. I do not have a perfect hall of fame.

"Still going around fucking women for fun?" she asks.

"That was long time ago," I respond. When she was married to Gundo, I was a player. A hardcore player that didn't care about anyone's feelings.

"What happened? You finally found love?"

"I thought I could try this love thing like the rest of you," I respond. "Have you found love? It

has been a while since the divorce."

"What? Are you fishing information for your friend?" she asks with a smirk.

Believe you me; I don't think Gundo still knows that Diana is still alive. Hakho haar! His life is with his new family and since he has full custody of Ciara, he is not bothered about how Diana lives her life. I don't think a piece of this information would do anything to him. So, the response to that is that, HELL NO, I am just trying to make a conversation.

"No. My friend won't even know what to do with that piece of information."

"I am off men. I am focusing on myself," she says.

Good for you Diana, good for you.

"So, where is the invitation to the party? In case Gundo is not back from his honeymoon," I say. She widens her eyes at me, "I mean...vacation."

Is she still in love with the man? That would be sick if it the case.

"The party is at Spur in Menlyn," she says. "From 2PM."

I hate Spur birthday parties but I will do it for my friend. I can

always take my laptop and zone into work while she parties.

"Got it," I say.

"The theme is Frozen," she says while picking her handbag. "She doesn't do face paint...so please...no face paint."

No face painting. Spur at 2PM. Frozen. Got it.

It is only Thursday, but I have had it. It has been a long day, just like yesterday. I am starting to hope that Gundo will show up tomorrow. I don't think I will survive this party that I am supposed to take Ciara too. On

Tuesday when I picked her up from school, I told her about it and since then, it has been in her lips. It is all that I hear about. Apparently, I am supposed to take her shopping to get Frozen dress and all. Zizipho had to be busy to help me out. So, tomorrow I am supposed to go to the mall to get a dress and presents. When I spoke to Gundo this morning, he only asked how things were. I didn't want to piss him off by asking too many things. All I did was to update him about how the twins are. They are just two happy champs and I was

making sure that I leave the house when Ciara was done with her homework.

I make a great uncle, see?

My phone vibrates from the night stand. I smile before swiping it to answer.

"Hey beautiful?" I say.

"How was your day?" she asks.

Her voice still worries me, even though she told me that she spoke to her mother on Tuesday. I thought she said her mother understood.

"It was hectic. I'll tell you about it after you tell me what is bothering you," I say.

"Nothing is bothering me," she says. "I just miss you."

I beam on the phone.

"I miss you more. When are you coming back?"

"On Sunday," she says.

"Not Saturday?" I ask while sitting up. How am I supposed to go to that party alone?

"Mom asked me to accompany her to the doctor and I want to make sure that she is fine."

"I bet I can survive another two days. I want you back though."

I hear someone calling out for Maria so we cut the phone call short.

Sigh! My life sucks right now. It feels so lonely. I can survive a few more days though.

Luckily, Zizipho bought a dress and a gift for me on her way from work yesterday. I didn't have to go to the mall with primary scholar – I know how exhausting that is. I have done a few times with Nkosinathi.

"Uncle Njabulo...it fits," Ciara calls out as she twirls around. She looks very pretty. The nanny also tied her hair like a doll. "Did you see my hair?"

I saw that one coming.

"You look lovely," I say. That is enough to make her blush. I help her buckle up before driving to Pretoria for the birthday celebration.

She is in a great mood. If only she could share some of that happiness with a few of us.

On my way to Pretoria, I call Maria on her brother's phone. She has saved my phone number so that her brother knows when it is me calling, looking for her.

She keeps me company as I drive from Johannesburg.

"I cannot wait for tomorrow. I want to kiss you so bad and jerk

off this load that has turned my balls purple," I say - in Zulu of course. Ciara cannot be part of this convo.

"Yeah?" she sweetly asks. If only she knew what her voice does to me.

"I am too horny, it is not even funny," I say.

"When you are horny...." She says but her line got cut. It should be the network. I try the phone again but it is off.

When we reach Spur in Menlyn, she runs to her little cousins who were as excited to see her. A long table is set for the mothers who

brought the children. The other table has the birthday party with just a few kids around the table. We are too early. I am too much of a punctual man.

I wave at them before picking a table in a corner where I can easily watch Ciara and the party. I got a very quiet corner where I can work and watch the party now and then. Gundo would kill me if anything happens to her. I order a draft of beer and set my laptop to start attending to some emails.

"I thought I was seeing things. Njabulo is that you?" a familiar

voice says. The voice is not too familiar but it is fresh to my mind.

Ish!!!

I close my eyes first before opening them and meeting the owner of the voice.

"Heeeeyyy," I say, my voice trailing off.

Ish!!!

"I saw you dropping the girl over for the party..." she says while sitting beside me. She shifts closely to me - unnecessarily. Does she have to sit here? She flashes a smile at me. She is gorgeous. She just looks more decent than

what she did at my party.

"Oh yeah??" I ask.

"This is crazy, right?" she says and then gives me a seductive smile.

"Yeeahhhh," I respond before clearing my throat.

"We have unfinished business," she says and giggles.

Unfinished business!!! I was supposed to have shagged her during my house party. Had I know that I was going to meet her, I wasn't going to suggest to bring Ciara over for the party. How was I to know anyway? How? I have to keep an eye on

Ciara in places like these. Mostly, when that lunatic promised to go down with us. I cannot be reckless with Gundo's children. I have to make sure that I am here for him so that he only has to stress about his wife only.

If she is here, it means she came to the party knowing who I am. If she is here then she is Diana's relative.

Shit! I thought she was just one coloured girl who followed her friends to the party.

"How have you been?" I ask, trying to act normal.

"I have been great."

"That is good," I say.

This is awkward!

My phone rings, saving me from this awkwardness.

"Hello," I say. I didn't even check the caller ID. I just jumped so that I get an excuse to stand.

"Babe...sorry, the battery died earlier?" Maria says.

"I figured?" I say and without a warning, this girl drops her hand and places it on my cock, forcing me to jerk up.

WTF?

"You were saying you were horny," she says and my dick responds to her sweet voice. This girl grabs

my growing penis which is not meant for her.

"Uhhh...uhhh..." I try to say something.

"Njabulo, are you okay?" Maria asks on the phone.

I move my phone from my ears so that I sternly reprimand this girl with a stern look.

"Your dick is hard rock... ready for me, huh??? I am not wearing panties. Why dont we finish what we didnt finish at your house party?"

What the fffffff...

I look at the screen. The call is still counting. She stares at the

screen too.

"Oopps, you were still on the call?"
she asks and the dialer stops
counting.

Maria hanged up.

EPISODE 20

MARIA

"Your dick is hard rock... ready for
me, huh??? I am not wearing
panties. Why don't we finish what
we didn't finish at your house
party?"

Huh? What is going on here?

"Oopps, you were still on the call?"
the same voice echoes in my ear.

Wow!

I press the red button and take a deepest sigh! Wow! I get on my feet and walk outside, to get some air – the phone vibrating in the pocket. I cannot believe Njabulo met up with that girl from the party. The same girl that had me jealous when she interrupted us. He was ready to sleep with her and the only reason he didn't was because I showed up and disturbed his plans.

Did they hook up again? Did they meet up to finish what they have started? I thought I mattered. I thought he was going to

change his ways.

Who am I fooling? The man was sexual active before he broke up with his EX. He has confessed a thousand times how horny he is. He was sexual active to a point where another man fought him so that he stayed away from his wife. I was at the party where he had invited nude women so he could feast on one or on all of them. I knew all of this but my heart still chose to court him.

I run my hand on my face.

Why am I hurt? Maybe it is the fact that he proposed to me and told me that he wants us to

officially date. I thought that would mean we both do not entertain other people. Ex or potentials.

I am hurt.

The phone vibrates but I don't respond. I don't trust myself to have a matured conversation with him right now. What am I going to say to him?

It hurts that our relationship died before it even began. What did I expect? Njabulo and I are just two different individuals. I'd be lying if I say I don't wonder how we are going to make it through without anyone of us

compromising on their values or morals.

What am I saying? Relationships are all about compromises. But how far am I willing to go?

I take a deepest sigh before contemplating on walking back to where my brother and mother are at.

The phone beeps before I could pass the phone back to Khangwelo. I wouldn't want my brother to see my business so I open the texts.

Njabulo: For God's sake can you please pick up my phone calls?

Just after I read the WhatsApp

text, he calls but I don't answer it. Can he let me breathe a little bit? I don't know what to say to him. A second later another beep goes off.

Njabulo: For crying out loud Maria. Pick up your phone. I can see you are blue ticking me lol.

Two pictures appear from Njabulo. One is a picture of a table in Spur with his laptop and one beer; and the other one is of Ciara, standing on a couch with a group of other kids.

Njabulo: You should be very proud of yourself for making me prove my innocence to you. Dammit

Maria, answer your phone so that I can embarrass myself some more by explaining myself. Stop blue ticking me.

Njabulo: Fuck it! I feel like a sissy right now.

Njabulo: Could you please answer your phone?

I dial his number and he picks it immediately.

"Maria...really?" he asks and laughs.

Really what? What was I supposed to think? What was I supposed to think when I heard those things? It has nothing to do with my insecurities about how

gorgeous she is. He is my boyfriend and should stop entertaining these women who throws themselves to him if that was the case.

"You can still make sense without swearing, all the time when you talk," I say.

"That only happens when I lose my breath," he says. What an excuse.

"I see."

I keep quiet. Someone has some explanation to do and that someone is not me.

"She just came here...nothing happened," he breathes out a

laughter. "You don't believe me do you?" I stay silent. I don't trust my ability to converse about this. I am just relieved that he is at Spur like he said he was taking Ciara to a party. That's all. "I didn't know she was related to Diana...so she is here for Ciara's cousin's birthday."

"I see."

"How do I do this?" he asks. I am happy that he is trying to mend things.

"Do what?"

"How do I explain ish to a woman for her to believe me? Gundo is not here to couch me," he says.

"When is he coming back, by the way? Him and Thandeka?"

He sighs and thereafter says, "I don't want you to worry about them. I don't know when they are coming back or not. I don't know. Let us give them room because I have tried so many times to crack my head about why they are away. Who knows? They might be having a great time of their lives while you stress yourself about them. You have a lot to deal with right now...focus on yourself and your mother. Focus on you, Maria. Focus on you."

He is right.

"I need to go," I say after I notice my brother waving at me. My mother should be getting into the consultation room.

"Maria...no...do you forgive me?"

"What is there to forgive Njabulo? I cannot control anything when I am 500 km away," I say. That is the truth. I have better things to worry myself about. What if she is sitting right next to him right now as we speak? It is too early for me to put my trust on him. I don't know. I just don't want to stress myself right now.

"She wasn't meant to be here...."

"Exactly!"

If she wasn't supposed to be?
Why was she there in the first
place? You know what?

"Really?" he asks before swearing.

"I need to go Njabulo," I say.

"Promise me, you will call me
later."

"Sure," I say before walking back
to the reception area. I pick my
bag from the floor and follow my
mother to the consultation room.
She hasn't been herself since the
news and I just want to be sure
that she is fine before I leave
for Johannesburg. The doctor

examines her and warns her to stop stressing herself before her high blood shoots off the ceiling. We spoke and I made her understand what happened, but the damage is done. I prayed for her as much as she always prays for me. When done with the consultation, the doctor prescribed meds which we got from one of the counters by the reception. The whole journey back to the village, if she isn't reading the bible, she is been telling me how much she feels better. She is probably assuring me so that I don't choose to stay and not go

back to Joburg tomorrow. The only problem is the stares I get from the people that knows me in the bus. My mother doesn't notice because she has her head buried in her bible and Khangwelo is playing games on the phone. He doesn't talk much - he probably doesn't know where to start. It is so hard not to think of Thandeka. It has been a week but this thing is not blowing away.

Where is Luzuko by the way?
Njabulo does not want to discuss much about him and his whereabouts. All I know is that

he is in jail. Which jail and is he already sentenced - I don't know! I wished to look him in the eyes and ask WHY! Was this whole thing necessary?

Focus on you, Maria. Focus on you - Njabulo's words ring in my head. I have a big problem. I put everyone first and I think that is why Luzuko did what he did. He meant to hurt me for not choosing him; but he chose to hurt my friend because he knows it would kill me more than it would have if I was the only affected. He knew.

He knew other people mattered

more than me. I am done being that girl.

I am going to focus on me. I have got to focus on me first before trying to make everybody happy.

My mother walks into my bedroom. I am busy packing my little bag for tomorrow's journey back to Gauteng. It took a lot for me to decide to leave her at this state. She is fine but not herself.

Focus on you!

Focus on you, Maria - I kept reminding myself.

"Who Angie is here to see you," she says. My heart skips a beat. I have been avoiding her the whole week. Even though she doesn't have whatsapp, people have been talking around the streets. My brother doesn't go out as often as he used to, because it has affected him also. I know how horrible some people can be and I don't expect him to fight my battles.

But I need to move on! I have to move on from this.

I drop the dress into my bag and follow my mother to the kitchen, where she has accommodated

Mam Angie. She welcomes me with a smile when I get to a chair which is next to her.

"I heard you are leaving tomorrow and thought I should bring some vegetable and fruits for my grandchildren. You can also take some before dropping the rest to Gundo's house," Mam Angie says as she shows me a small cooler bag. It is a sin to go back to Johannesburg without a parcel of fruits – believe me.

Mom places a jar of juice for our visitor to help herself.

"Not a problem. I will drop it there tomorrow afternoon," I

respond without looking at her in the eyes.

"I know you didn't do it," Mam Angie says. I lift my head to her. Mam Angie has been a mother to the whole street. She doesn't have her own children but she mothers everyone I know. I have known her since I was a young girl. "I watched you when you were still a girl and I watched you grow into this woman that you are right now. Your morals do not allow you to betray your friend like that. Never! Mme a Maria, if you ever thought she did this horrible thing...I would want to

correct that thought right now. Maria was the only person who was there for my daughter-in-law...when things were going south. I don't believe she would betray her friend like that. Your morals don't allow that my child." I lift my eyes to my mother. It had to be said by someone else for her to continuously nod her head, in agreement.

"Thank you, Mam Angie."

Mam Angie said a mouthful and when she leaves the house, she left my mother and I seated quietly in the kitchen.

"Everything happens for a

reason," my mother finally says. What could be the reason for this? I didn't ask for this. What was the reason for meeting Luzuko in my life?

"I knew it from the day I met Luzuko...that he wasn't the one for me. He fitted the description of what we prayed for...and I thought maybe I was going to love him. I didn't know he was going to bring misery into my life."

"Don't you follow your heart?" she asks.

I am going to be brutally honest to my mother, right now.

"If I followed my heart from the

first day, you were not going to like the man that my heart fell for."

"Why is it so?" she asks. I thought she was going to brush this topic under the mat. She had always brushed these kind of topics under the mat when I tried bringing them up.

"Because he was the opposite of what we prayed for. He doesn't go to church much and I was afraid that I was going to disappoint you," I say.

Silence!

More silence!

She is going to judge me. I just

know it.

"Listen...since Musundwa made a girl pregnant, I decided not to judge anyone ever in my life," she says and shakes her head.

"What? Musundwa made a girl pregnant?" I ask. Musundwa is our pastor's son. That boy was his father's right hand man and he was pressurized into living his life for the congregation. I feel bad for him. He was expected to be more than human - and he is only human.

"From that day...I decided to shut my mouth. The boy got a girl pregnant. She wasn't even

from the same church as us and the one he was supposed to marry is still in our church...looking like she is about to lose her mind."

"Oh, my God. Didn't people judge him?"

"He never set his foot in church ever again."

"We all make mistakes," I say.

"And everybody should make their own mistakes. I prayed with you because it was the right thing to do. I have wishes for you. Good wishes...but it all. wishes."

I chuckle.

"This love thing is complicated."

"People make it complicated. The

heart always knows most of the time but we want to complicate things."

"true."

"Does he fight for you? Does he fight for your love? That is all you can ask yourself because many other things. Then you leave the rest in your faith...in the prayer that you make."

"He makes me happy," I blurt without thinking. "I mean the one that my heart wants."

"I don't want to meet him yet," she says and I widen my eyes. She gets on her feet to leave the room.

"Why?" I whisper. I know I am not ready to introduce Njabulo to my mother but it breaks my heart that she is not interested in him.

"Because I don't want to pressurise you to bring me a man. See what I have put you through?" she asks while leaving the room.

Oh!

Phew!

The mini bus turns into the taxi rank. I grab my luggage bag from underneath the seat and hang my handbag over my

shoulder.

What a ride?

We left Venda very early in the morning but we are only here after three o'clock. Since I spoke to Njabulo in the morning before leaving the house; I told him to pick me at the taxi rank at twelve o'clock. When the taxi parks, I make my way to the local taxis that will take me to my apartment.

"Look who is here?"

I smile before even turning towards Njabulo. He walks towards me with his arms opened for me to bury myself there. He

wraps me in his arms and squeezes hard.

Love is a beautiful thing.

"I thought you left," I say.

"What? I knew you were just delayed on the way," he says while taking my bags.

I wonder if he is always this patient. He leads the way to where his car is parked. I jump into the passenger seat while he gets into the driver's seat.

"I missed you so much," he says with a smirk. I smile. "Don't tell me that you haven't forgiven me?"

"Does it matter?"

"Are you kidding me?" he asks. It's good that he knows that he is wrong. He drives us to his house. I don't know why but I don't ask. I wish to be going home for a nap, but that would be unfair. We haven't seen each other in ages.

"What are we doing here?" I finally ask as I follow him into the house. His house is beautiful. The last time I was here, it was packed and filthy. The following morning I was drunk and all I wanted to do was to run home.

"I thought I could cook for you. You must be very tired," he says while pulling a juice from the

fridge. He pours it into two glasses and thereafter set one glass in front of me.

"You cook?"

"Hey...I lived alone for so long to not know how to cook," he says while grabbing a packet of meat from the fridge.

"Oh yeah?" I ask and he stares at the packet before setting it back in the fridge. "And now?"

"On second thought; I will order us Mexican," he says and I laugh.

"You shouldn't have lied in the first place," I say.

He puts an order before leading me to the living room. While he

gets the remote from the table, I throw myself on the couch. He switches on the television and thereafter comes back to join me on the couch.

"We need to talk," he sternly says. What? My heart starts beating out of chest. He isn't breaking up with me, is he? "Maria, what is wrong?"

"What do you want to talk about?"

"I wanted to apologise for what happened yesterday," he says. I swallow hard. I thought it was the worst case. I sigh deeply before he takes my hand, "I don't

want my reputation to ruin this beautiful thing I have with you. I love you. I fell in love with you...and I fell so hard. I don't want anything to ruin this for us. Look, I never thought I was ever going to find love...but you changed that. So, I wanted to apologise because that was wrong and fucked up for that girl to say what she said."

"Stop swearing," I say.

"And here she is, trying to change me...and I don't mind," he says.

"I am not changing you."

"I am willing to change for the best. I will change for you," he

says.

"I don't want you to change for me. I want you to be yourself so that it doesn't feel like a burden to love me."

"Come here," he murmurs and pulls me into a tight hug. "I love you."

EPISODE 21 (unedited)

NJABULO

Zizipho laughs at me when she catches me smiling alone. Who would have thought? Njabulo Buthelezi madly in love? Madly in love with a church girl. Now I get

this; this love thing just happens when the time is right.

Maria has managed to turn me into a weakling. She makes me do things I never thought I could do. Like, finding myself outside her apartment so that I could feed her. I would stay up in bed just thinking about her or thinking about a future with her.

Yes! I see a future with her.

Hey, finally, the sex tape issue has blown away. The Radzilani came back that evening when I took Maria to Gundo's house – to take the parcel she was sent to drop by Gundo's aunt. Thandeka

and Gundo showed up, looking like hell. I didn't want to know anything. All I did was to watch as Maria and Thandeka hugged before I pull my girlfriend out of there. They had issues, which Maria and I are not getting ourselves involved.

It has been three months since then and we have managed to give them enough space. I see Gundo in the office and that is it. My Thursdays are usually busy because I prefer to lazy around on Fridays. It is already eight o'clock and I am late for my meeting with Phuti and Mrs

Masango. In fact, it is a photo shoot. I promise you, I woke up on time. Maria happened to invade my mind; I ended up just lying on the bed, thinking about her.

ThAnza follows me into my office. I drop my laptop bag and take off my blazer. It is a busy day, today.

"Coffee?"

"Black and strong and no sugar," I emphasized. I don't have time for breakfast so a cup of coffee will do.

"Phuti is already waiting for you at the studio," she says.

"Then forget about coffee. I will have it there," I respond while pulling a file we have put together for Mrs Masango. We have had two briefing meetings with her and today it is the photoshoot and I want to re-run the story before the next issue. She got a cover and boy oh boy, is she thrilled. I fold the sleeves of my shirt, grab the file and hurry to the studio. There are a few guys, preparing for the shoot. Phuti is standing in the corner of the room – probably making up angles in his head.

"Am I late?" I ask while moving

to the food station. He tells me that she is running late. I don't like it when people are late - I am punctual...in most days.

The food station is filled with proper food - but I lost my appetite. I think I just need this to be done so that I approve by next week Friday. I make myself a cup of black coffee and move to where Phuti is standing.

"Are you ready for North West meeting?" I ask.

"Why do I have to be the one going to North West? Can't I go to Cape Town?" he asks. We have two clients who need meetings. I

chose to fly to Cape Town and I have my own reasons. I want to spend time with Maria, this coming weekend. We need to spice up some things.

"Because I said so," I say.

"We have to look into this..."

"There is no need for that," I say.

Mrs Masango walks into the room. She came empty handed. No handbag, no nothing.

"Sorry, I am late," she says while crossing the room towards us.

With my empty hand, I shake her hand in greeting.

"Are you ready for the shoot? We

have two hours," Phuti says.

"Okay give me a minute. Maria is coming with my handbag..." she says. I beam at her. So she brought my woman with her? I plant the mug on the table and wait for her to make a grand entrance. She walks into the room with two handbags. She is on her phone so she doesn't notice me watching her. I love the black dress she has on. I am yet to see her in a pair of formal pants. She never puts on a dress without putting on stilettos...and when she does that, her butt pops out for the world to see. The world is

me. I am the world.

I let her finish on the phone and she lifts up her head, her beautiful eyes lands on me. She shyly smiles at me. I smirk back at her, supressing the sexual tension that is happening between us. Talking about sexual tention – my shaft is as hard as a rod.

“What did Emily say?” Mrs Masango asks.

“Oh...yes...she asked if she could meet you after the shoot. I told her that you will definitely call her after the shoot,” Maria responds. I don't move my eyes from her

lips. Her juicy lips. The lips that I feasted on last night when I dropped her home.

I cannot get enough of her.

"Okay...would you like to have coffee first? Before we get down to business?" Phuti asks, getting ready to start the show.

"I won't need food," Mrs Masango says and Phuti advises that she starts with make-up before she picks what to wear for the shoes. She had someone deliver three of her suits yesterday. Mrs Masango walks to the corner of the room to have her make-up done while Maria sets the handbags on a

couch. She then walks to where I am, by the food station. She beams at me before picking one mug.

"Why didn't you tell me, you were coming?" I ask while hugging her from the back. I don't mind Phuti. I don't mind the crew and I don't mind Mrs Masango. I don't mind anyone.

"I sent you an SMS," she says.

Oh, I haven't checked my phone since I got to work. I didn't even take it out from the laptop bag.

"It is great that I didn't see the SMS. It was a great surprise," I mumble while resting

her cheek on her shoulder.

"You know my boss is here, right?" she asks.

"I don't care. She knows that I love you. I want the whole world to know, by the way," I say. I let her make herself something to eat while I watch.

I huff out a laugh. It wasn't meant for everyone to hear. I am just laughing at myself. Laughing at how this church girl has turned my world around.

She grabs a chair and starts eating. It is going to be a beautiful day.

Why does make-up take ten hours? I have been waiting for Mrs Masango to finish her make-up for thirty minutes now. They have been painting her eyes for this thirty minutes that I have been standing next to her, trying to get some information that I missed from our meetings. We didn't touch on her personal story and that personal story is very important for her clients to relate with her. People will want to know how she did it. How her success have affected her relationship with her husband and all those personal questions that

people like so much. We still need to discuss that; and I cannot do that when the make-up team wants her not to move her face. "How long is this going to take?" I ask.

"About twenty minutes," Rachel – our make-up artist responds.

Sigh!

Things women go through?

Maria is busy with her phone.

Now I miss my very own phone.

"Please walk me to my office," I say while taking her hand to help her up. She doesn't protest. She is probably bored from sitting here and watching her boss

getting ready for the shoot. I take her hand and lead her way to the elevators.

She greets a group of cleaners who mumbled their greetings back at her.

"I used to work here," she says when we get to the elevator. I walk in first and I follow behind her.

"Which floor?" I ask while she turns to the mirror to see if her lipstick is still intact. I wouldn't bother if I were her. I have plans to ruin it.

"Second, where the creative team is. Thandeka got Gundo's floor," I

say.

"Oh...so Gundo always had a fetish for a girl in a uniform? I bet it had always been his fantasy."

"Are you crazy? They met in Venda before she came here," Maria responds before the elevator door opens. I lead the way to my office.

Anza and Gundo's receptionist mumble their greeting as we enter my office. When she gets inside, I turn the key to lock the door. Maria turns towards me and shakes her head.

"You just had to let the lock make

noise," she whispers.

"Doesn't that turn you on?

Knowing that there are two people who know what we might be getting into right now?" I ask.

"We are not getting into anything, Njabulo Buthelezi," she whispers.

"You are dripping wet, right now...aint you?" I ask with a smirk. She cannot even hide her smile. We haven't shagged by the dry humping she makes me do, like a teenager, has given her an idea of what she is missing. I wonder how long she is going to keep it together.

I respect her wishes...to stay like that until I marry her. but what is the big deal, I am going to marry her anyway. Plus, the time we spoke about "sexual acts", she had said that she should have given it up that night when she was drunk. That wouldn't have been nice. I want her to remember every little details. I have never been with a virgin - so it'll be the first for the both of us...if you know what I mean.

"You are beautiful," I say as she walks away from me. She stops at the cabinet. Why do people like

going to the cabinet? I think pictures are too personal and people always want to get personal with people. She picks my grandmother's picture and stares at it.

"You look like her," she says.

"I agree," I respond while walking towards her. I stand behind her, rubbing my chest on her back. I instantly get turned on. How can I not, when my shaft is pressed against her shaft. She is dangerous.

She places the picture frame down and turns to face me. I am looking down at her. She flicks her

tongue and licks her lower lip.

"I wonder how far you going to keep doing this," I murmur before dropping my lips at her. She moans as she receives my lips. I am going to nut in my pants - I tell you. One hand finds itself on her hip and the other is already caressing her boobs. The more she moans, the more I get turned on.

"Njabulo," she moans my name.

"Yes, babe?"

My phone goes off from the laptop bag, bringing me back to earth. I was lost in the world where only Maria and I existed. I

open my eyes first and break the kiss. She still has her lips pouted and her eyes closed. She wants me as much as I want her. We are sexually attracted to each other – at her hundredth level.

“You are coming to Cape Town with me tomorrow, right?” I ask and she opens her eyes.

“What?” she asks. I can trace disappointment in her voice. I had to stop here before nutting my pants and ruining my day.

“After work?”

“I am going there for an early morning meeting. I’ll book you the five o’clock flight so that you

don't miss work, right?"

"Alright."

"It is going to be our first night together," I say. I felt a need to emphasize that.

"Our third night together," she corrects. Of course, our first night together, we kissed for the first time! The second time, I proposed to her. Maybe, our third night will be extra special too. A man can only wish.

Had Mr Watson known that my mind was not in this meeting the whole afternoon, he would have rescheduled this meeting to some

day and let me go to my hotel room. The morning meetings went well since Maria was still at work. Now, that I know that she is in an Uber to the airport, my mind is all over the place.

I think I am just super excited.

"Thank you Mr Buthelezi, I will have my team send you the contract," he finally says. Gundo is going to kill me if he realises that a meeting with Mr Watson was a waste of time. I bet the contract will break down our terms with his company - I didn't hear shit.

"Thank you so much Mr Watson,"

I respond while getting up. It'll be an embarrassment if we are done. He also gets up and gets ready to shake my hand.

"We will keep in touch," he says. With that, I rush out of the meeting and back to the hotel.

The company booked me at V&A Waterfront. I bet you, Anza gave me an eyebrow when I picked an exclusive hotel. I am the one who always preach that people should utilise standard rooms when they go on trips. I am a boss too - I am allowed to break the rules.

And in this case, Gundo's business account will settle the bill. He will

kill me later, when I have already given my girlfriend a best.

At seven o'clock, I am already at the airport, waiting for her to land. I feel like a teenager. I feel like that time in Varsity when I fell in love with a girl. I loved her whole heartedly and the thought of seeing her always excited me. I feel like that boy again. The boy who was never heart broken. The boy that gave it all, for love.

Maria took me there.

I see her first.

Hmmmm!

She is wearing a legging and has long sporty shirt. I bet her

roommate has everything to do with today's look. She looks comfortable and ... sexy.

"Hey you," I say while walking towards her. She smiles at me while I take her luggage.

"Please feed me," she says.

"You want sex? Haaa...Maria," I say. She laughs. I swear she has the sweetest smile. Or is it that I am in love with her.

"I am hurry. I skipped lunch because I wanted to dine in Cape Town," she says. "I didn't even eat in the plane."

"Let me feed you some Cape Town food," he says.

I have a perfect room, with a balcony. I order us food before we head to my room.

She is pleased. Our first night together, second night, has to be perfect.

It is already eight, so after supper we are heading straight to bed. We could watch a movie in the duvets until we fall asleep. Or we could do more than that.

"I would like to freshen up," she says after taking her fourth sip of the complimentary champagne that I only opened when she arrived. She looks nervous. Very, very nervous.

"Babe, I wouldn't make you feel comfortable. You don't have to be nervous," I say.

"Me?" she asks and raises her brow. I wink at her and she picks her bag, get into the bathroom and lock.

"What if I wanted to join you?" I yell out.

"You are not allowed to come in here," she yells back.

A knock on the door stops me from yelling back another line. It is room service. I open the door and tip the guy before locking the door once again. I push the tray to the balcony, where we are

going to have our supper with a view.

I set the little table and fill my glass with red wine. She is going to have a great time with me this weekend. I lived here before packing my life and followed everybody to

Johannesburg. I know exactly where to take her and how to make this place memorable for her.

I hear the bathroom door opening and I call out for her to come join me for supper.

She appears and I almost freeze! I choke on my drink.

WTF Maria!

"What are we having?" she asks while walking towards the little table, as if she is not wearing something inappropriate.

Something that will make me lose the morals I never had. I shake my head with a smirk as she settles on the chair next to her.

"So, you meant you were hungry for me, didn't you?" I ask. She stares at me and shakes her head as if she doesn't know what I am talking about.

"Prawns. I love sea food," she says while picking one calamari from the bowl. She dips it in the

sauce and shoves it in her mouth.

"You are doing this intentionally...ain't you?" I ask.

She is here, wearing a short lacey lingerie. I won't call thing a night dress. It is as if she knew I loathe her the night shirt, she wore in Mpumalanga.

She picks the wine glass and takes a sip.

"Can I have a word with you?" I ask and tap my lap. She got me. She understood, because she gets on her feet and comes to sit on my lap.

"Yeah?"

"Are you seducing me?" I ask. "I

am losing my mind, right now."

My D is throbbing – just by watching.

"Is it working?" she asks.

"Dikeledi said this will work."

"You are...killing me," I say.

"That was the whole intention," she says before dropping her head and smashing her lips on mine. She breaks the kiss and stares at me.

"Maria..."

"I know this is wrong...but I want it too."

Arrggghhhh! I sigh deeply.

"Are you suure?" I ask. There is no turning back if I go ahead with this mission. There is no

aborting mission.

She covers her face, with her hands.

I carefully snake my hands underneath her thighs and get up.

"Shit! You heavy," I say as I make my way to the room. She laughs loudly as I throw her on the bed. What the hell was I thinking????

She cracks up! I should be embarrassed, but I am not. I join her in laughter. When she recovers from a fits of laughter, we stare at each other. She might not be sure of what she

wants...but her eyes are burning with lust. Her eyes are begging. I get on the bed and crawl to get on top of her - without breaking the stare. She closes her eyes when my hand lands on her thigh. "Please..." she says.

"Please what? Please yes...or please stop?" I ask as I get on top of her.

"Please..." she says.

EPISODE 22 (Unedited)

MARIA

"You are coming to Cape Town with me tomorrow, right?"

Njabulo asks when I still have my eyes closed. I suck in a breath and open my eyes. That was a lovely kiss.

"What?" He stopped the kiss. Wait! Did he say I must go to Cape Town with him? Hell yeah! I have never been there and this is my only chance. I swallow and thereafter ask, "After work?"

"I am going there for an early morning meeting. I'll book you the five o'clock flight so that you don't miss work, right?"

"Alright."

"It is going to be our first night together," he says in a seductive

way.

"Our third night together." It is going to be our third night together. Of course, I have been counting. Ever since I met Njabulo, which is over five months, we have only shared the night three times. We have been spending so much time together, since we officiated our relationship three months ago. Boy, I am spoilt and I am loved. He picks his phone and we head back to the studio where Phuti needed him.

This morning when Mrs Masango asked me to accompany her to

this shoot, I jumped into the opportunity. She usually takes her Assistant when she goes to meetings outside the office - I just got lucky today. On our way here, she had asked me what my passion was. I figured, I don't know what I like to do the more. I am not like Thandeka, who loves sewing. I don't know what I like to do and that bothers me. "You cannot be a receptionist for the rest of your life...unless that is what you are passionate to do. My brother is a cop and I bet you, if you offer him a million to quit his job, he wouldn't take it," Mrs

Masango told me earlier this morning.

Sitting here, and watching her turn and smile to the camera...I am beaming at myself. As the cameras click and the light flashes on her face, it is kinda tickling me.

By the time we left the studios, they had thousands of perfect pictures they can choose from. We went to two more meetings before she drops me home. It is already noon, so there wasn't any need to go back to the office.

Cape Town!

I am going to Cape Town!

I cannot seem to hide my excitement as I throw my clothes on the bed. I need something beautiful. I need something catchy.

Yoh! I am not winning. All my dresses are semi-formal. I retire and head to the kitchen for some ice cream. We can be short of anything in this apartment, but not ice cream. Dikeledi opens the door just when I throw myself on the bed.

"And then?" she asks as she walks further in.

"I just need some ice cream," I say. She takes off her shoes and

proceeds to her room.

"Are you moving out or something?" she calls from down the corridor.

"No!" I say.

I take a full spoon of the chocolate chip ice cream.

"Why do you have clothes all over your bed and floor?" she asks as she walks into the living room.

She throws herself next to me and takes a spoon from my hand.

She digs into the tub.

"I am going to Cape Town with Njabulo...and I can't find something to wear," I mumble.

She sits up straight and stares

at me. "What? I wanted to look good. I can't even find something casual to wear."

"Nothing in your closet will fit in," she says.

"Ouch!"

"This is the first vacay with your boo...come one...you cannot embrass him with your formal skirts."

"I have little money that I saved up."

"Girlfriend allowance?" she asks.

I laugh. I wouldn't call it girlfriend allowance but I have it saved up because Njabulo buys most of the things for me. I don't buy takeaway anymore and

I don't pay for movie tickets.
That's why!

"I can get an outfit for three days. I just want to blow him away," I say.

"I am the right girl for you."

"Please...whatever you pick...it has to be by my knees."

"Deal!"

She didn't lie. Dikeledi got me long enough dresses that fits me perfectly. I am a pencil dress kinda girl and I got those in floral colour and casual enough to wear with my sandals and sneakers. I also got myself a pair of legging because, apparently they look

good on me.

The only thing which is out of character for me is the lingerie that Dikeledi had me pick. She told me that if I didn't want to sleep naked, then I should get myself a beautiful piece. I took two - different colours. One is for tomorrow night and the other for Saturday night. I cannot sleep naked.

"How is it going to work?" Dikeledi asks as we get into our apartment after our shopping trip.

"What is going to work?"

"You? Njabulo? One bed?"

Virginity?"

"Really?"

"I am being honest. Do you think he asked you there because he wants you guys to....."

"I don't know," I whisper. The thought of it makes me blush.

"Then what is going to happen?"

"I think I am ready."

"Whatt?" Dikeledi asks with widened eyes. I close my eyes. I cannot believe that I am saying this.

"The tension between us is too much. Last night, I was in his office...and..."

"Oooohhh..."

"Stop it!" I push her away from me. I am shy about this.

"Okay...if you decide to give it to him neh... put on that sexy number and take a lead," she says while setting the shopping bag on my bed.

"What if he doesn't react?" I ask and she burst into a laughter.

"Believe me! He is going to eat you up like a peach..." she says. I blush. Sigh! "Does it hurt?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I was drunk," she says as if it didn't matter.

"Didn't you want to remember

the experience?" isn't it supposed to be special.

"What is there to remember? I gave it up to a jerk. Best I don't remember," she says.

"I want to make it memorable." I might be lying to myself but I feel that Njabulo loves me.

Marriage? I don't know but I wish we get to that. Life is too short. Lol. This is me convincing myself.

"If you want to make it memorable...then you must take the lead. Let it be about you more than it is for him."

"How?"

"Take the lead," she says and shrugs, as if I am supposed to know. "Seduce him. Tell him what you want. Enjoy it. It might hurt...and if it does hurt then it must be worth it."

UNDER 20, STOP HERE.

By the time he picks me up from the airport, I have been wet – just thinking about what is going to happen tonight.

Make it memorable! – I remind myself.

I grab my luggage bag and

search for Njabulo. There he is, looking sexy as hell in shorts and a golf shirt. I chose well.

He has booked us in a perfect hotel. Corrections – the company booked us into this beautiful hotel. When we get to his room, our room, he pops the champagne and fills a glass for me.

I am going to need this bubbles. All of a sudden I am nervous. I am so nervous, that I wish I could abort this mission.

“I would like to freshen up,” I say. I just want to get away from him for a minute. I am too nervous.

"Babe, I wouldn't make you feel uncomfortable. You don't have to be nervous," he says. Of course, this is me choosing to do this. I pick my overnight bag and disappear to the bathroom for a quick shower.

This is it! I whisper to myself when I am done putting the lacy number.

"This is crazy," I say to my reflection on the mirror before laughing.

I open the door and follow Njabulo's voice from the balcony. He looks like he has seen a ghost when I parade to the balcony. I

don't know how he sees me...but I am sure, he is turned on. He cannot even hide it.

"What are we having?" I confidently ask while heading to the set table. Great food and great setup. I stare at him as he shakes his head.

What? He cannot believe his eyes?

"So, you meant you were hungry for me, didn't you?"

Of course! But I don't say it out loud.

"Prawns. I love sea food," I say instead. I pick one calamari from the bowl and dip it in the sauce before seductively putting it in my

mouth.

"You are doing this intentionally...ain't you?" he asks. Yes! It's working. I pick my wine glass and take a sip.

His eyes are lusting for me. He cannot keep himself from staring.

"Can I have a word with you?"

I get on my feet and settle on his lap.

"Yeah?"

"Are you seducing me? I am losing my mind, right now."

I am obviously seducing him.

"Is it working? Dikeledi said this will work."

"You are...killing me."

"That was the whole intention."

I cannot stop staring at his lips. His lips are always tender on mine. I drop my head and land my lips on his.

"Maria..."

"I know this is wrong...but I want it too."

"Are you suure?"

Did he have to ask that question? Now I am not sure anymore. I cover my face with her hands.

He picks me up and takes me to bed. My heavy weight actually breaks the ice. I am not even that heavy but I cannot stop

laughing when he exaggerates how heavy I am. When we both stop laughing, we lock our eyes for a moment. If words didn't exist, our eyes would communicate enough.

I feel him and he feels me too. I watch as he crawls towards me. This is it! He keeps his eyes on me until he gets on top of me. His hand lands on my thigh and I swear I felt my soul leaving my body. I gasp and close my eyes. "Please..." she says.

Words are failing me.

"Please what? Please yes...or please stop?" he asks. Did he

have to ask?

"Please..." I try again...but my tongue is twisted. I moan when he caress my thighs with his one hand and the other on my boob. This is unfair! If I decide to change my mind...I wouldn't survive it. I want him so bad.

"Please what Maria?"

"Please...make love to me," I whisper with my eyes closed. His spicy cologne is filling me up as he digs his mouth on my neck.

Oh, wow! He groans, while I moan.

"It is going to hurt a little," he mumbles while caressing me. His

penis is pulsing on my thighs. He hasn't taken off his clothes but it feels like he has.

"I am...I..."

"Ready?" he mumble. "You want to say you are ready?"

Words fail me so I nod while biting my lower lip. He keeps kissing my neck and his hands are all over me.

He pulls himself up and takes off his shirt. I have always admired his body and tonight, I get to touch it.

"You can touch," he says with a smirk. I land my hand on his abs and then up his chest and then

back at his abs. I don't know where to focus. Njabulo laughs at me. I have my hand on his chest when he is having fits of laughter.

"It's not funny," I say.

"I have the whole night," he says and stares at me while I inspect his body with my hand. When done, I place both my hands on his biceps. He got the message because he drops his lips on my nipple. I gasp. This lacy thing is as good as being naked. He doesn't need to take it off for me to feel him.

"You are beautiful," he says. I

have lost count of how many times he has told me that.

"I won't change my mind, you know?"

"You wouldn't dare," he responds. He carefully helps me out of the lingerie. It did its job and it is time to go. My thong followed. On any day, I would have been covering myself and feeling shy...but right now...his eyes are giving me the confidence. He is admiring every bit of my body. I feel beautiful. I feel admired. He shakes his head as if he doesn't believe this moment. I don't believe either.

Njabulo gets on his knees and grabs my butt to pull me closer to him.

"What are you doing?" I whisper. He laughs.

"We want to make it worth your time, don't we?" he asks and I nod. "Close your eyes."

I am going to have to trust him. Without a warning, I feel Njabulo's finger on top of my vagina. Just one finger brushing the top of the vagina before he massages my clit with his thumb. Ohhh! Wow! I open my eyes, to notice that he is staring at me. I am not going to be able to close

them again.

I widen my eyes when I notice him dropping his head to where his thumb is. I shut my eyes and whimper out loud when his tongue massages me instead of his thumb. I grab spread my hands to grab on the linen as he continues.

It escalates from massaging me to licking me.

"No...no...no....Njabulo," I jerk my upperbody up. He lifts his head and gives me a smirk. How is he enjoying this.

"Something wrong, baby?" he asks. "Close your eyes and relax."

I drop my head back to the pillow and close my eyes. I suck in a breath before I let out a loud moan – he is continuing where I interrupted him. I curl my toes as he continues to lick and suck and lick and bite and do all those things I cannot see but feel. He stops for a minute before I feel something enters inside. His finger. Followed by another one. I jerk my off from the bed, giving him more access to whatever he is searching for.

“Babe....” I moan as his two fingers are inside of me and his thumb brushing the insides.

"Njabulo...Njabulo."

"You have to come first...because I get inside," he mumbles and pulls his fingers out.

"Why...?"

"It is going to hurt and...."

Before he finishes the sentence, his tongue is inside. Without a warning, I land one hand to his head. He stops licking me and slowly takes my hand. He positions it on top on my vagina. He presses his two fingers on my fingers and motions them. He has me massaging my own clit.

"You can control what you want to feel," he says. "Don't stop until

you cum. Got it?"

I nod. With that agreement, I rub and massage myself while his tongue gets back inside of me.

Team work. He grabs my bums to lift me up...before deepening his tongue. I feel something pushing me to the edge. The more I

increase the pace of my

finger...the more he does

something with his tongue. For

some reason, I cannot stop my

fingers until I feel my body

floating. I find myself murmuring

his name when something hits

me. My body jerks and only then

does he pull his head up. I moans

while pressing my thighs together
- eyes closed. Only when I open
my eyes, I notice Njabulo naked.
What. A. Feeling.

The more I press my thighs
together, the more the feeling
comes back. Njabulo puts on the
condom, his eyes on me.

He picks my hand and let it
continue what I was doing earlier.
The more I rub myself, the more
the feeling is coming back.

"Njab..."

"Open up for me," he murmurs
while positioning his penis. I close
my eyes and felt my body getting
weak. When he presses his penis

to my opening, I stop moving my fingers. Njabulo does the rubbing himself.

I am ready for him. I had the best pleasure...but for some reason, I still long to connect with him.

"Love, can I come in?" he asks. He didn't have to ask. I jerk my body up to respond and he gets the message. Words are failing me. He rubs his penis to the entrance. I gasp. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." That came as a whisper. He positions my hand again - I have figured that it is his mechanism for me not to

concentrate on the pain. The pain I am willing to feel.

He pushes himself inside and that pain happened. That sharp pain that confirms it all. It is done. He stares down at me and I shift my gaze at him. We are in this together. I nod at him before he pushes in again.

He groans while I moan.

He swears under his breath while he pushes further in.

Pain and pleasure - all at the same time. He is fully in.

"Are you okay?" he asks. I can see his veins on his temples.

"I'm not fucking going to last," he

mumbles before moving his hips. He moves his hips while I cover my mouth with my fist.

Can my body handles this pleasure and pain? He starts moving faster...and that "feeling" starts building up again. The faster he moves...the faster I rub my fingers on my clit - until my body loses control.

He groans, with his teeth gritted, not losing the rhythm...he thrashes faster, and faster, and faster, I think I ended up screaming his name. Weirdly, that pushes him to the edge. I feel his penis twitching inside of me,

before he collapses on top of me. I try to catch my breath...and he does the same. He rolls on the side and take off the condom.

"Are you okay?" he asks while pulling me closer for a cuddle.

"More than okay," i murmur, while trying to catch my breath.

"Damn it, I'm no longer fit," he says.

"You call that...unfit?" I ask while he spoons me. I am never ever, ever, going to forget what just happened!!!

EPISODE 23

NJABULO

I am woken up by the breeze coming from the sliding door.

After that 'cherry popping' session, we both fell asleep in each others' arms. The breeze is cold, piercing my skin but Maria is dead asleep to feel anything.

Oh, is that a smirk on her face?

It looks like someone who is satisfied. Satisfied for days - if I should say so myself.

I get up and search for my briefs somewhere on the floor. We both fell asleep, naked and with the lights on. Luckily our balcony is not

facing any hotel room. I proceed to the balcony where we left the food on the table. I pick a bottle of wine and take a gulp. From here I can see her perfectly. She must be dreaming...sweet dreams. Maria!

Deep sigh!!

I stare at her from the balcony. You know that feeling you get after having sex for the first time with someone? That feeling that will make you start avoiding them after tapping the ass?

That feeling that confirms that you finally got what you are looking for and it is time to move

on. You know...when you thought you love someone but only when you sleep with them you realise otherwise?

This is crazy. I laugh at myself. That feeling is foreign to what I have just shared with Maria. It is not there. Not even a hint. Nothing. Nada. And this, right here, is a confirmation that I love Maria with my heart and soul.

She changes the sides and that is my queue to head back to bed. I close the sliding door, then the curtains and get into bed – next to her.

It is either she is a deep sleeper or she is dicktimized and her body could not handle all that foreplay. I mean, I lost count on how many she came.

Lucky girl.

My lucky girl.

When I wake up again, she is the one getting out of bed. I watch as she hurries to the bathroom – butt naked. She has a firm butt and a sexy dark back. My dick twitches at a sight. It is morning after all and it has all reasons to be happy.

“Good morning,” I mumble, the moment she walks into the room.

She turns her back on me - I think I caught her off guard. "I love the view of the butt, more." She turns her head over her shoulder.

"Isn't it too late for that? I have seen all of that and I have tasted...all of it," I say and wink at her. The bubbles evaporated - she is sober minded now, I guess. "Come back to bed."

She slowly turns towards me and take her bold step to the bed.

"Mhhh...mmhhmm...mmhhmm," I say and lick my lips. She gets on the bed and my hand lands on her full breasts.

"Good morning to you too," she mumbles while lying on her side and looking at me. This is how we were when I asked her out. We were staring into each other's eyes.

"Did you have sweetest dreams?" I ask and she nods. "Is it sore?" "Not really," she responds.

"Ohhh my goodness Maria, you want more dick?" I ask and she laughs out loud. I like seeing her straight teeth and her shining face.

"It was not as painful as I thought it would be...so it ain't really that sore."

"I enjoyed watching you reaching orgasm. You looked so angelic," I say. Honest truth. "Look at what the thought of you is doing to me."

She drops her eyes to my underwear and a hard rock penis wants to poke out. She drops her hand and brushes it.

"Dammmn!!" I groan while closing my eyes.

"Teach me how to please you," she says. Ooh, how I love a woman who is willing to learn. I pull my briefs down so that I could teach her how to give a hand pleasure. Who would say no

to that? I am good teacher and boy, is she a great learner.

She gasps when she wraps her hand around my shaft – her touch, pulling me to an edge all of a sudden. The effect she has on me??? Its too much, man. I close my eyes before putting my hand on top of hers. I have jerked myself a million times I can do it with my eyes closed. I direct the motion, slow and slow and even slower until she gets the drill and I let go of my hand. She takes over, with the same pace.

“Good girl,” I murmur as she does the same. She rubs the tip as

the slimy pre cum fills her thumb. Who taught her that? I open my eyes to only notice her eyes buried on the mission. She is fascinated and I am fascinated by the fact that she is fascinated.

Wow.

I close my eyes when she continues to give me slow strokes. It would have been nicer with a lube – but where the hell is it? I didn't need it last night. I had my tongue wet her pussy like a well. I groan like an animal when she firmly wraps her finger on my shaft.

"Am I hurting you?" she asks.

"Baby girl...I want you to hurt me," I groan and her hand gets firmer. "Faster."

She does go faster than a few minutes ago. Consistency – she nails it. She stays consistent on the rhythm and I feel something to start ripping me apart. She rests her hand on my thigh and my muscles starts tightening up. I don't feel her other hand on my thigh anymore, so I open my eyes to find her hand flicking her own bean. That...that...that...pulls me to the edge.

Ten more quick strokes – whatever – I wasn't counting

and I feel my semen jerking off from my penis.

Jeeezz!! I jerk my body up from the bed and throw my hand to tighten the grip she still has as I empty all the seeds!

Dammit!

I throw my head back at the pillow and collapse. She jumps out of bed while I try to catch my breath. When she returns, she has a guest towel in hand. I receive it from her and clean myself.

I drop the towel on the floor and let her sleep in my arms.

Let me catch my breathe. I have plans for her, the whole day.

She came to Cape Town prepared for the dick. I made sure I give it to her the way she wanted it. We decided to stay in, the whole Saturday. We stayed indoors and boy, did I give it to her the way she deserves? She returned the favour a million times.

I will have to bring her back here for a proper vacation because she didn't get to see much. We even missed the ferryboat to Robben Island this morning. Yes - you can blame it on me. It was my entire

fault.

"Are you sure you don't want to visit my house?" I ask. She shyly shakes her head.

"I need to rest from the weekend," she responds before laughing. It was a hectic week, indeed. The Uber that we are riding in drops her home before it takes me home.

It is already after nine when I get home. Maria is right. I am exhausted.

I didn't last long before I dozed off.

I am only woken up in the morning by my buzzing phone.

"Hello," I groan. Why is this bastard calling me early so?

"Please fill for me today. I am taking my wife to a doctor."

Is she pregnant? I want to ask but I have learnt not to annoy Gundo when it comes to his wife. He has become very sensitive and I do not want to be a nuisance, so I only talk when necessary.

"Is she alright?" I ask.

"She will be fine," he responds.

This is him when he doesn't want to talk to it.

"Any major task?"

"Meeting with TechTech. It is set for eleven. Please also email

me the report of your meeting with Mr Watson," he says. Mr Watson neh? I didn't hear ish about what we were discussing.

"Okay," I say. "Please send my regards to Thandeka."

"Thanks," he says before hanging up.

The bastard woke me up and I have to wake up for work now at five o'clock.

By seven thirty, I am getting into my office with Anza walking behind me. She has files in hands.

It is only seven thirty on a Monday – for crying out loud.

"Mr Buthelezi...how was Cape

Town?" she asks as she sets the files on the table.

"Cape Town was good. Did I miss anything?" I ask.

"Just a lot to catch up on. Mr Radzilani was not here on Friday so most meetings were shifted to today...and it doesn't look like he is coming in today.

"Do you know why he didn't show up on Friday?"

"He did show up but there was an emergency at home."

"I see."

I need to go see my friend today - I make a mental note.

She briefs me on what I needed

to urgently attend to. She also gives me Gundo's calendar so that I pick and choose a few meetings to attend, apart for the one he personally requested me to attend.

"Would you like breakfast?" she asks.

"My usual toast and coffee," I say before she twirls around and hurry out of my office. I pick my landline phone and check on my beautiful girl friend. Her voice is seductive and my body always respond to that.

She is having a busy day just like me but hearing her voice is

always a cherry. She wishes me a great day before I hang up and digging on the first file.

If I wasn't worried about Gundo and his wife, I would be driving straight home to sleep. The last meeting I attended was just after six. It even feels like the universe is punishing me for having countless sex over the weekend. I didn't even get a chance to have lunch. I jumped from one meeting to another. Gundo's car is in the drive way when I arrive. I park mine beside his and walk to the kitchen.

This is a home. I am welcomed by the beef stew aroma and the kids running around the living room. I no longer feel tired. For some reason, I feel revived. I greet the nanny and the kids notice my presence from the living room. "Uncle Njabulo," Ciara calls out from the living room and runs towards me. She is followed by the twins who also fight for a hug when I let go of her. It is always a competition. I pick one boy and throw him in the air. I drop him and pick the other one. I am a cool uncle and I bet I will make a good father.

A good father!

It is chaos around here. A lovable chaos, though.

"Where is your daddy?" I ask Ciara.

"In the bedroom," she responds.

"Please tell him that I am here to see him," I say and she runs down the corridor. I take the opportunity to tickle the twins as they run around the room.

"He said he is coming," Ciara reports back before getting on a couch.

Ten minutes and Gundo is not coming. The nanny is already cleaning up the kitchen and she

didn't even offer supper. I should have gotten myself

An animation movie is on and Ciara is singing along. The boys are just humming along.

"Sorry...I kept you waiting,"

Gundo says when he walks into the room.

"Was I waiting?" I shrug. I am enjoying the little show that the kids are putting up for me. It is really sweet. They make a hard core man like me melt like marshmallows. Only them, my nephew and Maria have that effect on me.

Gundo proceeds to the kitchen.

"I could do with a plate of food," I say and I hear him mumble my request to the nanny. He opens the fridge and pulls two bottles of Heinekens. He walks out the door that leads to the porch. I follow him behind.

I pick the beer from the table and take a gulp.

"Is everything okay?" I ask. I am here with him and he looks distracted. "The doctor's appointment."

"Oh, yeah. Everything is fine," he says.

"Does the doctor know what is wrong with her?" I and he

shakes his head. He doesn't want to talk about it.

"Look, I met Jonathan," I say, changing the topic.

Our food arrive but it is just one plate. It is either he has eaten or he doesn't have an appetite.

"What did he say?"

"He is giving us a useless deal," I say and huff a dry laugh.

"What is the deal?"

"Summer spread for the peanuts he presented to you," I say.

"Okay," he responds.

"Okay? Are you hearing yourself?"

I ask. He cannot be serious right now.

"Getting a company to buy a Summer spread for the rates that you were suggesting is...kinda...impossible."

"I don't understand how that can be difficult."

"And then what happens if we don't get a buyer?"

"Then, we go ahead without a Summer spread."

"Do what makes one's heart happy," he responds.

Are we still talking about Jonathan's company requesting our marketing package for our Summer business magazine...or have we changed the topic.

"What does that have to do with anything?" I ask.

"You never listen to anything that I say," he says. He is right, but not entirely. "How was the meeting with Mr Watson."

Dammit! I didn't want him to bring this up. I honestly missed everything we discussed. That was unprofessional of me.

"I will need to call him and find out," I say and gulp the beer.

"Didn't you go to Cape Town to meet him?"

"I diddd...butttt....."

"But, what?"

"But I didn't have my head in it.

Honestly, I was looking forward to meeting Maria. I bought her a ticket to join me and ... I ... fucked up. But whatever I presented to him actually did please him and he will be sending us a contract. However, I ...am not quite sure what the terms are."

"Are you kidding me right now?"

"Unfortunately..."

He laughs.

"You love hard, huh?" he says and drinks from his bottle. He knows me very very well. That is my problem. When I love, I love big with all of my heart.

"She brought me back to life.

These past three months have been the best days of my life," I say and he slowly nods.

"That's great. You are not getting any young," he says.

"I feel young though."

"Life is too short. Enjoy yourself and do everything that makes you happy," he says, sounding like a damn poet.

I smile. Poetic or not, he is right.

"Talking about that... how do one start the lobola process in Venda?" I ask.

He stares at me and laughs loudly. I don't laugh because I am

not joking. He stops laughing and asks, "Are you serious?"

"I am dead serious," I say. "Or it is too soon?"

"Are you serious?"

"I mean...I want what you have. I want to start a family. You said it yourself, I am not getting any younger."

"Are you serious?" he asks.

What? Don't I look like a marriage, type?

"You think I am not capable?" I ask. "Or, do you think it is too soon to ask her to marry me?"

"Life is too short."

"So?? What do I do?"

Gundo stares at me as if I have lost it. It is not the power of pussy... I had always known that Maria is the one for me. She made me feel like that young boy in varsity. She is selfless. I won't even bring up her beauty.

"First you need to make sure that you are not bluffing. Marrying someone is not fun games and you my friend still have a long way to go. Are you sure you love her?" he says.

"Dude, I love that woman, you know that very well. Have you ever seen me go crazy about any girl after Amanda? I know I

want her. In fact, I need her in my life. It has nothing to do with how sexy she is. I liked her before I even saw her in a pair of leggings. When she was just a church girl in long dresses...."

Gundo must not act like I didn't cheer him up to propose to his wife when he wasn't sure about his future. "Who do I talk to if I want to propose? Do I propose to her and then talk to her family? Or do I start with her family?"

"Where do I take a church girl? Where do I take a church girl?"

Gundo mimics what I used to say when he brings Maria up.

"Bastard!" I laugh. "The church girl took me to heaven and back."

INSERT 24

MARIA

Can it be Friday already?

Mrs Masango has been having meetings since the beginning of the week and when that happens, it means we have to do the run arounds. I think it has everything to do with the tender that she has listed - to get new trucks to add to her logistic fleet. Groups of people are coming in and out, for the briefing team with

Mrs Masango and her team. She is going to be a mogul someday. If she stays as humble and as hard-working as she has always been, then she is going to be a business mogul.

It is a Wednesday, and I am already hoping for a weekend. I have a date with my friend on Saturday. We are taking the children to Gold Reef City. I should rather call it a family day because Gundo also insisted of coming along with us, forcing Njabulo to also jump in. So, it is safe to call it a family day. I am looking forward to that day. I

haven't spent time with Thandeka and this is our chance to bond.

"Good day and welcome to Masango Logistics," I greet the delivery guy who is behind the reception desk.

"Good afternoon. I have a delivery for Mrs Masango," he says while picking a box from his delivery bag.

"I'll sign for that and I will give her when she leaves the meeting," I say while taking the box from him. He gives me a little tablet to sign on.

"Thank you." He nods and leaves

me setting the parcel on the table. Something grabs my attention. The delivery was made by Njabulo Buthelezi. I get excited because I know what is inside the box. It is the magazine that covered Mrs Masango's article. I blush at the thought of seeing how the project came alive. Only an hour later, does Mrs Masango open the boardroom door. She walks out first, followed by four gentlemen who were making a presentation and then three of our staff members who disappear down the corridor. I watch as she shakes the clients'

hands and promises to let someone call them in a matter of a week or so. The clients turn to the door and Mrs Masango heads for her office.

I give her a few minutes to settle before I take her parcel to her office.

A few knocks on the door and she tells me to come in. She is standing by the window when I walk in. She is on the cellphone.

Wrong timing! Now she is going to expect that I drop the parcel and leave.

"Alright, I think the parcel arrived. Let me take a look and I

will call you in a minute or so," she says on the phone. She is on the phone with Njabulo. I wonder what he is doing right now in his office. Does he have his feet on the table? Is he also standing by the window? I can't help myself. "Ohh, please Mr Buthelezi...if I am not pleased, then we are re-doing everything. Don't worry though, I am not too fussy." She is not too fussy? That is a lie. Mrs Masango is fussy and doesn't compromise. She drops the call and heads to her table.

"I have been waiting all week for that," she mumbles while placing

her phone on the table. She receives the parcel from me. On any other day, I would leave her to open her parcel in peace.

I stand still, with a widest smile on my face. She lifts her eyes to me and I blush.

"I notice the parcel is coming from Mr Buthelezi. If it is the magazine, can I stay and see?" I ask. She tears the box apart to get to the books.

Wow! Her eyes light up when she picks one book from the packaging. She smiles widely and turns the cover towards me.

"Oh, my God, Mrs Masango...this

looks perfect," I say. I am not trying to buy her face – the mag cover looks perfect. It shouts executive. Expensive. Business. Money. Beauty. All in one business cover. What meant to be a corporate magazine – is glamorous.

"I wasn't sure about the red suit."

"I don't know much about fashion...but this right here, is a perfect suit for you," I say. She hands me the magazine.

"You can keep that one. He sent four copies," she says.

"Oh, thank you Mrs Masango," I

say while running my fingers on the cover. "Can I frame this book instead?"

"After reading the article, of course," she says.

"Definitely," I say and page through the book. I am blown away by the pictures they took for her article inside the mag.

There is one picture of her, behind a black desk, wearing a white corporate dress. The other picture, she was standing, wearing a casual wear. I thought the business coverage was going to be dull and boring. I am blown away.

"You look like you are more excited than I am," she says. I quickly lift my head.

"I am," I respond breathlessly.

"Why is that? Do I have a big fan in you or what?"

"You have a big fan in me," I say and she smiles, "And there is something else."

She folds her arms and stare at me before asking, "What is it?"

"Remember when we were on our way to the shoot...you asked me what my passion was?" I ask.

She nods. "The whole time when you were doing a photoshoot, I was imaging myself in your shoes."

I enjoyed watching you.

And...now...when these pictures look amazing...I am even more excited."

"So..."

"So, I think I want to try modelling. I don't know if it was because you asked me what I like doing and I was just trying to find something I would do....or if it is genuinely something I will enjoy doing... but I enjoyed it."

"Modelling."

"I know nothing about it but I liked it. Maybe it was because I was in a photoshoot like that for the first time in my life. Maybe I

was just over excited," I say.

"If you like it, why not do it?" she says and my heart goes racing. I didn't expect that. I thought she would diss my idea and make me change it.

"Uhm...you think?" I ask. Where do I even begin?

"Remind me to hook you up with Mikateko, my girl, she knows the who's who of modelling," she responds.

"I'll appreciate it," I say.

"Don't sleep on those dreams hey," she says, "Imagine if I slept on mine? I would have been miserable right now."

"I cannot imagine you anywhere else but here at Masango Logistics," I say, again – not to buy her face. She is an exceptional business woman.

Mrs Masango's business journey is very inspiring. It is lunch time and I am going through her article. I am honoured to be one of the first people to read this magazine before it hits the stores next week. She only tapped in the logistic business when she was already forty. She has been working on her company for over ten years – without giving up. I like what she said – she didn't

agree to partner with her husband when he wanted to rescue her – because she had a point to prove to her daughters. She didn't want a man to shadow her and that worked for her. Even though she is a board member of other companies that belong to her husband, he is hands-off on this logistic business. Her daughter is a model and her son is a portraitist. She has mentioned that she doesn't expect any of them to take-over from her when she resigns. She believes that everyone is in a happier place when they do what

they are passionate about. I am starting to agree with her.

My phone vibrates on the table. I beam at him before picking it up.

"Mrs Buthelezi," he says when I answers. Don't I like the sound of that? I laugh before greeting him back. "You sound so relaxed, are you not at work."

"I am at work. Just having lunch by the small eating area outside the building," I say.

"I should have joined you. Maybe I was going to get my food too...who knows?" he says. I laugh because he is being naughty.

"Hey...congratulation on the next issue of your business mag. I loooveeee it," I say.

"Did you see it?"

"Did I see it? I am reading it right now. I love the cover too," I say.

"Do you know how lovely that sounds? Having your girlfriend admire your work. thank you."

"You outdid yourselves," I say.

"You should repeat that line when Gundo is around. I need to get more bonus than him," he responds.

"So...what are you doing?" I ask.

"Uhm, I am by the mall..."

"Remind me to be a boss in my next life. I need to do the malls while other people are at work. What are you doing there?"

"Nothing!" He snaps quickly.

"Haw..."

"Well," he says nervously. "I am just...uhm...you see...I am just grabbing lunch."

"Lovely."

"Can I take you out this weekend?" he quickly asks.

"We are doing the family outing with the Radzilani's, remember?"

"Not that. Just me and you. In a quiet restaurant.

Just...something nice," he says.

"I'm up for that," I say.

"I love you," he says and blows a kiss. I love him too.

The happiest person here is Ciara. I noticed her happy face when she jumps out of the car. Njabulo and I got here a few minutes ago and had to wait for the Radzilanis. I wave at Ciara as we cross to where they are parking.

"Hello aunty Maria," she loudly says with excitement. "Uncle Njabulo, are you joining us too."

"I am here to make sure that you win all those huge teddy

bears inside there," Njabulo responds.

"I want one big bear and two small ones for my brothers," she says.

"I'll make sure, I win all three teddy bears then," he says. I bet he is going to buy those. It ain't easy to win those challenge games.

We greet Gundo, who is trying to get the pram out of the boot.

"Are we going to need that, man?" Njabulo asks. The last time Njabulo and I took the twins out, the boys wanted to push the pram instead.

"It helps when they sleep," Gundo responds and Njabulo joins him while I walk to the passenger's side

Thandeka jumps out of the front seat. I quickly hide my reaction on she looks. I force a smile and pull her into a hug. I haven't seen her in ages and I need my friend to catch up.

"I never thought I'd live up to a day when you rock a legging in public," she says with a weak smile.

"I want to go on a few rides today," I say. "We have a lot to talk about."

The twins are ready to jump off when we reach for them from their car seat. These babies grow whenever I see them.

Gundo pushing them into Gold Reef City, I am walking hand in hand with Thandeka, while Njabulo has Ciara in her hand.

Nkosinathi would have loved this, but he has a birthday party to enjoy – I bet he'll have more fun than us.

The weather is perfect for our day-out.

"Oh my God Thandeka... the boys are getting older by the day," I comment when Gundo is taking

them out of the pram. They are starting their shenanigans. They want to push the pram instead of being pushed. It is so fun to watch and it fascinating to see Njabulo's eyes soften at the sight. He can be a strong looking man but the rascals turn his heart into a softie. He picks one and throws him in the air – only to invite the other.

"Am I too big for you to throw me too?" Ciara cries out happily.

"Let me see," Njabulo says and prepares himself to pick her up. He tries scooping her up but pretends to fail. "No, Ciara. You

are too big."

"Really?" she asks.

"Really," he says with an exaggerated look. She is old but he could if he wanted to. He is trying to make her happy and it is helping. She enjoys being a big sister.

Thandeka and I allow the guys to take the kids away so that we could talk. I buy us ice cream and get on an empty bench. We agree to meet the family at Nandos in a thirty minutes or so.

"Thank you for introducing me to Njabulo. He is a wonderful guy," I say.

"He is."

"How are you Thandeka?" I get the guts to ask. It has been bothering me since we got here. She is reserved. Very, very reserved.

"I am holding up," she says.

"Holding up?"

"I'll tell you when I am ready to," she says. I have learnt to give people space when they needed it. I appreciate it when people give me space too. She will tell me when she is ready to talk. "So, tell me about Cape Town?"

I blush. Not a little blush but that obvious blush.

"It was amazing," I respond. It has been a few weeks but I bet I remember that day always, before I get to sleep. I give her the details about the trip and she figured that I did more than just spending time with Njabulo. I always blush when I have to talk about it. Sometimes guilt consumes me but the pleasure will raise that away.

"I miss your mother, how is she?"

"She is fine. We are back at praying every weekend and believe you...only that keeps me sane when I think about that chaos," I say.

"Let's find the boys," she says while getting up.

"Sure!"

Njabulo and I couldn't go on our date after spending the day at Gold Reef City yesterday. We were exhausted from running around the whole place, chasing after the twins and keeping Ciara entertained. We took turns with Gundo and Thandeka. By the time we went home to freshen up and change for our date, Njabulo had to postpone our dinner date to now.

He isn't himself tonight. He has

been quiet since we left my apartment.

"Are you alright?" I ask.

"Remind me not to agree on a fun day with the Radzilanis...those kids wore me out," he says and laughs. I laugh too. I know what he is talking about. Maybe he is exhausted but he should have known that I wouldn't have minded to stay indoors and cook...or order a pizza.

He parks the car and hurry to my side, to open for me. I get spoiled sometimes.

He leads me to our table, which is by the balcony of the restaurant.

We have been to fancy hotels but this one is fancier.

"Babe...really?" I ask.

"Company is paying," he says. I laugh because that is his line when he spends more than he should. You know Njabulo doesn't have to do much to make me feel special, we have been in a solid relationship for four months but I already feel like a queen. Maybe I shouldn't complain about any of this...our relationship still has a long way to go and soon I'll be missing this.

"You look amazing," he says while picking my hand from the table. I

sure look amazing because he personally bought the dress on Friday evening. The earrings too. "You don't look bad yourself, Mr Buthelezi," I say. He drops his head and laughs.

"Would you like wine, tonight?" he asks. I shake my head. Njabulo picks the best wines and I might finish a bottle and regret it tomorrow when Mrs Masango make us run around in preparation for her busy day.

"A glass of champagne?" he asks. "Are you trying to get me drunk?" I ask and barks into a loud laugh. "Is it working?" he asks while

caressing my hand.

"No. It isn't. I'll go for a virgin cocktail... virgin mojito will do."

"I'll get you exactly that. I'll get you whatever you need," he says.

When the waiter brings our little appetizers, Njabulo orders a mojito for me and a glass of whiskey for himself. He asked for one neat and another one on the rocks.

"You know I cannot drive, right?"

I say. If he is trying to get himself drunk, I won't be able to drive him home. He winks at me.

The waiter drops our drinks on the table. Before he could even

turn away, Njabulo has thrown the neat shot down his throat. He gives the waiter an empty glass and flashes me a smile.

Another flash from from a camera which is behind Njabulo...but far. The camera guy notices me and thereafter turns away as if he was caught.

"What is wrong?" Njabulo asks and turns his head to get what I am looking at.

"Some camera guy took a photo of us and turns away when he noticed that I caught him red handed."

"Oh! They...they always take

pictures so that you buy them after dinner if you want."

"Oh, okay." Fair enough. We collected a few of those yesterday after each ride at Gold Reef.

The waiter brings our main meal which Njabulo ordered for us. We skipped the starters. We always skip those.

"This is lovely," I say as the plate lands in front of me.

"I hope you enjoy it," he says before taking my hand so that I can mumble a prayer for us.

"HMMMMM!!" I moan as I take the first bite - my eyes closed. The first bite is always

important. Njabulo is watching me. I know he is.

"Babe...when are you going to be ready to marry me?" he asks as I chew.

What? Marriage? I chew my food with my eyes on him and thereafter say, "In a year and a half...or so."

"What?" he asks. He seems shocked and I think I just noticed his body tense.

"What?" I laugh. "Is it too soon for you? Okay, I can wait for two years...is fine."

"Why a year and a half?"

"I think that'll be long enough for

us to know each other more...and besides, by then I would have known what I want to do with my life."

"What do you want to do with...your life?"

"I wanna try modelling," I say.

"Modelling?"

"Yeah!"

He clears his throat and pick the fork from the table.

"When do you think you'll be ready to marry me Mr Buthelezi?" I ask. His face has slightly changed.

He clears his throat and say,

"Well...whenever you are ready."

"A year and a half it is," I say,

"I'll pretend we didn't talk about this when you propose after next year so that you can plan a perfect proposal."

"Uhm...excuse me," he says and gets on his feet. My eyes follows him as he walks towards the entrance of the balcony and a guy holding an enormous bouquet of red roses twirls on his heels and disappears inside the restaurant. Without turning to me, Njabulo follows him and disappears into the restaurant too.

EPISODE 25 (unedited)

NJABULO

I laugh at myself as I stride inside the restaurant, leaving Maria at the balcony.

A year and half? - What the???

The waiter who has this enormous bouquet of roses is holding it up and waiting for me to give him the next order. It must be very heavy - for him to support it with both his hands. People are turning head with their tight smiles. They don't have any idea how I feel right now.

"Give me the ring," I say.

"Huh? Are we changing plans?" he asks.

"We are not doing it anymore," I say.

"What? Why not?" he asks. He is a curious champ, isn't he? I am a client and he should leave me the whole alone when I don't want to talk. My business shouldn't bother him. "Did she say no?"

"Huh?" I ask, instead of dismissing him. Maybe if I can stand here and chit chat with him, I wouldn't feel like a jerk.

"Did she say 'no' to your proposal?"

It hit me. I didn't propose to

her. I didn't recite the speech I practised the whole week. She didn't get to hear what promises I am ready to make to her. What is the point though? She is not ready. She has a new modelling passion that she wants to pursue. Who am I to stop her reaching those dreams? Where do I even begin?

Modelling? – What the hell?

"Please give me the ring and take the flowers to her," I say. He drops the bouquet to the table next to us and untie the box of ring which was tied in the centre. I receive the ring and carefully

place it in my pocket. He nods at me and grabs the bouquet before bouncing to the balcony. I need a drink. The bar area is not busy so I cross the room to where a bartender is pouring a shot for a young girl who was sitting by herself. When I stand next to an empty chair, she turns to me and flashes a smile.

"Where do you stock your cologne?" she asks. Where do I stock my cologne? What kind of a question is that? Is it a new way of starting a convo?

"Double shot of that," I tell the bar tender before he could put

away the bottle.

"Stressful day?" she asks.

"I'd appreciate if you could shut the fck up," I say without turning to her. I am eagerly waiting for something strong to burn the lump which is stuck on my throat. I clear my throat as I receive my drink. I take one shot and drop the glass loudly on the counter. "Add that to the table by the balcony."

"Sure." The bartender nods. I turn on my heels and head back to our table. When my woman notices me, she blushes and give me a widest smile.

"What did I do to deserve this?" she asks, her eyes gesturing to the flowers that are on mini side table that the waiter brought when I was gone.

"You deserve all things," I say.

"What am I supposed to do with this bouquet? It is so hugggee," she says. She is fascinated but I wanted her to be more than that.

"You can break it into five bouquets and place each in each room in the house," I say with a smile.

"Why didn't I think about this?" she asks and then laugh.

I clear my throat and watch as she takes a few last bite of her food. My food should be very cold now and I have lost my appetite. All of it.

"Would you like some dessert?" I enquire. I can sit here and watch her eat. Instead of giving me an answer, she stares at me, a smile gone from her face. It must have been my tight voice. She mustn't blame me - my dream is a little crushed here. A dream of a possible family in a year's time. I need to love her enough, to shove my wishes aside.

"Babe, are you okay?" she asks.

She love me. I can hear it from her concerned voice. She loves me but I love her more to let her live her life the way she needs to.

"Yeah!"

"You don't sound like yourself," she says.

"What? Ohh... you want me to order the dessert for you regardless? Because I don't care about you gaining weight?" I ask and she smiles. I always force her to take dessert whenever we go out. If she ever complains about gaining weight, I'd tell her I don't mind at all. She would still look perfect.

"That is more like it," she says with a giggle, "But...with this new adventure...I am not supposed to gain more weight, so I will pass on the dessert today."

"Right?"

"Right!"

"So...you are serious about this whole thing?" I ask, praying that she doesn't pick jealousy in my words. The words tasted bitter on my tongue and I pray it is not the case to her ears.

"Yeah, Dikeledi said I have perfect teeth for modelling...imagine? And...I think I am tall enough and if I am not

thin enough then I jump into a plus size modelling. The waist, the hip, all these things matter," she says.

"You look perfect," I say.

"Thank you," she says and set the fork back on the plate. "You didn't even touch your food."

"I shouldn't have eaten the fruits before our supper."

"This was so beautiful. Thank you so much," I say.

"It is my pleasure."

She is on heels so I had to walk her to her door. She digs her stilettos on the ground as I

follow behind her – the bouquet in my hands.

What the hell was I thinking?

Ordering this huge thing? But to be honest, I didn't prepare myself for the worst answer. She doesn't have to know that I had booked a room for us, to spend the night together to celebrate our engagement. I have a bag with her clothes and mine. I couldn't go ahead with the rest of the evening. I wouldn't have been great company and it wouldn't have been fair to her.

"Do you want to come in for a cup of coffee? Dikeledi is not home,"

she says while taking off her shoes.

"Oh yeah?" I pull a tight smile.

"You are tired, aint you?" she asks while walking towards me. "You haven't been yourself since the beginning of the evening."

That - and the fact that I am tipsy from the whiskey and shots I took - and the disappointment? I deserve to throw myself in bed and sleep. I am not that man anymore. The man who would use a woman to take off their frustrations. She deserves better than that.

"I need to recharge my energy," I

say. She gets on her toes and lands her lips on mine.

"Thank you for a romantic night," she says. "Now...I need to see what I am going to do with that bouquet."

"Let me leave you to it. I love you," I say and kiss her.

The hotel room is cold without her. I am even wondering why I decided to check in – my house is just minutes away. I just couldn't have my money go to waste by not showing face. I pick the bottle of champagne that was meant for us to pop in celebration. The rose petals on the floor are

such a waste.

"To love," I say to myself after popping the champagne. I fill the flute and sip on.

Ish! Disgusting taste!

I throw return the flute back on the table and take off my clothes.

Love neh? This ish is not for the faint hearted. My chest is tight as if I have been hammered for days. All because my woman's wishes come first.

'Lord have mercy!!!!' I yell in my head as I shut my eyes tightly - hoping that the phone stops ringing. It doesn't.

Who calls people on a Monday

morning? Isn't my alarm supposed to do that? I should resort to switching this damn thing off when I sleep. The world won't come to a halt if they don't find me. I groan as I get out of bed to reach for my phone.

Jeezzz!! I have a pounding head. "Hello," I groan as I drag my feet back to bed.

"Hey man...I have been texting you all night?" Phuti says. He sounds like he is already up. What time is it?

"What do you want?" I groan. I am the least friendly in the mornings, unless it is someone

special waking me up.

"Conference in Sun City," he responds.

"What about the conference?"

"I received an email last night stating that there is a spot to exhibit at the Million Businesses Conference. One media company cancelled so we finally got the spot."

"Why do you have to wake me up for that?"

"Because you are the only one without a task today. The conference is today. You have to attend and mingle with all those business people and get us

clients."

Dammit!

I lift my phone from my ear and check the time. It is just after six.

"What time does the thing start?" I ask, praying

"At ten," he says. I resist to swear at him. "Your team is

leaving in a few minutes with the banners and the material. You can drive straight from your house."

Straight from the hotel.

"Fine," I spit. I'll go.

"This is what you get when you aim to be Forbes."

"Whatever," I say before he

hangs up while laughing.

If I don't want to stuck in traffic, it'll be best to get ready and leave right about now. Sleep won't bring anything.

A power shower and I am already on my way.

"Good morning babe. I didn't get a chance to call you earlier before you could start work. I bet Mrs Masango is already making you run around already. I am out of town until later in the evening I am attending some business conference. If you cannot reach me, I will call you when I drive

back. I love you, babe," I leave a voicemail. I open the dashboard and throw my phone. If I want my eyes on the ball - I am going to need to tune my mind in business.

She tried chatting with me on WhatsApp when she woke up but I was already driving.

I make it to Sun City on time. By the time I enter the conference centre, I already know the faces I need to confront. I already know which table to attack with my marketing skills.

Same old, same old business conferences. However, this one

takes the cup. I get to be with a number of billionaires in South Africa.

I should say, this is the best way to shift my mind from last night. I would have been frustrated but here I am, smiling and laughing again.

Why did I leave my phone in the car? I got a chance to present our company just after lunch and now I am sitting here, listening to mediocre presentations.

What's going to happen to Maria and I? - I unintentionally drift away. What would happen if we don't want same things? I won't

say that I am confident with her in lingerie in front of a crew and also a million of people who are going to see her pictures or see on a runaway. I don't know if it the Zulu man in me or I am just jealous. Should I even be jealous of her? I am always in and out of towns and she has never showed me that she has a problem with me. Then, why can't I just let her be? What kind of a man doubts his woman's happiness? It is never her fault that I had already imagined our children running around the yard. It isn't any of her fault that I am way

ahead of this relationship.

Dammit!

If it wasn't the fact that the most important part of the conference is at the end. When you get a chance to mingle and collect business cards to revisit whenever you are looking for a new client. After the meeting, I collect a few business cards and promise to meet a few gentlemen who were interested in our service.

By the time I jump of the bus that took us to the parking lot, I am exhausted. I miss Maria so much. So, jumping into the car, I

reach for my phone.

There are a lot of missed calls from Maria – even though I told her that I will be unreachable.

Other days she would only call me once and get the message.

I connect the phone on the Bluetooth as I drive out of the parking lot.

“Njabulo???” she calls out in panic.

“Hey babe...” I say. “I just finished now and I am only on my way.”

“We need to talk,” she says.

What? We need to talk? About what? My heart beats out of my chest. I haven't checked her text

messages to get a feel of how she is. Why would she need to talk? Does she want to break up with me? So soon?

"It will take me two and a half hours to get there... should I pick you up? Maybe we can spend time in my house," I say.

"Okay," she says.

"Okay...you'll spend the night?"

"Yes!"

"Okay, get ready. I will call you when I am a close."

"Okay."

"I love you," I say.

"I love you too," she responds.

At least she doesn't sound angry.

Phew!!

As promised, I pick her up at her apartment after three hours. It is just after nine, so she was almost ready to sleep. She can sleep in my house.

She drags her feet to my car. When she enters the car, she drops her lips on mine before driving us to my house. She doesn't bring the topic up and I appreciate that. I liked the fact that she held tightly to my hand until we get to my house.

I do not take the luggage bag from the boot. I don't want her to as why I had a luggage bag.

"Would you like a cappuccino?" I ask and she nods. We have these nice satchels of cappuccinos that she likes a lot. I drop the phone and keys on the table and lead the way to the kitchen. She takes the bar stool and watch as I make her cappuccino.

"You said you wanted to talk," I say.

She takes a deep breath.

She wouldn't come to my house to break up with me, would she?

"Dikeledi told me," she says.

I relax my shoulder and take a deep breathe. Dikeledi, the Radzilani and Zizipho knew about

my proposal plan. Thandeka helped me with the flowers from those girls from @Dzuvha Florist, Zizipho helped me to pick the dress and shoes and Dikeledi insisted on styling her hair. Gundo helped me with the speech. It was a collective work. I laugh at the thought. But honestly, everyone came through for me. "She shouldn't have said anything."

"Why not?"

"So that she doesn't make you feel bad about the whole thing."

"She didn't intentionally tell me. She didn't come home last night."

When she came in this morning, she was welcomed by the roses so she congratulated me. I forced the truth from her."

I place the cup in front of her.

"Well..."

"Why didn't you propose?"

"Uhm...well...you said that you will be ready in a year's time....and..."

"So?"

"So?"

"You didn't propose me. You asked me a general question."

"But from that general question, I realised that you are not ready."

She stares at me without saying

a word. She looks crushed but doesn't say anything. What am I supposed to do??

"Why not ask me?"

"Ask what Maria? You want to pursue something...who am I to stand on your way."

"Will my marriage with you stop me from pursuing my dreams?"

"Uhm...well...somehow."

"How? I can still be your wife and be a model."

"You cannot be a model and be pregnant," I say. She stares at me with sad eyes. I think she only realised now that I am right. "I am ready to start a family with

you. How do I do that without forcing you into doing something you don't want to do?"

"I can be your wife now...and we can discuss about babies soon."

"When would you want to be a mother?" I ask. We never got into details with this. I would want to knock her up the moment I put a ring on it.

"Obviously after a little a while when I have modelled a few years."

"Wont I make you feel guilty when I expect more than you can give? As a boyfriend, I have no right to bring the baby issue...but

as my wife...I would want us to start a family."

"So...what happens?"

"I...don't know..."

"Let's just love each other without labelling anything. I want to love you enough to let you live your dreams."

"Are you sure?"

NO! NO! I am not sure.

"Yes," I assure her. I rather make her happy than myself. I turn to her and take her hand. "I will wait until you are ready. That is how much I love you."

I don't know if I mean it, but

this is the only thing I can say to make her feel better.

EPISODE 25

MARIA

I can still be his wife and be a model, can't I?

Njabulo doesn't look at me while he fixes himself a glass of juice. He has a wonderful kitchen and to say I haven't imagined myself cooking in it would be a lie.

Oh, my God! Njabulo wanted us to get married. How crazy is that? I threw myself on the couch the moment Dikeledi let the words slip

this morning. Her face was bright and she was so sure. It only made sense then why Njabulo was not himself the entire time. Thinking about it gives me goose bumps. The dress. The hair and make-up that Dikeledi insisted of doing. The restaurant. The balcony set up. Ooohhh... the camera guys who was stealing a few snaps. All signs were there but how was I to know? How was I to know? He was so anxious the entire night but it never clicked to me. We have been dating for a good four months and generally, that is too soon.

Njabulo wanted to propose! This is so crazy!

Oh my God, oh my God. I would have said yes in a heartbeat. I would have said a big yes. But it must come from him.

"Good for you Maria," I murmur to myself.

"What is that?" Njabulo asks.

"Huh?"

"You were saying something. What were you saying?" he asks before downing the apple juice.

"Nothing much." I sip my cappuccino and watch as Njabulo rinse his glass and put it away. I am in love with this man and I

am scared that this whole marriage proposal thing is going to change things between us.

"Babe...I love you," he says while walking towards me. He stops in front of me and presses his lips on mine. He sighs the moment he breaks the kiss.

"I love you too."

"I don't want you to stress yourself. I am fine."

And I am not.

"Yeah?" I ask and he nods.

"I am going to bed. I am extremely exhausted from the trip. You are welcomed to join me if you want. I could show you how

much I love you...you know?" he says and wiggles his brows. I know what he is talking about. He locks up the house before leading the way to his bedroom.

It doesn't take him long to fall asleep after making love. Even so, he has me wrapped in his arms.

This is where I want to be forever and forever. This man right here, makes me feel so special and appreciated.

Hours later, I am still tossing and turning. I should be sleeping but here I am worried about the future.

What is more important? I want

to try this out and see how far I can go. I am going to give it my all and see how far I can do this I want to be a wife and be a mother, just not now. And it scares me that we haven't spoken about this. Even though we didn't discuss it, it is a given. What now? I turn to look at Njabulo. What is going to happen? "Njabulo, please wake up," I say while shaking him. He is dead asleep. "Njabulo."

"What?" he mumbles while changing the sides.

"Wake up, please."

"You want another round of sex?"

Maria I cannot keep up with your demands," he mumbles while turning back to face me. I giggle. He is always himself whatever time of the day - that is why I am able to tell when his mood is off. It is easy to pick when Njabulo is not fine. He opens his red shot eyes and blink a few times in the dark - trying to get a glimpse of my face.

"Why are you not sleeping?"

"I am...not sleepy."

"What's wrong?"

"We need to talk."

"Are you breaking up with me?"

he asks with a smirk.

"Really?? No man," I say. He rubs his eyes with the back of his hand.

"What up?" he asks while sitting up. I sigh deeply. I don't know how I am going to be tomorrow morning. It is almost dawn and I haven't slept a wink since we got to bed.

"Is this seriously not going to change anything between us?" I say.

"What?"

"Me. Modelling?" He sighs and takes my hand into his. He is about to be honest to me and I would honestly appreciate that.

"Honestly speaking without hiding anything for you, I wouldn't date a model. I am not cut out for that...I am too obsessive in nature. You are mine Maria and no other man should not dare look at you. That is me. I don't care if that came from my past or what...I am too obsessive," he says and I sigh. We can't continue together if I pursue this, can we? He is obsessive in a nice way. "But, you came into my life and changed how I see life. I am always on the road but you trust that I am not busy messing around and all...so why can't I do

the same with you. I need to focus on our love and not any other things."

"But if you could decide for me, you would choose that I don't go ahead with this, right?" I ask and hold my breath, waiting for an answer. Why did I even ask him that?

"Would that make you happy?" I look away, trying to hide the disappointment. "Exactly! You wouldn't be happy...and guess what? I rather have you a happy woman than one miserable woman."

"Really?"

"Yes," he responds and kisses my hand. Wow! What more do I want in a man. "Now? Can we sleep? I have a long day tomorrow. Gundo and Phuti are on a mission to abuse me."

No matter how much I didn't sleep, that is not an excuse not to dress up and feel good today. My boyfriend dropped me at work before he left to start with his busy day. He has a busier day than mine. The exciting thing is I am meeting with Mikateko tonight after work. She promised to pick me up from work so that

we could have supper. I'll need to go home to change from my uniform.

God answered my prayer: Mrs Masango took the rest of the week off. Her PA shared the information and I am very grateful. There is no running around the building today.

After five o'clock, I am home already, changing into a black pencil dress. I don't know - but I am too nervous like I am going to an interview. I have met Mikateko just a few times when she came to visit her mother. She is petite and have the best style

in the world. I think it has everything to do with money. Her mother has money and she looks like money.

Dikeledi walks in just when I am about to grab my handbag from the bed.

"Where are you going?" she asks while scanning me.

"I am meeting Mikateko for supper."

"The model girl? Can I come with you?"

"Uhm...I don't know..." I say but she gives me a puppy face. "Okay, maybe she wouldn't mind."

"If she minds then I will take a

corner table and dine by myself. I feel like something nice. Very very nice."

"Okay, then let's go. She is waiting outside," I say and she throws a fist in the air. Dikeledi doesn't need to change from her work clothes. She dresses the she does, for everything.

The only car parked outside the gate is a yellow Polo. We can see here from here because she is dancing to a song that is blasting on the speakers. Dikeledi looks at me and we both shrug as we head to the car. She puts down the volume and press a button to

unlock the doors.

"heeyyy ladies," she says as we get into the car. She is the opposite of how I thought she would receive us. The last time I saw her, she walked through the corridor with headsets on as she marches to her mother's office. Today, she looks bubbly just like Dikeledi.

We are dining at Turn n Tender. She picked the restaurant and her reasons are that she is on a diet but needs to cheat. Dikeledi looks at me and laugh. I am forever cheating.

She gets the tiniest piece of

steak and a salad – I wouldn't call her plate, a cheat plate.

Dikeledi laughs when she says she doesn't drink anything but water. This is going to be a tough journey.

"Do you take drugs?" she asks and I choke on the rooibos tea I just sipped. What? Drugs? Never. "No ways," I say.

"Good. I don't want to work with people who lose their morals," she says. I finally breathe. "I am tired about good girls gone bad. I hate that nonsense so much. It is either you are good or bad. Which one is it for you?"

"Good."

"Then lets stick to that," she says. Dikeledi is nodding her head quietly on the side like she is trying to be serious. I am not going to hear the end of it when we get home. I am eating a salad. A mere green salad and I can already see that Dikeledi cannot wait for us to go home to laugh at me.

"So...can one be forced to do what they are not comfortable with?"

I ask.

"Like?"

"Like lingerie and bikinis?"

"You do what you sign up for."

Make sure you read the contract very carefully. We don't want you posing for nudes, do we?"

"No."

"So...how does your boyfriend feel about you being a bikini model?"

Dikeledi asks, on my behalf. This is the most important question, ever.

"I don't date. I won't date until I retire. Get that right, I don't date. I have a partner," she says.

"You don't date?"

"A man? That is the last stress I want when I want to travel for work. No one tells me what to

do. You must never date until you fulfill this."

What?

Dikeledi steals a glance of me. I am worried.

"I am already dating," I say before placing my cup on the table.

"Oohhh..." she says with a frown. I am sure I can make this work, can't I? I ask and she shrugs.

Why do I have to choose one?

"I can make it work, can't I?"

"You can," she says but she doesn't sound convincing. It isn't convincing at all.

"Don't you know anyone who has a

partner?" I ask and she rests her back on the chair, trying to think as if she is cracking her head. "I know one. She used to bring her boyfriend to photoshoots and all. I don't know where she is now though."

"Okay, I think you can take Njabulo with. So that, he can see that it all about work...don't you think?" Dikeledi asks.

The rest of the dinner, we chat about the projects that Mikateko is going to get for me. I am starting small though. I am going to book a photoshoot so that we do my portfolio. I am so

scared and excited at the same time.

The rest of the week flew by and I got a chance to dine with Njabulo three times. I am convinced that we are okay because he is back at being his old self. Some days I wish he could propose to me because I know that we belong together. I hardly talk about my new passion because I know how tense he gets when I do. He is somewhat uninterested or maybe he doesn't want to stress the both of us. When I told Thandeka about it, she gave me thumbs up and told

me to follow my heart. What she said was that life is too short to be stressed about what people will say. She said it in an upset tone and I didn't want to dig deeper. She has stop me a lot of times to ask. She said that when you do what you love and are content, the world becomes a beautiful place. I totally agree. Everybody seem to think like this. I am just worried about my relationship with Njabulo. He is coming to see me later today before he goes out with his friends. He hardly goes out with his friends so I am not bothered

that I am spending a Friday evening.

My phone buzzes from the table. A smile creeps on my lips when I see it is him.

"I am downstairs," he says just when I answer the phone.

"Are you not coming up?"

"You want to have sex with me? Maria...I can't..." he says. I laugh.

"Are you sure you don't?" I flirt.

"Don't tempt me. Come downstairs. I am with Nkosinathi. I picked him up from a soccer match and I am dropping him home," he says. I slide my

feet into sleepers and hurry downstairs. He is already standing outside of the car. His face lights up when he notices me cross the road to where he is parking.

He opens his arms for me to burry myself in when I get to him.

"How was your day?" he asks as I position myself to stand next to him and rest my back on the car just like he was standing. I lower my face, before knocking on the window and waving at the nephew who was playing on his phone.

"He is in a bad mood. His team lost," Njabulo advises when I

stand up straight. The boy does look very sad.

"Oh, man... I hope you have a plan to lighten his mood."

"He will be fine. It is not his first loss."

We usually catch up on our day whenever we meet. I would tell him nothing interesting and he tells about his exciting clients and the new ventures that he is jumping in. We could always do this over the phone but we cannot get enough of each other.

"Hey, I want us to go to Vaal tomorrow for my cousin's graduation celebration. He

graduated today but my family from KZN couldn't make it into the hall...so my cousin wants us to host them on a little celebration. You will be getting to know half of my family."

I fold my arms to my chest and sigh deeply.

"Tomorrow I have an appointment with a photographer for my first portfolio."

"Can't you reschedule?" he asks.

"Mikateko had to ask for favours and all for me since I couldn't make it during the week."

"Ohhh," he says. I feel bad. I

was going to tell him before we part ways tonight but not like this. He drops his eyes to the ground and sigh deeply, hiding his disappointment. "Unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you come with me. The shoot is in Maboneng at eleven. We can go straight to Vaal afterwards. I would like to meet your family."

"That's....not a bad idea," he says. His mood lightening up. Honestly, I didn't want to take him to the shoot. I thought about it and concluded that Njabulo wouldn't want to be there. However, I

don't have any choice now. We both have to sacrifice time for each other.

"Yeah. What must I wear?" I ask.

"Leggings," he says and sticks his tongue out and wink. He would kill for me to live on leggings. "Wear anything you want. It is just a young braai nyana."

"Okay. Got it."

"I love you," he says before dropping his lips for a smooch.

"I love you too."

"What time am I picking you up?"

"Ten. We should be there at eleven," I say while he kisses my

finger.

"Ten it is," he responds while opening the door.

I am super nervous as Njabulo parks the car outside the photographer's studio. He takes my hand and kisses it. Isn't it strange that he doesn't like this modelling thing but he cares that I do it greatly? That is how I know that he loves me. He picks my bag from the boot and follow me into the building. There are bright lights surrounding a white booth. The photographer is standing by his computer screens.

He is a tall guy with long beards and a toned body just like Njabulo's. My man is not happy about this. Talk about two bulls in the same room.

"You must be Maria," he says with his eyes on me. "Not quite what I was expecting."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Njabulo asks before I could even open my mouth.

"A new model. I thought I was dealing with an experienced model," the guy says. "Take a seat over there and our model can go behind that door to get into the first outfit."

Njabulo does as he was asked while I turn to the changing room. I am keeping my natural look so I only do a touch up lip stick. Dikeledi helped me with the make-up. She is my god-sister if there is ever anything like that. "Do you work here alone?" Njabulo asks.

"Yes."

"Was Maria going to be here with you...alone?" Njabulo asks. I close my eyes while waiting for the answer.

"Yes," the guy responds and Njabulo laughs. I quickly walk into the room so that I calm him

down. I know that sarcastic laugh.

"I am ready," I say while getting into the little stage. Njabulo stare at the pair of skinny jean and a white t-shirt. It was an instruction to wear a plain shirt and a pair of blue jean. He tilts his head at me with a smirk on his face. Just that look makes me blush and feel like a sexy woman. I don't wear jeans but here I am rocking it like I was born with it. Thirty minutes later and we haven't gotten the shots that he is looking for - I am failing. Njabulo is taking some photos

with his phone as well. He keeps taking the pictures and then play on his phone. The only time he gets tense is when the photographer touches me to show a pose. I can see that he is trying his best not to explode.

"Get into a bikini set," the photographer says.

"Ohh...hell no..." Njabulo says.

"What?" the photographer says.

"I am not doing a bikini shot," I say before Njabulo could say some more.

"Then why are we here? The instruction I got from your agent gave me instructions."

"Oh...no...I am not doing the bikini shot."

"What are you doing? Lingerie?"

"Lingerie?" Njabulo asks and then shakes his head. He walks outside.

"Excuse me," I say to the photographer as I walk after Njabulo. How is this going to work. I find him standing just by his car. "Njabulo?"

"What?" he asks.

"Why are you mad? I didn't know that I am going to be asked to get into a bikini..."

"Did you bring a pair of bikini?" he asks. I nod. Dikeledi told me to

put a pair just in case. "You were not asked but you brought it just in case."

"Please..."

"Please what? I am sorry for over reacting...but this is nonsense."

"How is it nonsense? Is it nonsense because I am the one doing it? I never tell you that whatever meeting you run to is stupid."

"Why modelling?" he asks and shakes his head. "Why modelling."

"Why not?" I ask and shrug.

"What happened to you understanding?"

He sighs deeply.

"Do I have to understand?"

"You promised to do it for me."

"I know," he says.

My chest is rising and falling from panic before asking, "So you don't want me to do this....even if it makes me happy?"

"Can't you find something else instead?"

"No."

What about what I want to try.

"I understand," he responds.

"Njabulo??" I call out but he gets into the car without saying anything else to me. Is he this jealous?

Oh, God.

"Ma'am, I need to get back to work. Can we do the lingerie shots or bikini," the photographer says. This is not happening right now. What must I do now?

EPISODE 26

NJABULO

"Ma'am, I need to get back to work. Can we do the lingerie shots or bikini."

I cannot help but stare at her from my seat. The photographer dude walks back in, leaving her alone to decide on her fate.

She looks straight at my car and eyes meet. I hate feeling like this. I hate feeling like a sissy. She stares right at me with her one hand on her hip, her chest rising and falling. She looks pissed and so am I.

I pray that she walks back in there to get her stuff so that we could leave.

Bikini shots? Lingerie shots? Ah, never madoda. I thought this was going to be easy because I know I love my woman but NO, it ain't fucking easy. I can't. I can't let other men feast their eyes on her. It is just that, that right

there is not the woman I fell in love with.

She storms into the studio and I start the car. She must be coming in any minute. I connect my phone on the Bluetooth and start playing some new album I uploaded last night – setting the mood for us to have an adult chat.

She doesn't show up.

Fifteen minutes and she is still inside. I angrily switch the car off and march to the damn fucking studio to only finding her posing for bikini pictures. It doesn't help that she has jean

shorts on - I don't like what I see.

I am not acknowledged when I enter into the room. My presence is not acknowledged. She turns her head towards me and thereafter continue to pose to the photographer's instruction. Wow!

Just, wow!

She ignores me and flashes a smile to her photographer who is finding a different angle to capture her bareback.

Ngaze ngadeleleka ke nokho.

Yeses!!!

"I like that...I like that..." the

photographer keeps saying.

This is too hard to watch!

"Are you still going with me or should I leave you ... doing your job?" I sharply say, loud enough for the both of them not to ignore.

"We need thirty minutes," the dude responds as if he is sent by the devil to mess with me. How am I supposed to wait for thirty freaking minutes while she is in here posing for this man? Couldn't they get her a female photographer?

Fuck it! I turn on my heel and march out of the stupid. I don't

know what the hell I was doing in there in the first place? Maybe I wished she had abandoned her new...adventure...job...passion...or whatever ish you call that modeling that she is busy with. I didn't fall in love with a model. If I wanted one, I would have gone for one.

Fifteen minutes and she is still not out. the more I imagine her posing for that bastard, the more I become so angry.

She shows up when I have already given up. I am even shocked at how long I have parked here and waited for her to

come. If she didn't have that effect on me, I would have left her here in peace. I hate how she makes me feels. I hate how much she has an effect on me.

I start the car, for the freaking second time, as she jumps to the passenger seat. She is back at wearing a pair of jeans that shapes her visible curves and I don't like her see-through blouse.

"Are you going to wear decent clothes?" I ask while putting the car on reverse.

"Huh?"

"Are you going to put on decent clothes that don't show your

bra?" I ask and she drops her eyes to her chest.

"Yeah, I will put on a blazer when we get to where we are going. I didn't want to keep you waiting for long."

She didn't want to keep me waiting for long? I have fucking waited for over an hour in total. I turn towards the main street and drive out of Johannesburg. The whole trip, when I have wished for her to bring up a topic, she is quiet and staring out of the window.

"So, we are just going to ignore what just happened?" I ask

without turning my gaze at her. She sighs before asking, "What am I ignoring?"

"You are a bikini model now?"

"I was taking pictures for my portfolio," she responds.

"Why are you giving me an attitude?" I ask. This is the first time we have been like this ever since we have been together. First time. And I hate where this is going.

"What attitude Njabulo?" she asks with a breaking voice. "What attitude. I thought you would respect the fact that I took you there with me so that you know

that there is nothing to hide. Its business. It aint my fault that I was assigned a handsome man for a photographer."

"A handsome man for a photographer."

"Oh, my God Njabulo. Stop being so childish. Please," she drags the plea.

I must stop being childish. I must stop being childish. I cannot help but laugh as I turn towards the main street that leads to my cousin's house in Vaal.

Today was supposed to be a special day for Maria and I. I was planning to introduce her to

my family but how do I do that when I am not sure that the future is still as bright as it was once was? She has gone back to staring outside the window as if she is regretting coming along with her. I also regret. I should have made a U-turn in Maboneng and drove her back to her apartment.

"Ngezwa kuthiwa unentombi, iphi?" my aunt loudly says when I walk into the kitchen. What a way to be welcomed.

"Where did you get that?" I ask with a laugh. My cousins probably

shared the news with everyone. Ntokozo follows me on Instagram and she was the first to like the picture of Maria that I shared earlier in the morning when she took the very first shots. The decent shots in jean and white. "I will be the happiest when I meet the woman that you are going to marry," she insists. I throw my arms around her and force a hug, trying my best to run away from the topic. Before we parked outside the gate, Maria and I got into a heated argument and when she told me to leave her alone, I did. Luckily

we are the last ones to arrive, so the car is parked at the end of the street.

"Where is the man of the moment?" I ask, still on a mission to run away from the girlfriend topic. That topic is a bit complicated right now.

"He is getting ready. When these ladies are almost done preparing lunch, we are going to start with the programme."

"There is a programme?" I ask. I thought it was a young get-together. I was shocked to see a mini tent and chairs lined up in a formal manner.

"We figured that we do something a little formal," she responds.

Zizipho walks into the kitchen, wearing an apron. She doesn't look as pretty as she did when she left the house this morning.

"Where is Maria? We need more hands."

"Who is Maria?" Ntokozo asks as she follows in with a bucket of scones. She drops the bucket on the table and walks to give me a brief hug. "I am a little sweaty."

"You are."

"Your aunt didn't want to hire a caterer, and now we have to do all

the work."

"You guys are great cooks," I respond.

"Who is Maria?" Ntokozo asks. I thought we have moved on from that.

"My woman," I say, praying that it is still the case.

"Where is she? I thought she was coming with you. We need hands. I am not trying to be a bad sister-in-law," Ntokozo says.

"Well...she was making a call in the car. I will go and pick her up."

"Don't worry, Nathi will go and call her," Zizipho says and thereafter calls Nkosinathi who

was playing with his peer. She sends him to go call my guest from the car.

I wish to see if Maria will show up and if so, how is her mood.

However, one my uncles calls me from the living area. He is watching soccer with two other old men that I cannot recognize.

I wish I could ditch him and head back to the kitchen but he is busy asking if my cousin chose the right career path that'll score him a job. He is Civil Engeneering and I know nothing about ish except that they are paid well. He asks a few more questions which

I quickly responded to before asking to be excused.

My aunts are busy interrogating her when I walk back into the question.

"When are you getting married?" Ntokozo asks while standing next to her mother, my aunt.

In a year and a half – that should be her famous response but she doesn't say it. She gives my cousin a smile. If I didn't know her, I'd be fooled but I know that she is faking it.

"All questions should be directed to me," I try to rescue her but I could respond when they ask me

the same question.

When am I marrying her? I would tell them that it is complicated but I don't. The only thing I tell them is the fact that they will scare her away with all these questions. I don't blame their excitement though, I have never - not even once - brought a woman to meet my family. They are excited and cannot keep the excitement to themselves.

"Don't mind us...my cousin has never brought us a makoti...so we are thrilled to meet you," Ntokozo just confirms what I just said. My family is thrilled to see the

first woman that stole my heart
after so many years of
bachelorship.

Her mood was off the whole day
on Saturday. It has everything
to do with the words I told her.
"Maybe we should break up." I
told her that when she told me
that she is not going to leave her
new found passion.

"You cannot control what I do." -
those were her exact words when
I asked her to reconsider her new
career. Selfish of me, I know. She
is right though. I have no right
to tell her what and what-not to

do with her life; akayena owami. I don't own her. I love her with all my heart but I don't own her. She played along with my family as they made her part of them. Zizipho knows very well that I would be on their case if they mistreat her so she was on her side most of the time. I kept stealing glances of her when she assisted serving the food. When she danced with the kids - I couldn't help but fall in love all over again.

I love her.

I love her so much - that I know for sure. It is just that we are

going through this little hiccup. I wish I could be less selfish but I am failing.

My Monday is not as busy as I anticipated. I attended two meetings and I am free the whole afternoon. Sitting here in my office is making me miss Maria so much.

I pick my phone piece from the table and dial Phuti's number.

"Don't tell me about a meeting. I am officially taking no meetings," he dryly says. He was nursing a hangover this morning and the clients gave him a hard time.

"Drink later tonight?" I say.

"It's on me."

My office door opens and Gundo peeps in. I wave for him to enter, while still on the phone.

"That is very tempting....but..."

"Bro...it is not every day that I clean the tab. I just need to get my mind off things and my friend here doesn't have time for me," I stare at Gundo while I say the last part. "I will keep you for just two hours now that I know you have found a girl."

"Bye."

"Four o'clock...down the road," I say and thereafter hangs up. I know that he will show up. He

always does. And if he chooses not to come this time, I can always take a few glasses alone while catching up on the news.

"I might join you. I need a break more than you do," he says while getting on the chair.

"Maybe we could have our brief meeting there," I say. He is here so that I brief him about our new client. He looks like he needs a break. I need a freaking break. We all need a break.

"I think that is a great idea," he says.

Without another word, I get on my feet and collect my car keys

and wallet from the drawer before picking my blazer from the stand. Gundo gets on his feet too and follow as I lead us out my office.

A bottle of Jack Daniel is what I order. The waiter brings the dash and ice before leaving Gundo and I in a corner table. Phuti and Sylvester will join us any minute from now. Maybe, Gundo and I could catch up a bit.

"How are the twins?" I ask.

"Chaotic!" he says with a smirk.

"They gang on other kids at crèche."

"They are already at crèche?"

these kids grow up so fast.

"Yeah, it was best that we took them to crèche so that Thandeka could work from home."

"How is she?" I ask before Phuti and Sylvester reach out table.

Phuti is loudly laughing at his colleague who received a cold shoulder from a woman he was trying to persuade at the entrance.

"I told you to stop wearing scotch shirts and chinos," Phuti comments while taking a seat.

Sylvester works in finance and I have seen a lot of these finance guys in these scotch and stripes

shirts.

Soccer topic is brought up the moment Sylvester opened his mouth. He is a big soccer fan and so is Phuti. We call bottles after bottles while the guys try to defend their respect teams. I could join in and make my point, but my mind is no longer here. I am trying to think how Maria is. If whether she is still mad at me or if she has forgiven me for the stupid thing I said. She is pissed. If she wasn't, she would have gotten back to me or she would have sent me a message just to greet.

Shit!

I screw up.

"Are they cheating on you?" Phuti asks and cracks a loud laughter.

"Why the hell would you think that?"

"Only a man with women issue would look like that. What did she do?"

"Oh...please..."

"What did she do?" Gundo emphasizes the question. "You look like a mess and that cocky smile of yours is not working."

"She wants to be a model," I blurt out without thinking twice.

"What?" Phuti asks and laughs,

joined by the rest of the guys.

The bastards! They think that I am joking.

"I am serious. My woman wants to be a model. I had to watch her strip clothes for a photographer. How fucked up is that?" I say.

They are no longer laughing.

This is painful. This is a woman I wanted to marry.

"What is the big deal? I think she could make a good model. I saw her the time she came with Mrs Masango. She looked like someone who was blown away by the experience," Phuti says. It looks like I am the only one who is

against this model thing. I have messed around with models before. I have partied with them. I cannot let my girlfriend be part of that life.

"How do I start a family with her? What is going to happen when I want to have babies."

"Then knock her up without telling her," Sylvester says with a shrug.

"Oh...please," I say but he doesn't laugh. He is serious. He cannot be serious. How do you knock a woman without her knowledge.

Why am I getting excited about

this idea.

"Don't you dare," Gundo says and shoves the drink in his mouth.

"Why is that?" I ask out of curiosity – not that I will actually do it.

"She is going to resent you when she finds out."

"Unless you tell her, how is she going to know?" I ask – again...out of curiosity.

"Are you considering it?" Phuti asks, moving to the edge of the seat.

"Oh please," I say and sip the gold liquid. I rest my back on the chair and cross my leg.

"You are considering it. Are you?"

Phuti says with a laugh.

"What do you take me for?" I ask but he doesn't stop laugh.

"I know that look, dude," Phuti laughs.

EPISODE 27 (Unedited)

MARIA

"This is the last time I am showing you," Mikateko says while walking at the end of the corridor. Her petite body sways as she marches in tallest stilettos.

"Are you ready?"

"Yeah!" I say and fold my arms to

my chest.

"Okay...tap your fingers for the rhythm," she says before moving swiftly, showing me how to run the carpet to Josh Cairo's wedding summer collection.

Apparently, Josh has a way of doing things and his runways are exclusive.

"One, two, three...one, two, three..." I count in my head while I tap my fingers on my hip.

"Got that?" she asks once she reaches where I am standing. Mikateko does this thing so effortlessly. I can't believe I have to match that. "You try it."

I give it a few tries until she was pleased with my improvements. She got me this gig and I am going to nail it.

"You are a natural," she says while sitting on the floor. She doesn't even mind her white jean shorts. She crosses her legs and starts playing with her phone. She updates her Instagram every thirty minutes. She never fails to do so.

I join her on the floor but do not cross my legs. For some reason, I cannot cross my legs the way she does.

"Do you want tickets to the pre-

party?" she asks without moving her eyes from the phone.

"What pre-party?"

"Josh Cairo's pre-party," she responds. I shrug. I could go if she is going. I wouldn't want to be mingling with people I do not know. For a few weeks now, I have realized that this industry is different from them all. It is every man for himself. "Cool. I will get us tickets."

"Thanks," I whisper. I know someone won't be very happy about my choice to go to a party. Njabulo and I have been having it rough because of some of my

choices. I don't know how we are going to make our relationship work, really. I don't know.

The elevator opens, stealing our attention. Speak of the devil.

Njabulo walks out of the elevator and turns towards our direction.

He is coming straight from work - I can tell by the navy blue suit he has on. I cannot help but droll. He looks like the man I fell in love with. A man I thought I would never be with. It breaks my heart that we are going through a rough patch when we were supposed to be at our happiest moment.

He notices us sitting on the floor. I drop my eyes to the brown paper bag he has. It is from one of his favourite coffee shops. If he didn't bring their best red velvet cake, then he brought muffins. He walks towards us with his eyes locked on mine.

I miss him.

I miss my boyfriend.

"Hey..." he says without moving his eyes from me. I am glad that he has his eyes on me because the shorts that Mikateko is wearing is too short and showing off the cheeks of her bums. I get why Njabulo is against me modeling. I

just get it. I also get it why Mikateko doesn't want to be in a relationship with anyone.

"Hey..." I respond.

"Is this a good time to see you?" he asks.

"Yes!" Mikateko says while getting up. "I needed an excuse to get out of here."

While glued on her phone, Mikateko makes her way to my apartment, leaving Njabulo and me on an eye contest. He looks sexy as hell and I cannot help but stare at him with lustful eyes. We only break our eye contact when Mikateko walks out of my

apartment with her handbag on hand.

"I will send you the tickets for the party tomorrow," Mikateko says while walking towards the elevator.

"What party?" he asks when she jumps into an elevator.

"A pre-party of a gig she scored me," I respond. He quietly nods at me.

"I tried calling you...I wanted to find out if you need something to eat. Your phone kept going on voicemail and I was worried about you."

"Oh schucks," I say. I forgot to

charge my phone after work. It has been dead since afternoon.

Luckily Mikateko was at her mother's work when we decided to do a little practice before my dress fitting tomorrow.

"Can we talk?" he asks, his face becoming serious. I get on my feet. Njabulo and I do need to talk and we cannot run away from it. We haven't spoken much since his brother's graduation party. I played the girlfriend but it was all for the eyes of his family.

"Sure...we can go inside," I say while leading the way to my apartment. Dikeledi is not home

yet. She is stuck at work – it is usually hectic for her during the first week of the month.

If I didn't know better, I'd think that he brought these goodies to kick me out of my diet plan. He grabs a seat in the living room while I proceed to the kitchen to make him a cup of coffee. The red velvet cake he brought is calling my name. He knew very well that I was going to neglect my diet for a good bite. I make black coffee for the both us and place the piece of cake on a small saucer. When I walk back to the living room, he has his blazer

off and he is busy folding the sleeves of his shirt.

He picks the cup of coffee before I could even place the tray on the table.

"I needed this so bad," he says before taking a sip of the bitter coffee. He doesn't mind a sugarless coffee and it only makes sense that we are taking it this way.

"How was work?" I ask while getting on the other couch. We have been so formal lately and I hate it so much. I miss my bubbly man. I miss his stupid comments. "Work was great," he says. It is

already Thursday and this is the first time I get to see him since Saturday. It was very childish for the both of us but I think it helps us to reconnect. I am no longer pissed and he looks fine too. I listen as he tells me about Josh Cairo. Isn't it crazy how small the world is? He is going to be featured on the next issue.

"I am one of his models," I say.

"Are you serious?" he asks with a smirk. "He is an international designer."

"I am going to be part of his runaway...how crazy is that?" I ask with the widest smile. I

didn't know who Josh Cairo was until Dikeledi yelled at me and show me all the articles about him. I am glad that for once, Njabulo looks like he is happy for me. This is a big shot and he knows.

"You are going to nail it, huh?"

"I am."

"I miss you," he says. I smile widely. I miss him so much but I was waiting for him to mention it.

"I miss you more," I say while getting up. He opens his arms for me to sit on his lap. He slightly moves when my butt touches his shaft. We are still on the same

page.

"Do you mind if we go to our place?" he asks.

"Am I going to have an early night? I have a long day tomorrow," I say.

"I promise I won't make you stay up for long," he says.

He lied.

Njabulo lied! He has kept me up and it is now after midnight. We have been countless rounds of sex. I missed him as much as he missed me and I am pleased. Even though we haven't spoken about our issue, I am enjoying being in

his arms. I am enjoying his company.

He pulls me to his sweaty chest. I rest my hand on his hairy chest, followed by my head. I can easily hear his heart drumming loudly.

"What is wrong?" I ask. He is worried about something. I can just tell.

"I don't want to lose you...but I am scared."

"What are you scared of?" I ask.

"I am scared that you are drifting away from me. I am scared that you will figure that I am not good enough for you."

"What?" I lift my head and turn

my eyes to his. I cannot read his face but I can tell that he is sad. "Babe, you are not going to lose me."

"I was selfish," he says.

Good! He acknowledges his mistakes.

I drop my head back on his chest and sigh deeply. Relationships are very difficult. Mostly when your job is to please the next person. I matter too and his needs matter too.

"I understand where you were coming from."

"But I was wrong. I am sorry," he says and lands a kiss on my

hair. "I love you so much Maria. I see a perfect future with you."

"I love you too," I respond before he pulls me so that he could land the kiss on my lips. I get on top of him. I get comfortable while deepening the kiss. He groans when I move my body on top of him. I know I am clueless when it comes to million things but Njabulo gives me so much confidence when he responds to my attempts to please him.

"Yes..." he hisses while placing his hands on my buttocks. He has taught me not to be shy when I am with him. The more he digs

his nails on my bums, the more I feel the fire burning. This is wildfire. This is wildfire... that I feel. It must be what we call 'thirst' because I cannot wait to get what I want.

He sits up before flipping me around and dropping me on the bed.

"I want you so bad," he whispers before burying his teeth on my neck.

"Njabulo..." I whisper lustfully, knowing that it will press more buttons. I know what makes him tick. Calling his name in the most seductive way is one of them. He

rubs my inner thighs – his mouth still on mine.

I close my eyes and allow the wet kisses to seduce me.

“I love you Maria. I love you so much....,” Njabulo whispers in between our hot kisses. “I love you so much it hurts.”

“Hmmmm...” I cannot help myself. I know when I am ready for him and right now, I am ready for him. I am ready for the third round or whatever round it is. “I am ready for you.”

I can feel his hand leave my hip, leaving it feeling cold. He continues to kiss me while he reaches for

the condom.

"Dammit!" he hisses.

"What?" I am panting at this second. I am panting and still angry at the fact that he has stopped.

"We are out of condoms," he says.

"What?" I ask. It feels like I have been slapped hard on my face. That is what it feels like.

"We are out of condoms," he repeats.

I am disappointed but who do I blame? We bought once when we were doing groceries for his house but it has been a while back.

"What are we going to do?" I ask.

I do not believe that I just said that. I am just sad that we might have to stop...unlesssss

"Uhm..well....babe..."

"Let's do it," I say.

"Huh?"

"Let's make love without," I say.

I cannot believe what I just said.

Oh my God. I am being naïve

right now but it doesn't matter.

We have both done our HIV tests

months ago when we started

being sexual active but I am not

on contraceptives – that is why

condoms are part of the grocery

list. This is a big risk but I am

already hot and ready for him

inside of me. I miss him. I miss him a lot. I want him as much as he wants me.

"Are you sure?"

"As long..." I drop kisses on his mouth... "as long as you pull out. Please."

"Yes..." he says breathlessly...as if I will change my mind. I know what I am doing. I won't change my mind.

"Ohhh...Maria," he groans while rubbing his penis on my opening. I close my eyes and imagine him already inside of me. Njabulo is gifted. I don't know much but I know he is. He spreads my legs

open with one hand while the other hand supports his penis in the entrance of my vagina.

O.M.G

I almost scream when he finally slides it inside. The feeling is different. He groans while I moan. Oh my God. I thought we had the best sex ever...since we started getting active. I was wrong. I have never felt like this before. I have never felt like the world revolve around me and Njabulo alone ever before. I have never felt like screaming at a good feeling before. I have never felt like sex is the greatest gift

given to mankind before.

It feels real good!

He slides in and my folds welcome him. He cannot help but groans as he gets deep inside. I feel like crying. I feel like digging my nails on his back. I feel like biting his lips. I feel. I feel.

When he starts shifting his hips, I drop my head on the pillow and relax my mind. This is the first man that I have ever fallen in love with. His touch and his love is all I know. He groans loudly before he drops his mouth on mine.

Oh, Njabulo.

I move my hips with him. I move

with his rhythm because I know what it does to him. It drives him crazy.

"Isshhh," Njabulo swears before I feel his muscles tense. "I am going to come."

"Stay...a little longer," I beg. I beg him not to release. I also want to reach the peak.

"Babe...I can't....," he grits his teeth and quickly pull out. He positions his penis to my stomach and empties himself while I watch.

His seeds are warm on my stomach but that is not enough. I pull a towel from the pedestal

and throws it at him. I watch as he cleans himself before wiping my stomach clean.

Njabulo is well-taught. I don't care who gave him the lessons but I know the man knows that is not game over until the woman is satisfied.

What did I say?

He moves his body on top of me until his lips are on mine. I am already hot. I am about to explode any moment but he is welcomed to explore my body some more.

He is ready for me. I close my eyes as he slides himself inside of

me.

"OOhhh...Njabulo..." the words escape my lips.

"Are you ready for me, babe?" he asks while positioning himself perfectly.

"Yes..." I hiss.

He rocks his hips. Once. Twice.

Three times and thereafter start dancing in a rhythm. I yelp and cry out and scream. He doesn't stop as I cry loudly. He is on a mission. A mission to make me cum as hard as possible.

"Is this what you want?" he hiss as he humps me hard. I dig my nails on his biceps. This feels like

either a punishment or a way to show me what I will be missing if I decide to walk away.

This is too much!

"Yes!" I respnd to his question. I don't even know if it is still relevant but I answer it anyway.

"Ohhh...Maria..." he hiss. I think I am his weakness and it frustrates him.

"Yes..." I hiss.

He quickly grips my hand and throws it on top of my vagina. I know what I am supposed to do but helps me anyway. He helps me to rub myself. This is the only trick to make me reach my

orgasm the soonest before he will be forced to release.

"Yes...yess...." I pant as his hand forces me to rub myself while he thrust me.

I am close.

I can feel myself drifting into the clouds. I can feel myself floating already. I curl my toes when the feeling catches me off guard.

Njabulo forces my fingers to caress my clit – making me lose all the energy I had left. I scream loudly as he presses my fingers on my clit.

Only minutes later do I relax. Only then does my body relax. Only

when I feel his shaft softening inside of me do I realise that he came inside of me.

I drop my head on the pillow and try to catch a breath.

Jeeezz!

Njabulo pulls himself out and drops on the bed, beside me.

"I had missed you," he whispers before dropping his lips on me.

I cannot help but beam at him.

Njabulo pulls the towel from the pedestal and passes to me to clean myself up.

We are both panting when he pulls me into his arms.

"You must get the morning after-

pills tomorrow," he says.

"And buy more condoms," I say.

"And buy more condoms," he repeats after me.

I drop the towel on the floor on position myself to sleep in his arms.

"I love you so much...no matter what happens," he says and kisses me.

"Can you promise me to love me even if I chose to be a model?" I ask. This is very important for both of us.

"I promise," he says. For some reason, I believe him.

"I love you," I confess.

"I love you more."

EPISODE 28

NJABULO

I am woken by Maria turning her body away from me. She was sleeping on my chest but I get that she is fast asleep now. I stare at her back before pulling the linen to cover her until the waist area. I cannot help but trace the back of my fingers on her back, caressing her until she wiggles her body for me to stop. She has lost enough weight to

score her whatever important gig she wants to score in her bag.

Who wouldn't want to work with her? Everyone wants to work with an innocent face. It is even worse that she has a killer body and even worse than that - is how dark and chocolatey it is. Her skin is smooth and soft but her features are toned and sexy. She drives me crazy. This new job of hers is driving me so crazy and I know that I will lose her if I don't stop being pathetic.

Maria takes a deep breath before turning her body again.

It is kinda-hot tonight or should

I say this morning?

I kept her up for the whole night. I had missed her so much we had to make it up to each other. I have lost count of how many times we have made-out. My fingers do not stop tracing her body. I shake my head when they land on her tummy. It is now flatter than all the days I have seen her naked. This modelling thing must be very important to that. And on that note, I have to make sure she drinks the emergency contraceptives when she wakes up. What kind of man would ruin someone's life by giving

them a baby? I am a fucking adult to know that a baby cannot keep people together. For that reason, I am raising my niece because he couldn't be the connection between his parents. How selfish will that be?

I might have drifted to sleep during my thoughts. It is already morning and Maria is sitting on the edge of the bed. She is mumbling her prayer like she always does every single day. I want to hear her pray for me - because I know she always prays for me. I do too - whenever I remember to pray.

"Amen!" she mumbles and thereafter get on her feet. She is wearing a pink silky gown that I got for her for times when she visits me. I watch as she fasten the belt and disappear to the bathroom.

She has a long day - I remind myself before getting up. I would have love a quickie before she gets into the water.

I pull my boxers from the floor and pull my phone from under the pillow. I have a long day today. Scoring Josh Cairo to cover on the next issue of our bizz mag is an achievement. Whatever tricks

Gundo Radzilani pulled worked and I am not going to mess this opportunity.

Maria is soaking in the bath-tub when I walk into the bathroom. She has her eyes closed and her head rested on the edge.

"Do you know what time it is?" I ask and she opens her first before flashing a smile at me.

"I didn't even close my eyes for five minutes."

"How are you?" I ask while walking towards her. I sit on the edge of the tub and reach to kiss her. She presses her lips together before they meet mine. This is

how all my mornings should be.

"I am fine," she responds while picking her face cloth from inside the water. "I just have a longest day. Not that I am complaining though."

"Do you want me to fix you breakfast while you get ready?"

"I'll appreciate."

"What do you feel like? A lot of crispy bacon and croissants? With lots of cheese?"

"Don't you dare. I am on diet," she calls out with her eyes widened.

"Okay...I'll tone it down to pancakes with that golden syrup

and..."

"Njabulo! Stop it."

"Don't you want to have a bite at least?" I tease.

"No."

"Okay. What do you want?"

"A berry smoothie."

"What the..."

"Please! I have a dress fitting today and you know they only took our measurements once."

"But you need to eat."

"I know...but this is big babe.

This is big," she says.

I, for one, know how big this gig is to her. it is even big for our company too. I grab my gown on

my way out of the bathroom and head to the kitchen to prepare myself a quick breakfast and blend the smoothie for my woman. Nkosinathi is busy packing his books into his school bag while her mother washes the dishes.

"Am I late or something?" I enquire. I usually come downstairs when they are both eating.

"No. I am going to Witbank for an interview. I'll have to drop Nathi first."

"You should have told me. I was going to drop him off to school."

"I didn't want to wake you up," she says with a smirk. I turn to

Nkosinathi and he is drawn to his task. Zizipho laughs when I turn back to her. "Yes!."

"Yes, what?" I ask. Where were we that loud? Okay...we were. Maria screamed her lungs out when she came a multiple times.

"Let me get this job and you will have all the room to...you know?" It hit me. If Zizipho leaves, I'll be on my own in this huge house. It is too big and lonely at times when she is not here with her son.

Nkosinathi picks his huge bag and throws it on his back. He follows his mother out of the kitchen

while I cross to the stove to cook.

"When am I going to see you?" I ask after landing a hundredth kiss on Maria's lips. I would have loved to pick her up in the evening but she is going to dress fittings and some rehearsal for Saturday.

"Saturday? After the show?"

"I am going to miss you," I mumble before pulling her for another kiss.

"It is just two days. Literally, two days," she says while getting her things from the back seat. Oh, before I forget - I pull my

wallet and pull two notes.

"Please get morning-after pills," I say while giving her.

"First thing I am going to do at lunch time," she responds.

I make a U-turn and drive straight to my office. Three long meetings and I will be done.

While going through my notes for the next meeting with a TV station broadcasting Josh Cairo, Gundo walks in with two white envelopes.

"Hey...do you have a minute?" he asks while walking further in.

"Just a minute," I respond while dropping my eyes back to the

report. I need to discuss this report with the team that is going to be capture the event. Josh Cairo's brand is bigger than any client we have worked with. Everything should be perfect. We cannot be given an opportunity like this and not utilize it.

"I don't know how to distribute these tickets," he says.

"Distribute what?"

"The tickets. We received a number of tickets from Josh Cairo's team," he says. That takes my attention. "For the main show?"

"For the pre-party and the

show," he says while pulling tickets from the envelope. "I am going to keep two VIP tickets for myself and my wife. She would kill to be in one of these things."

Now that he mentions, maybe I could take this opportunity to go watch Maria on stage. I didn't want to go because she didn't invite me but if Gundo is going, I have a better excuse.

"I'll also take two. If Zizipho gets one of her friend to stay with her son, I might take her."

"Haw! So, she is still mad at you. Relationships have never been easy for you my guy."

The bastard! He laughs at me.

"Can I confidently tell you that I have everything under control? Maria is part of the show. She is one of the models," I say.

"Are you kidding. Maria...Maria?"

"What do you mean?" I ask while resting my back on the chair. I won't lie. This also caught me by surprise.

"Then you must abort those thoughts you had about knocking her down. If she walks Josh's stage...she is going places. You should hear how this dude picks his models. He looks at a model once and decides. So, if she scored

that one...then...my brother...let her fly to places."

Why am I moved? I shake away the jealousy that is trying to creep in. I promised her that I will love her regardless.

She is going places. All I need to do is to brace myself and support her.

"So you know...I never took Sylvester's advice."

"Yeah right," he says and laughs. What the hell? Am I that fucked up for my friend to think the worst of me? Oh. Wow!

"Two tickets will do and you can drop them to Andani to give to

the Creatives."

"Phuti only wants the pre-party ones."

"Let me have one pre-party one as well," I say after clearing my throat. I can make a turn there and see what is popping. I know that Maria is going. It would be nice to watch her as she parties.

"Enjoy! The nanny is off this weekend. You don't want to know how crazy my house is on Friday nights...Thandeka won't manage alone."

I could kill to be in his shoes right now...but I bet a little patience won't kill.

I always wonder how Phuti parties hard and is still productive the next day. We are Josh Cairo's pre-party. Phuti and Sylvester are abusing the VIP privileges since we got here an hour ago. They are not drunk because it takes them tanks of alcohol to slosh them, but they have called the waiter for some many times I have lost count. "I have been to pre-parties neh...but nothing beats this," Phuti's date says as she sips her champagne. It is an all-white party. I hate these theme

parties but I had no choice to put a white shirt and slacks.

They strictly classified on the tickets. Everything yells summer and everyone is in some sort of white clothing.

"You must spend the rest of your life with me...I will take you places," Phuti says while the waiter places the second platter of food.

"I am not much of a party animal," she says. If she is trying to please Phuti, then she is waiting her time. Phuti needs to marry a party animal like him or else he will be divorced in less

than a week.

I haven't seen Maria. I have been darting my eyes around the club. When I texted her that I am on my way to the pre-party, she sent me a few kiss-emojis as if she was busy and that was all. She must have been busy with something for her not to respond back.

Only when I am about to give up on my search, do I notice Maria walking into the club with her two friends. She has a white pencil dress on. She is always on pencil dresses but this one is shorter than it should be. It is

not revealing but it is short.

I huff out a laugh!

What is wrong with you Njabulo?

- I reprimand myself with a quick shake. It is not her fault that she is a sexy woman. I lift my eyes again and find her laughing with that model girl who chooses to dress in skimpy shorts. She is wearing a white one today. If Maria ever gets to that level, I am going to call the whole church to pray for her.

I shake my head with a smile. I brought trouble to myself. I am in love with an angel and I am going to go crazy someday. Is it

me or my girlfriend has the best smile in the world? I want to punch every man who is turning to check her out. I want to grab the mic from the DJ and tell the whole club to keep their filthy hands to themselves because the angel that just walked in belongs to me. She is mine. She belongs to me.

Dikeledi grabs a glass of champagne as they make their way to the other side of the VIP. I am tempted to walk up to her and kiss her in front of everyone so that I mark my territory - but I don't. I need to give her

space. She will text me when she is ready to meet me.

She does look around before taking a white couch. I am disappointed when she doesn't fish for her phone from her clutch bag.

"Did you say your girlfriend is one of the models for Josh Cairo?"

Phuti brings me back from my thoughts.

"Yes," I respond. Of course, I told him. I told everyone at work and that made me feel really good.

"Wow, oh my God. You must introduce her to me. She must a big shot," Phuti's date says

happily. I want to tell her that Maria is an ordinary girl but Gundo's words ring loudly in my head.

If she walks Josh's stage, she is going places – his exact words.

"Sure," I dryly respond and drag my eyes towards her. She is the only one without a drink.

"Would you like something to drink?" the waiter asks, taking my attention from my angel once more.

Why does it look like they want everyone sloshed in this party?

"No, thanks," I say while showing him the glass that is sitting in

front of me. I have been having the same glass since I got here. I am in no mood to drink yet I am at the party.

I am having the time of my life watching Maria attempt to dance. After a longest dance song, she sits and grabs her clutch bag. I smile as she fishes her phone.

'Hey, when are you getting here? I have been trying to check you out' – text message from her.

'I have been watching you since you got here. Are you sure you didn't bring leggings for that dress?'

'Is it short? I thought so. But

the plan is to turn you on. If I get lucky I will attempt to give you a show before we leave.'

'You have been turning me on since you got here. When do I see you? You are at the VVIP and I am at a mere VIP.' - I press send and my battery dies before she could even respond. I shove my phone in my pocket and pick my glass from the glass.

I stop on my tracks before I could cross the club. Josh Cairo is standing with his models - Maria included. There goes my chance to get a kiss from my girlfriend. I turn back and settle on the couch,

shifting my gaze to a group of guys who are dancing.

Let her work - I remind myself.

"Isn't it weird for a

photographer to steal shots in a party like this?" Sylvester asks.

"Huh?"

"Is this a private coverage party?" he asks.

"It should be. Imagine Josh's enemy coming here with a gun...disguising it as a camera?"

Phuti asks.

"I think anybody is allowed in as long as they have a ticket or an access ticket," I say. That is what I heard, that is why we

brought our camera guy to take a few shots. He was allowed in without a hustle.

"Then why is that dude taking pictures from the corner?" he asks. He points at the guy standing by the corner with his camera aimed at the VVIP.

What the fuck?

He is standing by the shadows but I can see his profile.

It can't be!

I dart my eyes to the VVIP section. Josh Cairo is having some sort of a meeting with his models. Some male models are taking their seats next to the ladies.

When I dart my eyes to the dark corner, I notice that same gun with a different camera. I quickly get on my feet and make my way to his direction. One look at me and he flees further into the darkness.

"It can't be," I whisper to myself, trying to follow him to the dark corridor. There is no one around here.

Fuck!

'It should be. Imagine Josh's enemy coming here with a gun...disguising it as a camera?' Phuti's words ring loudly as I march towards VVIP. I don't

care about the meeting but Maria's life.

"Excuse me... Maria...please...can I have a word with you?" I ask while standing not far from the team. Everyone turns towards me. I don't care how everyone looks at me right now but I can see Maria is begging me with her eyes.

Ever since that psycho told me that he is going down with me...I cannot stop thinking what he is planning to do.

Was it even him? Maybe I am just paranoid.

"Maria, it is important," I say.

"Go fix your personal issues," Josh says. I don't care. Maria's safety is important to me.

Maria gets on her feet and walks to me. She is pissed. Very very pissed.

"Babe...I think we need to go," I say while taking her hand and directing her to a corner.

"Are you kidding me?" she asks and shakes her head. "I thought you said you will let me do this.

This is my biggest break Njabulo."

"I know...I know..."

"And then? Josh told us to sort our personal issues because he hates drama....and you just had to

stop him from an important briefing...because of what? You are jealous that men came to sit close to us."

"Maria..."

"We are supposed to run the runway in a minute...to showcase that we are all ready..."

"Babe."

"Can I go back to work?" she asks while turning away so she could walk away.

"Luzuko is here and I don't know what he is going to do to you," I say. She turns towards me, slowly. She darts her eyes around and her chest is starting to rise and

fall.

"Are you sure?" she asks.

Dammit! I am not too sure.

"I think so...I am not sure. I thought I saw someone like him."

"You think so? Wow Njabulo," she says. She is disappointed.

The music stops and Josh takes the mic! They are about to start their little showcase.

"I have to go and work. You don't have to be jealous, you know? I don't like any of those models," she says and marches to where her team is.

EPISODE 29

MARIA

I cannot shake away the feeling that someone is watching me.

The stares I get from Njabulo doesn't

crawl under my skin but make me feel good. However, right now, I feel naked. Mikateko and the other models are getting their face-up touched up and I am still waiting for my turn.

Maybe Njabulo was trying to scare me. That's what it is. But what if he is not making this up? I feel like running back to him to beg him to tell me the truth, but it already late. We are backstage

and getting ready to be introduced to the attendees. By the time it is my turn to catwalk, I had to make a little prayer. My nerves are sky high but I nail it. I

kept my smile to myself and did everything we practiced.

"Stand straight and relax your hands on the side...and walk..."

those have always been Mikateko's

words. They worked because they kept ringing as I marched through the stage. I wish I had searched

for Njabulo. If I did, I would

have been more nervous knowing that he doesn't really want me here.

"Wow! If my someone told me my girlfriend cat walked like that...I would have argued them...you were brilliant babe," Njabulo says the moment he finds me when we are done and resuming the party.

I was wrong.

He liked it.

I am so relieved that he is here.

I feel safe and sound.

"You think I was great?" I ask excitedly.

"You were amazing," he responds

and his friends agree by clapping their hands. Oh, my God, it is not yet the main show and I am super excited.

"Would you like something to drink?" Njabulo asks.

"No. I want to be fresh tomorrow," I respond while getting on the couch next to where he was sitting. He also drop on the couch and stare at me. "Babe...I am sorry for earlier."

"I was just being paranoid...and I am glad you stood your ground. I wouldn't have seen marching like a sexy soldier," he says. I laugh.

"Was I really marching like a soldier?" I ask and everybody laughs at me.

"Are you sure you guys are not supposed to smile? Huh? Because you were serious, it felt like you were ready to murder someone."

"We were not allowed to smile for this one," I say.

"Njabulo. What did you see exactly?" I ask when we are done laughing at him mocking us. The smile

on my face is gone. The possibility of Luzuko being out of the police custody is scary.

"Well... I just saw someone

snapping pictures of the VVIP earlier and when I walked towards them to get a closer look...they ran away."

"Oh, my God," I call out with my hand on my mouth. My whole body is filled with goose bumps.

"Maybe he was just one of the uninvited guests, trying to steal pictures of Josh Cairo. My phone died

so I couldn't call one of my contact to tell me where the fuck Luzuko is," Njabulo says. That doesn't make me feel better.

What if he is out?

What if it was him?

"Come here," Njabulo pulls me closer and brush my cheeks with the back of his hand. "He will have

to go through me first."

I trust him.

"Did you buy the pill?" Njabulo asks as he starts spreading my legs. He is spending his first night in

my apartment. I couldn't go with him, knowing that I have an early morning. I need all the beauty sleep.

"I did." It was the first thing I bought on lunch break.

"Good girl," he says while dropping his legs between my legs. I shift, getting ready for his tongue to attack me. If my mother knew what I do with Njabulo, she would call the whole village to fast and pray for me.

His tongue lands on my sex – worsening the hot session I have been feeling since we started kissing.

"Oh...wow..." I mumble as his tongue does its job. He knows which corners to attack. He slide

one

finger, still his tongue dancing in my sex.

"Are you ready for me?" he teases because he knows very well that he can even slides the whole hand inside. I am that wet.

"yesssss..." I hiss.

He pulls the condom from underneath the pillow – where he positioned it earlier. He lets me rub

him while he gets the condom ready.

Oh! God! I am disappointed in myself. I allowed Njabulo to make love to me without a condom –

AGAIN! I understand though, it was just so different at the beginning.

"I think we need to go see the gynae so that he can recommend a best contraceptive," Njabulo says

while pulling me to his chest.

"Those things will mess with my hormones and then...mess with my body. We just have to go back to using the condom."

"But it wasn't the same," he complains.

"Njabulo, I am serious," I sternly say.

"Fine. Fine," he whispers and pulls

me even closer to him – leaving no space between us. I lay my head on his chest before we both fell asleep.

Am I a lucky girl or am I a lucky girl?

I am woken by an aroma of bacon. The only person who is capable of waking up early on a Saturday is Njabulo. Dikeledi usually stay in her room until I drag her out. Njabulo is trying his best for me to abandon my diet. I open my heavy eyelids when I hear him closing the door.

I like the sight of him. He is already fully dressed in all white,

like he did last night.

"You look like an angel," I mumble when he sets the tray on the pedestal.

"A good or bad one?"

"All angels are good," I respond while sitting up.

"How did you sleep?" he asks while putting his weight on the edge of the bed.

"I slept well."

"I am going to need to go. I have to go to the office for a briefing for tonight's event. My team is covering Josh."

"Am I seeing you tonight?"

"What? Definitely! But I will be

working. Sometimes I prefer doing interviews myself and we have a fifteen minutes slot immediately after the last bow."

"I cannot wait for tonight."

"I can't wait to see you in Josh gowns," he says before giving me a kiss on my forehead. "See you later."

"Are you still flying to Durban on Sunday morning?" I enquire. Last night he told me that one of his potential client has an opening for a meeting at nine in the morning. He is pissed that he has to wake up for a six o'clock flight on a Sunday.

Imagine!

I would be pissed too.

Tonight was the best time of my life! Best time, ever!

"Oh...my God...Maria... you looked amazing," Thandeka says the moment I make my way to them after the show.

"Thank you," I gladly says while pulling her into a hug. "Wow! You guys came."

"I couldn't miss this for the world."

"Wow!!!" I say.

"You were a star," Gundo adds. He has his hand on his wife's

shoulder. Thandeka looks better but we still need to catch up. We still need to talk. Maybe Gundo could allow me to take my friend with me to a night out for some fun.

"Thank you. I didn't know you guys were coming," I say to Thandeka. Oh, my goodness I miss my friend.

"I can't believe this is you."

"Believe it," I respond.

I take her arm so that we could dish some finger food. Gundo hesitantly let her go but finally let's go.

"How are you?" I ask.

"I am finnee," she drags with a smile.

"How about we go out for lunch next Saturday?"

"That would be wonderful. I miss you so much."

"Just the two of us."

"Just the two of us."

Gundo allows us to catch up while he meets up some business associates. Zizipho is also here with her cousin. The only person that I am missing is my boyfriend. He must be busy at the back-stage. Dikeledi shows up with her boyfriend.

"You were so beautiful," she says

while hugging me.

I am starting to believe that I was indeed beautiful. She asks if I need a ride home. I tell that I will wait up for Njabulo – he is busy at the backstage.

An hour later, I head to the backstage when everyone was leaving. Njabulo looks pissed. He is sitting with his crew.

“How is it going?” he asks.

“They fucken reshuffled everything. I bet we are not too important to him,” he says. I turn to where is pointing with his thumb. Josh is busy with some television station.

"Maybe they are broadcasting live," I attempt to calm him.

"Yes, it is live but his team should have informed us of any changed schedule."

I wait with him until two hours later. I stand behind his team as they get their fifteen minutes to chat to Josh. He must be tired. All the lights around this room should be blinding him.

Njabulo runs a few questions for their business magazine. The intern journo is taking a thousand snaps. The other guys from Njabulo's company left an hour ago. They had covered the main

event and Njabulo had to release them.

"What is next? Any shows in South Africa before you go back to Switzerland?" Njabulo asks.

"Due to popular demand, we are heading to Cape Town for a Saturday show there."

"Any highlights of the night?" Njabulo asks. This should be the last question and the live cameras are still rolling.

"The models. Oh, my goodness... these girls were natural. Believe you me, I am taking them with me to Switzerland," Josh says. My smile widens when I realize that

I am one of the models. If Josh can say that, on live TV, that he was impressed by us...then, more doors are going to open for us.

It is after mid-night when Njabulo drives me home. He is exhausted and needs to sleep, and I cannot go home with him.

There wasn't a need anymore since he is going to lay his head on the pillow for just a few hours. I am also exhausted to wake up at five. I need to sleep the whole morning. Also, waking up to his sister and cousin is a big NO! I rather sleep at my apartment. "What time are you coming back

from Durban?" I enquire as he pulls outside my flat.

"I could only get the evening flight. So, I'll pick you up from the airport."

"Alright, travel safely."

"I will do," he says before kissing me. I blush when I remember the intern is watching us from the back. Njabulo is dropping him off before he drives home.

"I love you," I mumble after kissing him.

"I love you too," he says while getting out of the car. "Let me walk you to the reception area." He takes my hand and walk me to

the reception area. He kisses me before I jump into the elevator. He presses the floor for me before sneaking another kiss and walks away.

Jeez!!! I am super exhausted. The lift opens and I feel the hair from the back of my neck, rise. That feeling again. I get a feeling that someone is watching me.

This is crazy. Why am I scared? I am safe here. I have walked these corridors after midnight so many times.

I pull my bag up and fish for my house keys.

Found them! I stride to the door but I am stopped on my tracks by someone walking from the shadows – behind the pillars.

“What do...”

Two larges strides is what takes the intruder to get to me. He quickly spins me and I feel a strong scent of alcohol and a wet cloth on my nose....and mouth.

Without a warning, I relax my limbs and close fall into a deep sleep.

Jeeezzz!!!

This is the reason I didn't want to drink alcohol at the event. The

mornings are the worst – they always have me swear I will never taste alcohol ever again.

But...wait!

I didn't drink alcohol last night.

But then...why is my head very and my throat this dry?

My eyes are heavy. I roll on the bed and drop my head on the hard pillow! I force myself to open my eyes.

White ceiling. Navy blue curtains.

My curtains are not blue. I close

my eyes and open them with all

the strength I could get. This

room looks exactly like mine but

the décor is different. I turn my

head to the sides. It is not Dikeledi's room either.

Where am I? Panic rises as I don't recognize this barely decorated room. There is just a bed and a pedestal, nothing more. Tears starts rolling from the sides of my eyes when I notice my feet tied together.

I remember.

As if my memory called out the devil, my intruder walks into the room.

"Oh...you are awake?" he says as he strolls casually into the room.

"Luzuko?" I whisper. My head is still heavy and pressed on the

pillow. Tears do not stop falling.

"Did you miss me?" he asks while leaning to the pillow.

"What do you want?" I say with my dry throat.

"I missed you," he says. He has a wet cloth in his hand and I already know what he is going to do with it. He is going to put it in my mouth if I dare scream.

"Go to hell," I hiss while pulling my heavy body to sit.

"I have been to hell and back. Your boyfriend took me there."

"How..."

"How did I come out?" He laughs.

"Very simple. Money talks. You

know that. That is why you also chose him...because he has money. He wears suits every day and you saw money in him. Didn't you?"

"What do you want from me?" I ask.

"What do I want?" he asks and sits on the bed. "I want to bring your stupid boyfriend down."

"Why?"

"It is a promise I kept to myself...and I keep my promises. I am nothing like you."

"How?"

"How am I going to bring him down?"

"Yes," I beg.

"Maybe hijack the Uber he will take from King Shaka Airport? I mean... I can track him everywhere he is and he is exactly in my trap where I want him. A hijack gone wrong."

Oh! My God!

"You won't dare."

"I won't dare?"

"You won't dare!" I repeat.

"Why do you think I made him fly to Durban for? He went running to a meeting that doesn't exist...all because he is chasing money."

"Luzuko!" I beg. "Please."

"What Maria? What?"

"Please don't do this. Please.
Please."

"What do you offer?"

"Please...Luzuko..."

"You were in this together with him. You made me a fool and I promised to get back to you. You and your friends took me away from my family for five months and you still wanted to keep me away from my family for long."

"Luzuko...listen to me."

"What?" he asks while shaking his head a countless time. "You know what? Shut up!"

"No..."

He forcefully puts the wet towel

in my mouth before I could yell. He straightens himself as I try to fight him with my hands. My limbs are weak – my attempt is useless. My feet are tied.

The phone vibrates from his pocket. He picks it and puts it on speaker.

"Yes!"

"He landed!"

"Tail him and wait for my lead."

"Are we taking the shot? It is very quiet around here."

WHAT? What shot!

"Are you sure...it is going to be a clean job?" he asks and stares at me. I beg with my tears. My sobs

are almost choking me as I try to breathe. I shake my head a thousand times, begging him to stop. "Look, I will call you back in a second."

He drops the phone and pulls the cloth from my mouth. I could scream but my voice is hoarse and my throat dry. Chances of people hearing me are slim.

"What?"

"Please don't hurt him. please. Please. I beg you. I beg you." He shakes his head. "Please.

Please...don't hurt Njabulo. I will do anything for you. Don't hurt him."

"Anything?"

"Anything if you won't hurt him. Please.." I beg.

"Run away with me Maria," he says while quickly sitting on the bed next to me. "Run away with me. Let's continue where we left of."

"Are you not going to hurt him?" I ask.

"If you keep your promise...no..."

"Call this guy and tell him to let him go. No shooting. No hijack," I say with urgency.

He looks down at me before taking his phone. He keeps his scary eyes on me while the phone

rings.

"Yes!"

"Abort mission until I give you another direction."

EPISODE 30

NJABULO

Seven damn months since Maria disappeared to thin air. Seven damn months of mourning! I have tried every fucking thing I could, to find her because just like everybody is suggesting, she was not killed. It doesn't matter that the dress I last saw her in was found under the bridge, just a few

kilometers from her apartment. The police – the not so helping police – suggested that the blood was washed off before it got stuck under the bridge. I don't believe any of that ish! I don't believe any of it.

The torn dress still haunts me, even today. What did they do to her? And how?

I dropped her home and took her to the elevators. Her apartment is secured. Very secured for anything to happen without anyone noticing it. Dikeledi didn't find anything unusual in their apartment. Everything is just

strange! Very strange!

The knock-on my office door almost make me jump. I have been standing here by the window, coffee in hand. I didn't even take a sip but the cup is already cold.

"Can I come in?" Gundo asks from the door. I turn to him and wave him in.

"I didn't know you were coming in today. You can't seem to stay away from me," I say, forcing a grin on my face. This is what I do best - put a brave face because the Lord knows I hate feeling weak and vulnerable.

"Are you okay?" he asks while

getting on the chair. He is not here for work. The runner shoes he is wearing says it all.

"Yeah! Yeah! Why wouldn't I be fine?"

"Come on Njabulo!"

"What?" I shrug.

"I have no words to say about...this whole thing..."

"What whole thing? We are over that!" I say. I am disappointed in myself for not finding her. I am disappointed that I am starting to give up on finding her. I have paid hundreds of people and it is not a secret that I am fucking broke now. I am broke and nobody

wants to help a broke dog when it has nothing to offer.

"Thandeka would like to invite you to Ciara's school concert," Gundo says. He and his wife have been trying to pull me into their little family like I matter. They don't know what that is doing to me. Watching them play with their kids - something I might never experience because I am cursed for such a perfect life.

I am cursed when it comes to love. The sooner I accept that truth - the better. I was better living like a stray-dog with no feelings to attach. I was better

off without this stupid thing called love. I was fucking better that way.

"I am busy," I groan.

"You have been busy ever since..."

"Yes I am."

"How can we help?" Gundo makes me a mistake of asking me that question.

"Find her and bring her back to me," I say. Gundo drops his eyes. I am taking it out on him and it is unfair - I don't care. He should stay far away from me.

He sigh deeply!

"Njabulo!"

"You going to start pissing me off

right now," I say while getting on my feet.

"How much do you need? Do you have any more leads?" he asks. I hate the fact that he doesn't even believe that she is still alive. He is just loaning me money as part of supporting me.

I drop my head into my hands. I have hit the wall at this point. We tried looking everywhere.

Everywhere. By everywhere I mean, all the places we could think of. Nothing. Her mother and I had to get the police to freeze her bank cards so that if she attempts to unblock them, we

would get a lead. Nothing.

Nothing at all. She left without a trace.

"I am done, searching," I say, my voice so hoarse. I quickly get on my feet to reach for a glass from my cabinet. I cannot be seen with tears – I am not a sissy.

Gundo gets on his feet too and walks towards me. He grabs the glass from me and tapped my shoulder hard. He has dragged me from the clubs so many times – because I have drunk too much to even see where I am going.

Ever since that Sunday when I flew back from Durban, my life

has never been the same. The client claimed that he never emailed me confirming our meeting in Durban. I had to fly back late that particular day – so pissed at the fact that I wasted a day in Durban. Even today, I believe Luzuko has everything to do with this. The IT gurus couldn't pick any sign of hacking on my PC. He probably hacked the emails of the client I have been praying so hard to get. I don't know – but I think I am or was dealing with Luzuko. That's what you get when you are dealing with another guru.

What did he do her?

That is what messes with my head. If he tore her dress apart - what else did he do to her? If he laid his hand on her, then I am going to do what I regret not doing. I am going to kill him.

I remember that evening and its following week like it was yesterday.

Because the meeting did not take place, I found myself in Gateway Mall in Durban. I went in and out of a thousand shops looking for something to buy for my girlfriend. It had to be special so I took my time window shopping

until I was left with no idea of what to get her. Only when I was about to drag my feet for lunch did I get a brilliant idea. The idea was to print and frame one of the pictures she once took when she was wearing a red bikini set and was doing an amateur photoshoot with her new friend Mikateko. I loved how her smile looks. How her chocolate skin blended with that bikini set. She was hiding herself with her arms but one could easily see how perfect she is. I framed that very photo with an engraved message: Take the world by

storm. I was ready for her to fly her wings and do what her heart desires. I was easily telling her that I am proud of her and I am ready to be the man she needs. I was very excited to present the gift to her but I never got a chance. Immediately after landing that evening, I tried her phone and it was off. I drove straight to her apartment only to find that she never got there the previous night. Dikeledi said she thought Maria was with me. Even when I told her a million times that I walked her to the elevator, she insisted that Maria

never came back from Josh Cairo's show. We started the search that very moment and we never succeeded.

Next week will be the eight month and there are no new leads. Nothing.

"Am I right?"

"Huh???" I quickly lift my eyes to Gundo.

"You didn't hear a word of what I said."

I sigh and drop my shoulders.

"What would you do if it was your wife? If you didn't know where she was....what would you do?"

"I don't know what I would do

with myself," he responds. I believe him because I know how much he loves his wife. I loved Maria so much and right now...I don't know what to do. I hate feeling helpless. I hate feeling like a sissy.

"Njabulo, you didn't wait for me?" Maria says in tears. She stares down at me while choking in her own tears. "I thought you loved me so much that you would wait for me."

"Babe?"

"Why didn't you wait for me? Is it because you have been so angry

at me?" she asks, tears still streaming down her face. "Why?" "You don't know how happy I am to see you, Maria. You have no idea," I call out as I rush towards her.

"Why didn't you look for me?" she asks, choking some more.

"I tried everything I could. I tried. God knows I tried," I call out. She shakes her head before turning into smoke.

DAMMIT!!!! I hit the pillow the moment I release it is one of the nightmares.

Damn you Maria! Come back!!!

I drop my legs to the floor and

walk towards the balcony. This is where I come for my daily prayers when I am woken up from my nightmares.

God knows how many times I have prayed, asking that He brings her back to me. I have prayed that prayer – countless times – hoping that she will show up some day.

“God, protect her wherever she is,” I mumble. A feel my chest tightening up. Is this me giving up on finding her? I just changed my prayer and it feels like a betrayal.

Today marks the eighth months.

Maybe, that is why I am starting to change my prayer. I seat by the balcony until it is morning. It has been happening for so long that it has become part of my routine.

Nkosinathi is having his breakfast when I walk into the kitchen. He is having his cereal, already in his school uniform.

"Uncle Njabulo...are you going to pick me up for my holiday visits?"

Nathi asks. I sway my eyes to the boxes that are in the living room. Reality kicks in! I am going to be alone in this house.

"Yeah...." I dryly say.

Zizipho got a job in Witbank. She nailed the two interviews they set for her. When she asked to only start later than they needed her, I thought she was going to change her mind and stay with me. But NO! She needs to move on with her life. She is an adult – a mother – and she cannot stay with me forever. This new job is perfect for her and I won't be selfish about it. She needs to go. "Ma said I will make new friends in Witbank."

"You will."

"Are you going to visit us?"

Nkosinathi asks.

"Every month...I'll visit you."

Zizipho quickly prepares breakfast while Nathi keeps asking me a thousand set of questions. Only when he hurries to his room does Zizipho takes a seat.

"I am worried about you," she says.

"Don't be."

"I am serious Njabulo. I am sick and worried about you."

"I am fine," I say.

"You really need to move on with life. She is not coming back."

A few weeks ago when she said the same thing, I slammed the

table. But today, I didn't. I am scared that I am starting to accept this fate. It has been eight months. Close to a year. Maybe it is time to move on.

"I am fine."

"Maybe you should drive with us to Witbank and spend a weekend in my new apartment," she says.

"I would take the offer if I didn't have a lot work to do this weekend," I lie. I don't want her to know how broke I am right now to afford an Uber from Witbank to Joburg. I am flat broke and I fucking hate it. I have exhausted all my resources.

ALL OF THEM in finding Maria.
All my resources.

"Njabulo, I am leaving. Are you going to be fine?" she asks. I could tell from her voice that she is worried about me.

"I am fine. I don't know what you guys want from me?"

"You are a walking zombie, that's why we are worried about you."

"I am fine!" I assure her.

"Fine!"

I had to watch her load the rest of the boxes into her boot and drive off. This is going to be tough on me. I have lived with her son and her for so long - I

don't know how I am going to be used to stay alone, really.

"Am I allowed to visit?" I ask with a laugh. Laughing - it is the only way I know how to express myself.

"Anytime!" she says while getting from the chair. She has moved the rest of her items so I take the few boxes to her car.

Only hours later, do I wave goodbye to my one and only sibling. I couldn't depend on her for more than I did. His son is buckled in the front seat while I properly pack her boxes away. I give her a longest tight hug. She had put

up with an asshole like me
throughout the whole eight
months. The least she could do is
to get a hug from me.

I feel sick!

Since Zizipho left with my
nephew! I have never felt so
lonely before!

It is Sunday morning morning and
according to Maria's mother, I
am supposed to wake up for
church or something.

I have prayed enough.

I have tried everything, so no
more praying.

If I didn't have this headache or

hang-over or whatever this shit feeling I am feeling, I would be preaching about how much we need to believe in the prayers we make. If only these prayer meeting didn't force us to lie, I wouldn't be lying about this right now.

There is no way that I am getting up. No way.

I drop my head to the pillow and fall asleep again. I am only woken up by the blurry imagine of a woman walking around my room.

It is not Zizipho! She is miles away. But, if it isn't Zizpho...then who is it?

I close my eyes so I could fall asleep again. I struggle to. I sit up and stare at her.

"Ohhh...you are awake," the angelic voice says. I try to shake my head so that I can remember the name from the get-go.

Unfortunately, I don't remember zilch. Nada!

"Who are you?" I ask, while pulling myself to sit.

"Njabulo! Really?" the angelic voice responds.

Who is this?

My Maria is nowhere to be found, but who does this angelic voice belong to????

"Njabulo, you need to get up," the voice warns. I open my eyes and dart them to the pink colour that is walking around the house.

I watch.

She opens the curtains and commends someone to fix the mess she sees. The problem is, it is only her and I in this room. It has been weeks since Zizipho stopped the lady that comes to assist.

I drop my head on the pillow; hoping that I am dreaming! Unfortunately, I am not dreaming. The pink dress walks towards me and picks the

blankets. I watch as she throws the blanket on the floor.

"I need that blanket," I warn.

My voice is weak. I was sleeping – for God's sake.

"NO."

"WHAT?"

"Wake up Njabulo," she begs – her voice so perfect.

I take all the strength I could, to sit up.

"What?" I ask while sitting up.

I feel her weight on my bed. She is closer than I needed her.

"We are all worried about you,"

Tinyiko's voice says.

Tinyiko! My ex.

"What are you doing here?" I ask while sitting up. I didn't know many voices. BUT I know it is Tinyiko - my ex. The best I could get from her is the fact whys she is in my territory.

"Zizipho asked me to take care of you," she says.

She helps me sit.

She has also told me how the bath is ready for me.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am here to take care of you Njabulo. Zizipho knows that I am the only person that can put sense into you. I know you are hurting and I know how to fix

this."

"How?"

"Because I am the only girl that has ever loved you."

Huh???

"Come!!! Allow me to take care of you. Maria is never coming back. Never ever!!" she sadly says.

Why do I believe her?

Maria is never coming back.

"Tinyiko, why are you doing this?"

"I love you. That's why?" she says as she helps me.

"You do?"

"Maria is gone! The sooner you accept that...the better."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. She is gone Njabulo. It is time to move on."

EPISODE 31 (Unedited)

NJABULO

The picture is missing.

My picture is missing!

I march out of my bedroom to the guest room just down the corridor. I knock on the door until my new uninvited housemate opens the door.

"Njabulo?" she says, her eyes widened.

"Where did you move the picture to? The picture of Maria that I

framed and placed on my bedside?"
I ask.

"Your sister took it last week,"
she says.

"What?"

Tinyiko wraps her arms around
her body and drop her eyes to the
floor as if I have hurt her deeply.
Maybe my tone is tighter than it
should be. I just don't understand
why my sister or anyone could
move my things without
permission.

Zizpho and Nathi spent the
weekend here. My sister was
worried about me that after
leaving me two weeks ago, she

had to come and see me. She didn't have to but she did it anyway.

"Where did she take it?" I ask.

"I don't know. She took it because she says it is holding you back from moving on. I am sorry...I tried talking to her but she insisted on taking away everything that belongs to Maria."

She mustn't be sorry. My sister is the one who needs to be sorry.

I turn on my heels, ready to leave for my room but I feel her hand on my shoulder. I turn to find her eyes pitying me. She feels pity for

me and I hate it when people do that.

"We are worried about you. I am worried about you...and the more you do this...the more it kills me."

"I shouldn't be your burden," I coldly say. I know Thandeka will never come back and I also know that my life will never be the same. My life is ruined. It is unfair of me to take it out on everyone who is trying to put me back to life. What I feel right now is worse than I felt when Amanda broke my heart. I never loved Amanda the way I did Maria - that is the difference. At

this point in my life, a part of me died with the hope of finding her. She is not coming back and the sooner I accept it, the better. "I shouldn't be your burden ... so what are you doing here?"

It has been a week since she showed up here. I give her a hard time as she tries to invade my space but she keeps coming. I don't even have a single strength to fight everyone who thinks I need help. Gundo keeps offering me money like I cannot afford to buy groceries. His wife still insists that I visit them. Everyone is just busy minding business.

"I love you. That's why. I know that you don't love me...but that doesn't change how I feel about you. And because of that...it kills me to see you so broken like this. Believe me, I wouldn't be here if I didn't care about you. I am on your side." I have slightly moved away from her but she takes a few steps towards me. She stops and stares into my eyes. "I care about you. Let me be there for you. The last thing we need is finding your body hanging on the ceiling. I am here to make sure that you are fine and as promised, I won't stand in your way."

My mouth is dry. It feels good to have someone on my side. It just feels wrong that Maria would be disappointed in me for moving on. I have to move on or else I will find myself on the ceiling - hanging. Those ideas were starting to creep in. Not only because I am helpless without Maria but because I feel like my life is cursed. I feel like I don't belong in this world full of happiness that we need to witness for other people.

"What's for supper? I saw you cooked," I say. I don't have anything to confess back to her.

"Milky samp and beef curry," she proudly says. She cooked my favourite.

I turn back to my bedroom to change into comfortable clothes. Work was just as hectic as my life. She is dishing two plates and set them on the dining table. She paces back to the kitchen to get us two glasses of wine.

"How is work? You have a new project you are working on?"

"Ooh same old, same old," she says and grabs an opposite chair.

"Does sound like you love your job," I say. Who does? I have been dragging my feet to work lately.

I am not as driven as I used to be but that has to change.

"Who does?" she responds. I laugh. That is exactly what I thought. "What is funny?"

"Oh..nothing."

"What have been up to?"

"Nothing fun. I have been searching for a sperm donor," she says and lets out a chuckle. "I haven't gotten the perfect co-parenting match."

"Haibo!"

"What?"

"You are kidding hey?"

"I am not. I am not getting young and I have decided not to

be in a relationship but get a co-parenting partner and have a baby. I feel like I am ready to be a parent and being single mustn't stop me from those dreams and wishes."

"Haikhona Tinyiko."

"What?"

"How do you make a baby with a stranger?"

"Okay tell me. Would you choose to be childless just because you are unmarried?" she asks and wiggles her brows. I haven't thought about that. The life I had planned had Maria in it. And now that she is gone, I have no idea

where to begin.

"I don't know."

"Okay, I have made up my mind. I am not going to die childless. The moment I get a perfect match for what I am looking for, nothing is going to stop me."

Gundo stares at me as I march into his room.

"I thought you were taking some time off?" he says. He dragged me home last week but I feel better now. I feel like I am alive after such a long time.

"I need to make money my guy. I am so used to hustling."

"What happened?" Gundo asks.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Last week you couldn't even lift your finger. What happened?"

"I had to accept the shit that life gives me. I got some more ish and now it is time to move on," I respond. That is right. The sooner I accept the fucks that the world gives me...the better.

Gundo stares at me. I cannot read his face. He looks shocked and relieved at the same time. What did he want? Isn't what he wanted?

"I don't know what to say."

"I need to invite you and your wife for dinner tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes! I want us to host a little memorial for Maria. I already invited her friends. Just a little supper in her memory."

"Uhm...oh...okay..." he hesitatedly responds. "What can I and my wife bring?"

"Bring yourselves."

"Well....okay..."

"Do we have any critical meeting that I can attend to before I leave?" I ask. It is already noon and it would be a great idea to rush home to prepare for the

guests.

"No critical meeting."

"On that note, I will see you later."

"Uhm...sure," he responds before I leave him staring at me.

This is the closure that I am choosing to act on. I head back to my office and pack my table clean before driving straight home.

Upon arrival, I throw my blazer on the couch and fold my sleeves so that I start setting the table. I host parties in this house, planning for a memorial party for my girlfriend shouldn't be a big deal. I just hope that I

am doing the right thing. Closure is what I want and closure is what I am going to give myself. It is an hour before dinner when I get a buzz at my door.

"Oh...thank goodness you are here. I was starting to worry," I say to the delivery guys. I make a way for them to bring the food and flowers in. I tell them where to set everything. Thirty minutes later, we are done and they are leaving me to stare at the room I have prepared to bid goodbye to the love of my life."

I rush to get cleaned up. If I am going to host a few friends, I

should look the part. I am in a pair of black jeans and a black shirt.

"Njabulo!"

It should be Tinyiko! She is the only one who has Zizipho's set of keys. I put on cologne before rushing downstairs to where she is standing in a black dress. She came with this idea and I think it is a great idea.

"Hey..." I greet as I head to where she is standing.

"I am sorry I couldn't help you set this up," she says. I had to use all the money in bank account to set this up. I wouldn't expect

her to help me.

"No...its okay," I say. Get yourself a glass of wine or someone.

"You know I don't drink around people. I don't trust myself," she says with a giggle.

A knock on the door disturbs us. A few knocks and the door opens.

Gundo walks in first, holding his wife's handbag and then

Thandeka walks in with a

bouquet of flowers. She stops at her tracks when she notices

Tinyiko and I.

"Babe...come this side," Gundo says. He might have picked it up that his wife seems like she saw

a ghost.

"Njabulo can I have a word with you?" she asks and marches to the kitchen. She sets the flowers on the table and places her hands on her waist.

"Thank you for coming..."

"What is she doing?" she attacks me before I could even finish my sentence.

"She...well...she is here for support."

"Your ex is here to support you? Are you kidding me? Are we not here to pay respect for Thandeka?" she whispers sharply. Gundo must come here and take

his wife.

"Thandeka, I am not really up to drama," I say with my hands in the air. Really!

Gundo walks in.

"What is wrong?" he asks while standing next to her.

"I was just asking him why his ex is doing here. It was her idea to do this, wasn't it? This closure you need so much...did she suggest it to you? I mean...she would want to jump back into your pants..."

"Gundo..." I say. I am going to break her with the words that might come out of my mouth...so

it would be best if her husband deals with her.

"Babe..."

"Did you know about this?" she asks. Gundo shrugs.

I notice more visitors walking into the room. It is Dikeledi, Mikateko and two other ladies. It must be Maria's colleagues.

"My guests are here."

"She needs to go. There is no respect we will be showing to Maria if your ex is here."

"I don't think..."

"Then I am out of here. I am not going to be part of this,"

Thandeka says. Phew!! It is not

easy to make sense to women, is it?

Tinyiko walks towards us. She must have picked that she is the problem is.

"Njabulo, I need to be somewhere. I need to go," she says. She doesn't wait for a response. She waves at us and sashays out of the house.

"That's better," Thandeka says and marches to the living room where everyone is at.

Gundo stares at me.

"What?" I shrug.

"Was it her idea?" he asks.

"She suggested. I fucking need

this closure," I say but he doesn't say anything. I am forced to explain myself, "Dude. I need this and you know it. I cannot keep holding on to what I don't know. I was starting to lose my mind. I had to do this."

"I am not going to judge you. Maybe this is exactly what you need."

"I thought so too."

We are sitting around the table – the eight of us. Everyone with a glass of alcohol in front of them. We all need a hint of alcohol to sooth the pain away, because this is not easy.

I pick my glass of whiskey and stand on my feet.

"Thank you for coming," I say after clearing my throat, "I am sorry that we had to gather in such circumstances. But I felt I have to do this...for me. I need closure and who is the best person to give it to me if not myself?"

This is for me and thank you for coming...to support me. I am broken. I am shattered but I need to pick myself up. Tonight, I just want us to remember Maria. I remember when I first met her, it was at Gundo's wedding. She was this bubbly girl who liked

to talk a lot. I didn't pay much attention because I thought, there is no way in my dreams where I am going to date a girl like her," I say. I smile. "She was just too different. Only when I got close to her did I learn that she has a heart of gold. No girl in my life has ever prayed for me. She did." My heart feels tight. Too tight for my liking. I sit down before I could even carry on. "When you speak about prayer, Maria was the first person to wake me up for midnight prayers...I remember sometimes I wouldn't be drunk but when her

mother insists that we all pray...she would wake me up," Dikeledi adds. "Just like how you thought she was too different for you....she was too different for me too. I am a party girl...and she was a church girl. Can you imagine the wild child and an angel getting together? Chaos." We all giggle. "I loved her so much." "I feel like we are giving up on her," Thandeka sadly say. Gundo places his hand on her shoulder. It isn't like I don't know that it might be soon. CLOSURE. I want some goddam closure. "Maria kept me sane when I should have gone

crazy. She was the reason I got the courage to try things out with my husband and boy am I glad, she did. My kids were hers." This is harder than I thought. Thandeka is as broken as I am and the tears that shine in her eyes tells me a deeper story. She wipes a tear that escaped her eye.

I must say, by the end of dinner...some people cried their lungs out. I don't know if I did the right thing because a part of me feels guilty.

I have stopped counting the days like I used to. I will always cherish my girl, but I bet she would have prayed for me to stop digging a grave for myself. I feel lighter. But, I still feel lonely. As promised, Tinyiko stopped coming the day she smiled at me and told me that I look so much better. That was just two days after the dinner I hosted. She stopped passing by, all she does is to give me a call now and then to remind me to eat supper. It is weird that she was the one to show me a light at the end of the tunnel.

I am back at lifting weights and trying to eating healthy. It will take so much time for me to gain back my weight and tone my body the way I like it.

My phone rings from the pedestal. I had just finished praying.

"Hello Mma," I greet. It is Maria's mother.

"How have you been?" she asks.

"I am getting better. How are you?" I ask.

"Are you still praying hard for Maria's return?" she asks.

"Uhm...Mma...I have made peace with what life has given me."

"You have to believe the prayers

you make."

"It has been eight months..."

"Even if it takes ten years, my daughter is going to return."

"Yes, Ma!"

"Do not cease to pray," she says. How do I tell her that I closed that chapter? How do I tell her that the waiting have been killing me? I was a walking corpse. I was a zombie.

When she hangs up, I notice the message notification from Tinyiko.

Tinyiko: Did you eat?

Me: You sound like my grandmother. Yes, I did eat.

Tinyiko: Good. Goodnight.

Me: Tinyiko, thank you. Thank you for the past two weeks. I can confidently say, you won't find me hanging on the ceiling. I don't know how I can repay you.

Tinyiko: I have something you can thank me with.

Me: Name it. If I can afford it, I might as well get it delivered to your work.

Tinyiko: Be my sperm donor. I need good genes and God knows I want my baby to look like you.

Been taking fertility shots and all I need is a sperm. We can co-parent or not. All can be in a written agreement between the

two of us. Or we can even keep it confidential if you don't want to be a parent. I don't want a white donor and that is what I have been getting from agency. I don't respond to her text. Instead I dial her number. "Please," she says when she answers the phone.

EPISODE 32

NJABULO

Five months later

"This must be the best business pitch I have ever heard," Mr Scotts says with a wide smile.

Phuti stares at e from his seat. He knows, as much as I do, this is going to open a thousand doors. "What do you say?" I ask while taking my seat. "You don't have to give us the answers right away. Go back to your company and discuss this with your team. We will be right here waiting for you." With all the experience I have in marketing, I know very well that you do not have to push a client. The more you push, the more a client feels like you are forcing them into taking wrong decision.

"No need for that. I know good

business when I come across one. It is a deal," he says. I give him a smirk but deep down, I want to stand on this table and thank all forces working with me right now. I get on my feet and walk towards him for a handshake.

"Thank you for this opportunity. We are going to make you proud. Believe me."

"I don't doubt it."

"Gundo and I will work on the terms of the contract and we will email you next week Monday...then we start working."

Mr Scotts stands and gathers his belongings from the table. I

watch as he smoothly walks out of the boardroom.

"Welcome back Njabulo Buthelezi, welcome back," Phuti says while clapping his hands slowly.

I smirk at him. Njabulo Buthelezi is back. I am indeed back.

Phuti disconnects his laptop and starts packing it into his sleeve. I do the same.

"Are you done for the day?" I ask Phuti.

"Done for the day. It has been a week and a half," he says. I burst into a loud laugh. I have been giving him a hard time. He had to help me with four clients

that I was pitching to. I had to bring back the Njabulo that we all knew. I cannot live on advances from Gundo; so I had to do what I had to do.

"You can go home. I will go back to my office to mail the legal team some terms for Mr Scotts's contract. I want this deal closed and finalized."

"It's a Friday."

"It isn't like I have something better to do?" I shrug.

"You could join me and the boys," he says. He is always in a party mood.

"Next time."

"Are you sure you are not hiding something from me?" he asks. We are now walking towards the door.

"Why is that?"

"You are now floating on cloud nine...and you are busy for us," he says.

Maybe I am hiding something from him but I don't see why I should explain anything to him.

"So, you want me to hit the walls, huh? I am not allowed to be happy, am I?" she asks.

"Don't get me wrong," he says.

"Go home. Go drink. I am going to my office to work some numbers,"

I say while pressing the elevator to get me to my office. He gives me a thumbs up and takes a corner.

It is almost three-thirty and Anza is cleaning up her desk. I knock on Gundo's door. I should tell him the good news about Mr Scotts' meeting.

I knock once and open the door.

"Oh...please...get a room you two,"

I groan when I find Gundo kissing Thandeka from the window.

"Uhm...if I remember correctly, this is my office. You should have knocked and waited for us to let

you in," Gundo says, his hands still on his wife's waist.

"I'll brief you on Monday. Let me excuse you two to continue what you were doing. Just come lock this door."

"How did the meeting go? I am dying to know how well it went."

"He is in."

"Mr Scotts?" Gundo asks.

"Mr Scotts is in," I proudly say.

Only now does Gundo take his hands off from his wife. He walks towards me for a hand-shake.

Just like we all thought, he also thought it was going to take longer to get Mr Scotts on our

side.

"This calls for a celebration," he says. Everyone wants to celebrate this milestone. I would like to do so, but I have plans tonight.

Telling them about them will just make them look at me weirdly. I don't have time for the world to judge me.

But wait!

Fuck it. I am a grown-ass man.

"I am going on a date," I respond. I hate to be a party pooper. But, fuck it, I have to live my life the way I want to. I just know that most won't approve but fuck it. Thandeka

laughs at me like I am some crazy man.

"A date?" she asks.

"Yes."

"With?" she asks. I turn my gaze to Gundo. He will know what to do with his wife. I am not compelled to answer to her because she will hate me when I spit venom on her.

"Babe...leave it."

"He never loved my friend," she says.

"Don't you dare talk about things you don't know Mrs Radzilani. If you don't have anything to say...just don't. what do you know

about my love for Maria? What do you know?"

"I know it meant nothing to you...that why you even hosted a memorial when she isn't dead."

"She is dead to me. If she isn't, why didn't she attempt to call me all these months? Why?"

"She is dead to you and now you are ready to jump to another skirt."

"I jumped into another skirt already."

"You make me sick," she says.

"Babe...no...no...no.." Gundo walks to his wife. Good choice my guy. Good choice.

Women love to be emotional unnecessarily. What does she want me to do? Wait for how long? Breaking my heart from the unknown. If Maria cared so much for me, why didn't she try to get hold of me? A sign. A letter. A 'please call me' from an unknown number. A message to any stranger that could have hunted us down. A message in a bottle. Just fucking something. She did nothing like that...that is why she is dead to me.

"Stay out of my business. When you two go through your shit...I let you be until you come back

crawling into our lives. Stay out of my fucking business." I bang the door and march to my office. I shouldn't have bothered trying to reason with Gundo's wife. She will never understand. I only care because she is my friend's wife. Anza walks into my office after she had knocked a few times.

"I am done for the day. Will you need anything?"

I will need everyone to leave me the hell alone.

"No, thank you."

"I will see you on Monday, sir," she says. "Ohh..before I go. Someone called, looking for you. When I

asked to take a message, she said she will see you at home later."

"I see," I respond but she doesn't move. I lift my eyes to her.

"Is your fiancée back?" she asks. Wrong move for my PA. A very wrong move.

"Anza, if you still need this job, I'll pretend you didn't just ask me a personal question right now," I say and she quickly turns before I could finish my life.

Jeez!!

Just like she had left the message with Anza, she is home

waiting for me. I take off my jacket, throw it to the couch and walk towards the kitchen. I hug her from behind and plant a kiss on the back of her neck.

"What are you cooking?" I ask.

She continues to stir the soup with a wooden spoon. I watch as the creamy mixture perfectly twirls inside the boiling pot.

"Your favorite," she says without stopping her task. I watch, still my hands wrapped on her waist. When done stirring, she carefully sets the spoon aside and turns to plant her lips on mine.

"It is your birthday. I thought I

was taking you out to something special. Maybe we could just dine in one of your favorite restaurants," I say.

"No, I thought we could stay in and spend some time together," she says.

"Let me help you set the table." I fold the sleeves of my shirt and walk towards the cupboard to get the plates. I set the table the way I always set for a romantic dinner. Two unscented candles, two wine glasses, two plates, and cutlery. After setting the table, I get to my room to change into something more

comfortable.

In the bathroom, I splash the water on my face and stare at my reflection on the mirror.

"Get it together," I mumble to myself before pulling the towel to dry my face. I pat my face dry without moving my eyes from the mirror. I throw the towel back on the rail and walk to my bedroom to put on a shirt and a pair of clean jeans. Tinyiko is still busy in the kitchen – probably finishing our dinner. This is not how I imagined my life after Maria. But I am proud that I didn't turn to be a fuck boy that I was once

was. Tinyiko was here for me and after agreeing to be part of her parenting idea, I thought it was exactly what I wanted. I am not growing young and starting a family has always been part of my plan. When she presented her case, I grabbed the opportunity. She thinks I am doing it for her but the truth is, I am doing it for myself too. Anything for me to feel my heart beating again. Something to give me a reason to live again. A baby is exactly what I want. I want someone to live for. It is unfortunate that I had always wanted to start a family

with Maria but those dreams do not need to die. An opportunity presented itself and I grabbed it with both hands. It is just unfortunate that Tinyiko is having a hard time conceiving. I offered to donate the sperm but the procedure did not go according to her plan. The night she came to cry on my shoulder, we took things to another level and made love. A moment of weakness for both of us. But that moment of weakness became more than one and we tried for a baby. The second month when she took the pregnancy test, it still was

negative. And to protect ourselves from the disappointment, we decided not to make our lovemaking session to be for the exercise to conceive. We stopped trying but decided to be adults about what we do for each other. No label for our relationship but we spend more time with each other. We are both adults to know that we are just having fun. I don't intend to invest my feelings in any relationship ever again. Life has fucked with me so many times that I don't want no relationship. No more labels - thank you.

My phone rings. I grab it from my pocket.

"Hey, hey," I say while making my way to the living room.

"Njabulo. It is Thandeka," she says. I turn towards the porch. I open the sliding door and shut it after walking out. "I thought I should call and apologize."

Right, she needs to apologize.

I take a seat on one of the recliner seats by the pool. I just know that she is going to make noise to me.

"You don't have to."

"I have to. That was not the right way to talk to my husband's

friend. I think I am just not over the fact that I feel we are giving up on Thandeka."

"It has been a year and a month. What are you talking about?"

"You are right. I am sorry. You have all the rights to move with your life. I am sorry for addressing the issue the way I did."

"It is fine Mrs Radzalani. It really is fine."

"Thank you. Have a wonderful evening."

"Thandeka?"

"Yes?"

"Move on. She is not coming back."

Move on with your life."

"Have a wonderful evening," she responds and hangs up. She didn't acknowledge what I said - she is still holding on to a lie. Believe me, if she was alive, she would have the means to contact one of us.

I turn towards the sliding door.

Tinyiko raises her glass for me. I get up and return to the house.

The food is already on the table.

"The food is ready," she announces with her eyes fixed on mine. "Is everything alright?"

"Everything is fine," I say.

"I made steak and your favorite sauce," she says. She doesn't

force me to talk. That is exactly what I like about her. she doesn't force things out of me. She is there to listen but never force anything out of my mouth. To be honest, if I didn't meet Maria that night when she found me at the club, I think I would have married Tinyiko by now. I wish I didn't have to meet Maria that night at the club when we reconnected. I wouldn't have fallen deeply in love with her and gotten my heart broken like shattered glass. I wish. I just wish.

"No steak house has anything on

you," I say while grabbing a chair for her. I am still a gentleman. She carefully sits before I take my seat, in front of her.

"I try," she says.

I pull a small box from my pocket and place it on the table. I take her hand and say, "Happy birthday. I hope you like this special gift from me to you."

She picks the velvet box and opens it. She frowns before forcing another smile on. She takes one earring from the box and puts it in on her palm.

"Do you like it? I didn't know what to get you...but I remember

you love earrings."

"I do. I love it. I do," she quickly says. I don't ask about the frown she gave me first.

"Let me help you," I say while getting up. I unhook the earrings that she has on and carefully put the pearls I got her on. I like the colour. It matches her beautiful eyes.

"Thank you," she says with a smile.

She picks her set of cutlery and starts digging into her plate. I do the same.

We dine in silence. I want to ask why she looks nervous...but I

don't. I already had drama with Thandeka, I don't need more drama. I just want us to watch a movie or fuck or something...as long as it doesn't have anything to do with solving issues.

I am exhausted from solving people's emotions and cases. I am exhausted.

When we are both done, she stands to pick the plates and glasses. When I ask her to let me help her, she stopped me.

"Sit here. I have something for you," she says with a smile. I am starting to think that she is fine and I am the one reading too

much into this situation.

She loads the dishes into the dishwasher while I pick the remotes from the table. I switch the TV on and throw myself on the sleeper couch. For some reason, I feel like a strong drink. I think Thandeka's call messed with my evening. She shouldn't have called me. She should have respected me enough to live me the fuck alone.

Maybe I could ask Tinyiko to leave so that I could join the guys for that celebration. It is Tinyiko's birthday. It would hurt her if I suggest something else

other than this.

Luckily there is a movie we can rent on the BoxOffice. I just hate that everything reminds me of things I used to do with Maria.

Fuck it! I get on my feet.

"When are you going to stop haunting me?" I ask quietly. Why does the thought of her hurt me? Please, Maria. Let me move on. "Can your soul rest in peace?"

I drop my eyes to the floor when I notice Tinyiko walking towards me. I don't want her to notice the sadness in my eyes. She has a gift wrapped in silver paper.

"Is that for me?" I ask. She places it on the coffee table. "Why would you get me a gift on your own birthday."

"Well...I thought I could charm you...or even make your day with something special."

"What is it?" I ask while getting back on the couch.

"I wouldn't have wrapped it if I wanted you to know what it is."

I pull the parcel towards me while Tinyiko grabs her phone. She holds her phone up. It takes me a second to reap the paper away until I notice a yellow toolbox.

I laugh.

"Oh...so what you are trying to say is...I should be a man enough," I say.

"What?" she asks and goes into fits of laughter.

"No one in the world has ever gotten a toolbox before in my life," I say. I had always been the type that hires a handyman now and then while I build an empire for myself.

"Open it," she says.

Toolbox. Jesus Tinyiko. She should have been a little more thoughtful.

I open the toolbox.

What the fuck?

There are no screwdrivers and hammers and all the tools one would need to fix any damn thing in the house. None of those things.

"What the heck?" I ask. She beams at me.

"Congratulations Njabulo. You are going to be a father," she says.

I turn my gaze back at the tool filled with baby powders and wipes and nappies and baby bottles and all the shit that babies need.

I drop my mouth.

"What do you mean?"

"I am pregnant. Three months. It seems like the baby was hiding or something. I don't know...but when I went to the doctor this morning because I didn't feel okay...he took the test."

"No way."

"Yes way," she says with a smile.

"Oh...thank you..." I drop the tool and reach for her. I pull her into my arms. If only she knew how much this means to me.

"No, thank you," she says with a laugh.

"You don't know what this means to me. This is my chance to move with my life. This is my chance to

have a reason to live. A reason to work harder than I have always worked." She beams at me and pulls me for a kiss.

God, thank you!!

Thank you!!!

Thank you!!

"You are going to be a father," she says.

"Right? I am going to be a father," I say without a care that tears are falling down my face. I don't fucking care.

I am going to be a father.

EPISODE 33

The farmhouse seemed to be the most beautiful thing I have ever seen before. He made sure to get the best location as if we were on the best holiday of our lives. The view from my room is the foothill where the sunrises every morning. This is more than I expected.

I have no choice but to love the place. A peaceful place, secluded from the rest of the world. This is crazy but this place is perfect!! So perfect from all the plans he had always had.

Perfect for him to fulfill what he wants to fulfill!

"Don't be stupid. Don't be stupid?"

Understood?" he had said that a million times that I know not to dare make a mistake. And I won't dare, in a million years, make that mistake.

"Of course! Of course!" I responded, for the millionth time. Never trust a human being. That is what he always said he knew. Who am I to blame him? I have betrayed him before and he has all the right not to trust me a little bit.

My room has pink walls, with a pure white ceiling. The bathroom on the left is painted in sky blue with navy blue décor. He asked me

to pick the furniture for my room. I only chose to add a white book shelf, filled with books and a thousand magazines. The rest of the things in the room were perfect. A double bed in the middle of the room, two pedestals – each on either side of the bed and a portrait of a woman walking on a beach. There was nothing much to change here. Nothing at all. For my own privacy, I have the whole wing to myself. No one bothers me this side. I can have all the time I need by myself and my angel who keeps me sane now. She is an angel sent to me by God.

That is one thing for sure.

It is already morning. I know so because the last hour I woke up to feed my angel, it was already five o'clock. I am yet woken by her complaint.

I pull the duvets away and hurry to where she is sleeping. I don't know - but I always rush to her before she could even cry. I want to protect her from the world. I want to protect her from all the bad of this world. I just want to protect her.

This is the best bonding session between the two of us - breastfeeding. I carry her to my

bed so I could seat comfortably before latching her on my breast. Only when she starts sucking the breast, do I know that she is set.

I enjoy this moment more than anything in the world. I play my fingers in her dark black curly hair. I am going to have a tough time untangling her wild hair very soon. For now, it is still smooth and easy to deal with.

An hour later, she is done sucking and is ready for another quick nap. I place her in a little blue camp cot I could get. I cover her with the throw and go back to sleep.

There is no way I am going to fall asleep. This is one routine that I am used to now. It was one routine that I was used to before she was even born. I am still yet to give her a perfect name.

She doesn't have a name yet.

A knock on my door forces me out of bed. I quickly grab the gown from the back of the door and open it before someone gets pissed.

"Yes?" I say while peeping from the door.

"Are you coming for breakfast?" he asks.

"Yes. Give me a few minutes," I respond. He turns on his heel. I close the door and return to sit on the bed. I don't feel like breakfast but I don't have a choice. Plus, I am so so hungry. Blame it on the breastfeeding. I jump into a shower for a quick one. One advice from one mother to another - you start your day as early as possible. I always make sure to start it with a shower before anything. That way, I am able to get a lot of things done during the day. I am fat from the weight I gained during the pregnancy. I

don't have much to wear, other than my maternity wear. I don't mind. This shapeless body is worth it. It really is.

When I think about how I would have been hurt if my angel was not part of me – I will live my life for her.

I leave the door slightly open before heading to the kitchen.

The aroma of bacon and eggs fill the room, forcing my stomach to grumble with hunger.

"I will be done in just a minute," he says while finishing the eggs. He makes good enough eggs. As long as I can stomach them – I

am happy.

I grab a glass and more juice for myself. I down the glass in one go.

He turns towards me with a saucepan, ready to dish the eggs for me. He makes breakfast and I cook throughout the day.

"Thank you," I quietly say as he dishes for me. He dishes more bacon for me – it is my favourite. He dishes the rest into his plate. I watch as he unties the apron and shoves it into a drawer.

"How did the baby sleep?" he asks. This is one of his regular questions – as if he cares.

"She slept well. I got enough time to sleep."

"That's good."

"Yeah!"

"Would you need something from the store? The guy is bringing more supplies."

"Just more baby wipes and nappies."

"Food?"

"The feeding milk is enough," I report.

He quietly digs into his food. I do the same. The last thing I want to do is to piss him. I have learned that lesson a long time ago.

When done eating, I pick my dish and head to the basin.

"Come sit down," he quietly demands. Without a protest, I walk towards the table and pull my chair. He finishes the orange juice that was in his glass. "The woman who wants to adopt the baby is coming."

I catch my breath but quickly strengthen my spine so that I still keep my chin up before asking, "When?"

"Any day. Any day, she will be here to take her," he responds. His eyes still on me.

"Okay," I quickly say.

He studies me as I keep my straight face. It hurts so much but I am not going to show him how broken I am. I force a smile. A tight lips kind of a smile but he doesn't smile back.

"But why?"

"Huh?" I ask.

"Why do you keep doing this for him?"

"This is more of a promise I made to you. I will keep my promise to you."

"So he can live?" he asks. I don't respond by drop my eyes to my fingers. "I asked you a question?"

"Yes."

Yes, I will do anything so that he doesn't hurt him or anyone. I will do whatever he wants. That is how I got to survive since I got here. Things didn't go according to his plan. When he brought me here, we were supposed to get married in a month or so...but I started getting sick. Thank God. I started getting sick and even a kid would know that morning sickness equals pregnancy. That was the only thing that stopped him from making advances on me or forcing us to get married. He was broken when we both found out that I was pregnant.

Just like I begged him to spare Njabulo's life, I pleaded with him to let me keep the baby until the baby was born so that I could give it away. For some reason, he listened and agreed. From that day, I swore not to piss him. For my baby and Njabulo's sake. I listened to each order, quietly prayed and hoped for the best. "Why?" he asks.

"Huh? What?" I didn't get his question. I am lost in my own thoughts.

"Why do you like protecting him?" I wish to say: Because I love him with all my heart. But I know

that will just piss him off and make him snap. I have learned to read his mind and to play along.

"Because I don't want you to turn into something that you are not. You are not a bad person and I don't want to turn you into a bad person."

He stares at me as if he is calculating his next move. I have learned - yet again - to ignore him when he does so. I don't want to show him how I scared I am so that he believes me when I tell him that he is not a bad person. He is as bad as they come. He has shown me how capable is

to be an animal that I am scared to face. Deep down, I am scared.

"Do you think your boyfriend will be happy for that baby?" he asks.

This is a tricky question but I find myself saying, "Yes." Worse – I responded with a smile. This is just the truth. I know how much Njabulo wanted to have a family of his own. A baby girl would melt his heart – I believe so.

I stop smiling. I hope this baby girl would melt his heart.

"Maybe you need to see this," he says, making me panic. He picks a cloth from the table and wipes

his hands. He roughly pushes his chair and leads the way to his wing. He keeps everything locked in an empty. I have never - ever gotten a chance to peak in or enter it without him. The computers fill the room. Pictures of everyone close to me and my family are pasted on the wall. The first time I was here - I was scared of all these things, but I am used to it now. It is ordinary to me.

"Grab a chair," he says.

I pull a chair and sit next to him. He plays his fingers on the keyboard and lands on the

Whatsapp. A few codes and I see Njabulo's profile picture. It is the same company logo that he had always had ever since I met him. He is not one to change his whatsapp profile picture.

He is on his whatsapp.

I quickly scan on the people he is chatting to. He does have messages from Gundo and Phuti and some names I knew from last year. Luzuko stops at Tinyiko. He double clicks into it and what I notice first is the love and kisses emojis. My heart skips a few beats as I scan the screen to see how old are these messages.

Just two weeks ago.

My heart drops into a pit.

The curiosity gets the best of me because I don't beg him to stop scrolling to where he wants me to see.

He stops at a video. Below it is a caption: Keep this for when it is old enough to understand. Luzuko plays the video.

The camera focuses on Njabulo unwrapping a gift. It is a yellow toolbox.

"Oh...so what you are trying to say is...I should be a man enough," Njabulo says.

"What?" She laughs loudly.

"No one in the world has ever gotten a toolbox before in my life."

"Open it," she asks.

Njabulo opens the toolbox only to be welcomed by baby essentials.

"What the heck?" I ask. She beams at me.

"Congratulations Njabulo. You are going to be a father," she says.

"What do you mean?"

His reaction breaks my heart because he never got to experience that with me. None of that. None of it. Tears are piercing my eyes but I have to stay strong and act as if this has no impact on me.

"I am pregnant. Three months. It seems like the baby was hiding or something. I don't know...but when I went to the doctor this morning because I didn't feel okay...he took the test."

Three months! Wow! All my hope goes crashing on the floor. I swallow hard, trying not to let out tears that are threatening to fall.

"No way."

"Yes way," she responds. I can't see her but I can easily feel her smile from her voice.

"Oh...thank you..."

Njabulo leaves the tool and

reaches for her so he could pull her into her arms. The camera loses focus but I can easily hear them. They are both crying.

My heart is beating out of my chest now. I can't breathe.

"You don't know what this means to me. This is my chance to move with my life. This is my chance to have a reason to live. A reason to work harder than I have always worked."

The camera loses focus but I can easily hear kissing sounds. He kissed her. The phones point back to Njabulo before she says, "you are going to be a father."

"Right? I am going to be a father." His tears wet his face. Luzuko taps the keyboard and the video stops.

Wow!!!!!!

The baby yells from my wing - as if she sensed that I needed someone to save me from my misery.

"Oh...the baby is crying," I quickly stand.

"I have more for you to listen," he says. No emotions in his face.

"I am coming. Can I feed the baby first?" he asks.

"Of course," he says. This is why I believe that Luzuko is not as

bad. He allows me to freely do things – as long as it is not a threat to him.

I hurry out of the room and rush my room. I shut the door and pick my angel. I cradled her while I let my tears fall for the first time since she was born. She has been my hope but not anymore. I had hoped that Luzuko would feel this connection and strengthen his search or something.

I was wrong!

He has moved on!

I cry my lungs out while holding my baby tightly. I only stop when I hear the baby crying loudly.

"I am so sorry my baby...I am so sorry," I whisper while wiping my tears with one hand. I set her on the bed and let my tears fall on the towel that is wrapping her. I quickly search for her nappy. It is wet – hence she is crying and making a fuss.

"Shhh...baby...I am going to change you, my baby..." I say while fumbling with her changing bag. I pick the nappy and change her. Only minutes later does she stop crying.

My heart is still beating out of my chest.

Njabulo!! You were my own hope!

My one and only hope!

I quickly fix my face when I hear voices coming towards my door. A knock startles me.

"Maria, she is here," Luzuko says.

"I am coming," I say as bold as I could. When I hear the footsteps walking away from the door, I cover my face with my hands and cry some more.

I cannot let my baby go now. I can't. I can't. No, I can't.

I walk towards the window. Just the like the first time I got here. There is nowhere for me to go. There is no way for me to run away but just empty mountains.

I rush back to the baby drawer and pull a pacifier and shove it in her mouth. I don't want whoever that is out there to fall in love with my baby. I carefully place the baby into the cot and clean my face up before making my way to the living room. A middle-age woman sits with a mug of tea in her hand.

"Good morning," I greet while taking a seat.

"Where is the baby?" he asks.

"She is sleeping. She had a bad night and I think it would be only fair for her to sleep a little longer. It will take her just

thirty minutes or so to wake up."
"She was crying just now," Luzuko says.

"Bad dream," I say. The woman looks at me. I try begging her to leave with my eyes. She stares at me and swallows hard. I pray I pray so hard that she gets that I am not into this. I beg and beg as she stares at me.

"Is this even legal?" she asks.

"Is this adoption legal?"

I shake my head while Luzuko says, "Yes. Yes."

"Can I bring an official from Home Affairs?" she asks. I nod and Luzuko gets on his feet.

"What are you trying to do? We spoke about this," he says.

"I thought maybe we could wait a little longer when she is done breastfeeding. She is only three months. She needs to start feeding at six months."

"True. I can wait for six months. I am not in a hurry. She has to feed healthy until she is old enough to take solids." She got my sign. She gets on her feet and says, "I will come back."

Njabulo's phone rings and he walks to the corner of the room to get it. The lady rushes out of the room. I sit still - hoping that

Luzuko keeps calm. He always loses it when he gets frustrated. Sometimes it is as if he cannot multi-task. I watch as he paces the room.

Only minutes later, he realizes she is gone.

"What did you do???" he asks.

"My love. Let her come back in six months when the baby is feeding solids. She doesn't want to starve the baby."

He stares at me for so long.

"I was stupid, right? She shouldn't have come here," he says. He is right!! He could force me to play the happy wife but

that is probably aware that the whole world might be looking for me. He thought the lady was picking the baby and leave. She probably saw through the both of us and cannot go on with this whole operation.

Or, maybe my prayers are only getting answered now.

"She is going to come back with people. She is."

If she is a good samaritan, she will return with the police.

Luzuko walks to the corner of the room and pulls another phone. I have lost count of how many phones he has.

"It can only go through to a Vodacom number," he says while pulling drawers open and grabbing all valuable things he could get.

"Call someone to pick you at Nic Bodenstein Hospital."

WHAT?

Without a waste of time, I grab his phone and call my mother's number. She is the only person who wouldn't think twice about making a way for me.

Voicemail.

I start panicking. I try a few times.

Luzuko stares at me...and God knows he is going to turn back to

his senses and he might change his number.

I call Njabulo. He has the second Vodacom number I know by heart. I quickly dial it and Thank Goodness it goes through.

"Njabulo's phone hello," a female voice answers. Thank God I already know it belongs to Njabulo. The line is too bad but this is my ONLY chance to talk to someone out of this room. The only people I could talk to belonged to Luzuko..

"Can I please talk to Njabulo please."

"Who is this? Njabulo is in the

shower," she says. The line is bad I got that Njabulo is in the shower.

"This is Maria. Can I please speak to him? Please."

"Sorry ma'am... your line is breaking," she says.

"This is Maria. Please. Can I talk to Njabulo. Please."

"Yoh!" I hear her say. I hear Njabulo's voice saying, "Who was it?"

"The line is breaking. I couldn't hear a thing," she responds.

"Njabulo!" I cry out, hoping that he hears me and recognizes my voice. "Njabulo."

"Put that phone aside...and let me talk to my baby," Njabulo's voice pierces my heart from the phone. Without hesitation, the phone dies.

Oh! My God! Oh, my God!

Luzuko grabs the phone and smashes it on the floor. He does this whenever he doesn't want his phone tracked.

"He doesn't want you anymore. Just start a life with me Maria? Lets just get away for a little while so that I make sure that woman will not bring police here? We can leave the baby at a clinic or a bus stop."

I drop on the couch and let my tears fall down my face.

My only chance!

EPISODE 34

MARIA

"She is coming back with the police. She is, isn't she?" he asks again. I hate it when he gets agitated. He takes irrational decisions when he panics.

"I don't think so...she is..."

"Take your things. We are leaving," he says while emptying some drawers into a huge bag. I don't want us to move to a new

place.

"Please," I beg.

"Now Maria!"

I hurry to my baby. She is still sucking her pacifier, staring at the ceiling. Isn't she just an angel? She hardly cries unless it is necessary and she has made things easier for me as a first-time mother.

Luzuko is packing away his things from the other room. I pray that the woman returns with someone before he takes us away. There is a light at the end of this tunnel and God knows it is my only chance of survival.

The most important things to pack away are my baby stuff - nappies, clothes and all. I don't have anything valuable around here. Luzuko got me a few things for my baby and God knows I am grateful for that. Sometimes he regrets doing this but sometimes he is determined to keep me here, hoping that I am happy with him. He knows where my heart is and that means he doesn't fully trust me. I remember how broken he was when I was pregnant. It killed him but he couldn't let me go.

I stuff the baby clothes and

items into two huge plastic bags and get dressed comfortably for whatever awaits us. My hands are trembling all this time as I try to grab as many things I could.

When my baby starts crying, I drop everything on the floor and pick her for a feed. Luzuko barges into the room.

"Can we go?" he asks.

"Can I feed her first?" I beg.

"Fine! Just hurry up."

"Please sit down," I say softly. He stands and stares at me like I have lost my mind. He should know by now that I will not betray him

by doing anything stupid. I have built my trust for him to let me go and I am not ready to blow it away.

"What?" he asks while taking a little chair I usually use when I read by the window. By now I have read the bible from the first page to the last. What else was I supposed to do if not pray for my freedom?

"Thank you!"

"For?" he spits.

"Taking care of me. Look, my girl is growing up. Thank you," I say.

"You are trying...."

"No. It is not wrong to look for

the good in people. There is nothing wrong. You are a good man Luzuko."

"No...no...stop it," he snaps. "Stop it." I close my eyes tightly as he marches out of the room. He walks back to the room a minute late with a phone. He presses a few buttons and sets it on bed next to me. He plays phone recordings between Tinyiko and Njabulo. Suddenly I feel like my baby is sucking the life out of me. I used to love these listening sessions when Njabulo was still looking for me. Now - Luzuko is just putting salt to my wounds.

"He has moved on."

"I have moved on too," I say, my chest so tight.

"Now, are you ready to start a life with me?" he asks.

"I want to start a life by myself. I was not made for love. Love hurts," I say.

"Love hurts," he repeats.

"It does!" A tear falls down my cheek. I am being honest. Love hurts. We are in this situation because Luzuko is hurt by the love I could not give him back. I am hurt because I loved Njabulo so much to sacrifice my life for. I am hurt because I had hoped

that he loved me as much. I don't want this love anymore. He quietly sits on the other chair. "Don't you miss church? Where you prayed every day? Don't you miss it? I miss praying with my mother so much. She used to make me feel like everything in the world is fine. I wonder how she is right now. The last time I was home, I had to take her to hospital...high blood pressure...but I know God will keep her strong for me," I say. Another tear falls down. I really am worried about her.

"Do you want to go back to

them?" he sadly asks. His voice is heart breaking. By them, he means my people. Njabulo.

Thandeka. Dikeledi. My family.

"Yes. I want to home to them," I mumble. Today, I am not asking to make a phone call to any of them. I lost count of how I would irritate him by asking to call my family, to tell them that I was fine. His plan was to let them forget about me so that I could start a life with him. He has succeeded. Njabulo has moved on with his life and he is looking forward to start a new family. I know my mother is still praying

for me. She is. And I believe, this moment right here, her prayers are answered.

"Fine!" he say. I can see his clenched jaws. He is angry.

Fine what? Is he letting me go?

"I won't tell on you."

"That is a lie. You have never cared about me," he says, grabs the phone and marches out of the room.

God, please. Let him release me.

God, please.

I flinch when he marches into the room. He angrily picks the black plastic bag and storms out of the room. I am trembling when I

carefully put on my bra. I hope my baby is fed enough. She doesn't cry though, so I know she is okay.

"Go to the car," he says. I grab the blanket and quickly slide my feet into the sandals. There is no time to think twice.

He jumps into the driver's seat and drives out of the farm yard.

My heart sinks when he doesn't take the main road. We are in the middle of nowhere and anything can happen right now. I can see the tar road from here but he isn't driving towards that

direction. He is driving further into the forest.

"Please," I pray. I don't like this at all. I swear if anything happens to me, no one will find me here.

He turns towards a huge tree and parks under it. He rolls down the windows and sits quietly. I know when to talk and when not to talk. He easily gets agitated. Sometimes he breaks down.

Sometimes he is angry. I know when not to make him angry. And mostly, I know not to go against my word. One click on his panic button and people will get hurt.

So, the best I can do is to cooperate.

He switches on the radio and searches for one Hillsong album. He used to play it when we drove together back in Joburg. He rests his head and closes his eyes. I am still trembling from the back. What worries me is his split characters. I never know what he is thinking and that bothers me. He unbuckles his seat belt and turns towards me.

"What did you love about him?" he asks.

"Uhm...his sense of humour."

"I see."

We sit in silence listening to music. We have opened all the doors as if camping. By now he has told me that he is waiting for the sun to go down. For hours, I prayed in my heart until he jumps out of the car and shut all the doors. He picks a black sack and throws it at me. I catch my breath. it is the same sack he forced down my head when he took me from Joburg.

"Put it on."

"Luzuko...please..."

He starts the car and says, "Put it on." I do. It is already dark outside anyway. I put it on and

let tears gush out. I cannot believe he is taking us to another location. I get the urge to throw my hands around his neck and destruct him but when I think of getting my baby hurt, I shove the thoughts away.

I rest my head on the seat and let him do what he wants to do. Today has been the hardest of all the days. Finding the truth about Njabulo's relationship, almost getting my baby taken away from me and now THIS!

I don't know how long we have been driving because I fell asleep. I think my baby slept too because

she is softly breathing in my arms. I feel extremely exhausted. What I know is that, we are in town or something, because he keeps driving and stopping.

"Maria?"

"Hmmm?"

"I did all this because I loved you...but whatever I do, you'll never love me back. I hope this stays between us. I pray it does," he says as he stops the car. I swallow hard, ready for him to pull me to his new house. The air is cold when he opens the back door. I flinch, hugging my baby tight, when he pulls the sack off.

Lights!

I see a lot of lights.

Luzuko picks my black plastic bag and throws it on the street. He turns and gets into the car. Only when he drives off do I realise that I am free.

I gasp for air as I cry so loud, clenching my baby to my chest. I don't think I have ever cried like this in my life.

"Ma'am, are you alright?" a young man asks as I gasp for air. I feel like I just popped my head out of the water.

"No...No...No..." I say, trying to get myself to breath. He leaves

me standing and rushes to the building. I lift my eyes to the board that says, 'Nic Bodenstein Hospital'. I notice him walking towards me with an old woman. She is a nurse.

"Ma'am are you alright?" she asks while reaching to take my baby. I held my baby tight and she takes a step back.

"I am fine. I need to use the phone. I need a phone," I call out as if Luzuko will change his mind and return here to pick me up again.

"Come this way," she says and leads me to the hospital

reception. There are people sitting around the benches in the hospital. The old nurse hands me her cell phone.

Thandeka!

I dial her number and pray she picks it up.

"Hello," she says. She was deep in sleep.

"Thank goodness Thandeka..." I almost cry. "Its me."

"Maria?" she whispers.

"Thandeka..."

"Maria!" This one came as a cry. She is wide awake. "Maria where are you?"

"Nic Bodenstein Hospital. I don't

even know where it is," I say as fast as I could. I don't want no network break or whatever.

"Nic what?"

"Nic Bodenstein Hospital..." I say and turn to the nurse, "Where is this?"

"Wolmaransstad," she responds.

"Thandeka, I am in Nic Bodenstein Hospital... it is in Wolmaransstad."

"Oh my God...I don't...uhm...can you send me the location or the name of the place on SMS? I got the bits of it but I want to be sure. We are coming now."

"Do you need anything? For you or the baby?" Thandeka asks. She is standing by the door of the guest room which I used to use when I visited them. We arrived an hour ago. The baby was unsettled, I had to bath her first before she could fall asleep. Thandeka offered to bath her but I insisted.

"I'll be fine," I say.

"Should I get you another blanket?" she asks.

"No Thandeka, I am fine," I say and I see her lips trembling before she lets out a sob. I

thought she had cried enough in the car. We drove for three hours in silence but just sobs. Gundo kept rubbing his wife's shoulder, the whole way.

"I am just happy you are home." I am not yet home but this is home for now. My mother's phone was off when we tried it but my little brother assured me to go to church - where she is camping - to tell her that I am fine. He will have to do so in the morning.

Thandeka cleans her face when we hear the noise from the kitchen. The noise is followed by voices and thereafter heavy

steps towards the guest room. There he is – Njabulo Buthelezi. Uninvited tears well my eyes before they fall down my cheeks like a cascade. The man I suffered for. He is frozen, with glittering eyes. He swallows hard, his chest rising and falling.

“If you don’t need anything...then...I’ll excuse you,” Thandeka says. I didn’t notice she was still in the room. She turns on her heels and walks out of the room – closing the door behind her.

Njabulo is still frozen like a statue – his chest still rising and

falling.

I shake the tears away. I drop my eyes to my hands. It breaks my heart to see him because I had hoped for things to be different than they are right now.

"Did he hurt you?" he asks and thereafter clears his throat. He swallows hard after that. I shake my head. "Are you okay?" That question! That question makes me breakdown.

I am not okay. I am not okay. I am not.

With the speed of light, he has me in his arms, forcing me to cry

harder and loudly. He tightly pulls me in his arms and lets me cry. I can feel his stiff body against mine.

I am not okay.

When done sobbing, he pulls me out of his arms and pats me on my face and then my body as if searching for a broken bone.

"Did he hurt you?" he asks.

You did!

He lets me stand and stares at me, before smashing his lips on mine. This catches me by surprise so I gasp, letting him deepen the kiss. I feel light but I get all the strength to stop him.

He doesn't register that I broke the kiss, or he doesn't care, because he pulls me closer for another tight hug.

I feel his body stiffening before he lets me go.

"Whose baby is that?" he asks.

He only notices the baby cot at the end of the room. Gundo had to dig in the garage and set it up for me.

"Mine," I say. He puts his hands on his waist and walks arounds, frustrated. "And you."

"What?" he shoots his eyes at me - his widened eyes. Doesn't he believe me?

He sits on the bed and covers his face with both his hands. He gets up and walks to the cot. I don't know if he believes me or not because the baby doesn't look anything like him. She is dark skinned and has all my features.

"Uhm...I know you are expecting a second born. Congratulation," I say and give him a small smile.

"How did you know? We haven't told anyone," he asks.

I lift both my hands. I don't want to talk about this. I am exhausted.

"Njabulo, I am exhausted. Can I sleep?" I ask. My baby is going to

wake up for an evening feed. Also, I am so exhausted right now.

"Of course. I am sleeping with you," he says while taking off his shoes. He takes his pants off, then followed by the t-shirt.

Honestly, I wish to sleep in his arms so I let him spoon me to sleep.

Njabulo never slept much. He kept waking me up from my nightmares and he sat with me whenever I had to wake up so many times to feed the baby. He watched and never went to sleep before I did. Also now, when the

light shines into the room, he is sitting on the edge of the bed. I know when it is time to start my day. I never had a phone for a good year unless Luzuko wanted to show me something. Hearing my mother's voice on one of the voice calls that Luzuko recorded, kept me going.

"Why don't you rest? It is still early," Njabulo says.

"I need to get ready for the day. She is going to wake up soon," I mumble. He moves the eyes to the baby. He hasn't touched her. He only brushed her hair with his fingers when I was feeding her

earlier.

"Did he hurt you?" he spits the words.

"It is over now Njabulo," I say. Luzuko didn't physically hurt me but he dealt with me emotionally. My eyes twinkles with tears and he doesn't ask further. We have his relationship to discuss but he is not bringing it up.

Njabulo hurt me more than Luzuko did and I truly understand. I understand that he had to move on with life. He had to.

He steps out of the room when I ask him to, so that I could

shower and get ready for the day. I join everyone after some time. They are sitting around the table, for breakfast.

"I made pancakes and orange juice," Thandeka says when I grab a chair.

"Lovely," I mumble while taking the seat. I wonder what they have been discussing because they are all tense around the table.

"Where are the kids?" I ask. I am sure Ciara is a big girl now and the twins – oh my God. They must be big boys now.

"Playing in Ciara's room. I will call them out after our breakfast,"

Thandeka says.

I pick the juice and take a sip.

The silence around the table is deafening. Everyone is probably dying to find out what happened. They are probably dying to ask where he is.

'I hope this stays between us. I pray it does,' Luzuko's words ring in my head.

Gundo tries to pull a topic about the weather, but it is dull in this room.

"Uhm... Thandeka and Gundo...thank you for picking me up last night," I say. Njabulo drops the fork on his plate.

"It's our pleasure," Thandeka says.

"You should have called me," he says and I laugh. They all look at each other. Njabulo shrugs.

"I didn't want someone to pick your phone like someone did in the morning," I respond.

Njabulo stares at me. He takes a deep breath – probably remembering that someone called and his girlfriend picked his phone.

"It's our pleasure, really. I am glad you called me," Thandeka quickly says.

"Can you please drive me home? My mother will refund you as soon

as we get there," I say.

"Oh...not a problem...right, babe?

I could drive there with the twins. Their granny asked me to bring them," Thandeka says to her husband.

"Yeah! Yeah!"

"I'll drive you there myself,"

Njabulo says, his eyes on the food.

"Thandeka will drive me there."

"I'll drive you there myself," he says and gets on his feet. "I'll drive you there my fucking self."

EPISODE 35

NJABULO

Ever since Maria introduced me to movies, I have started enjoying them. Before, I used to see them as a waste of time, but ever since then, they have become my escape. There is a new one playing - which I picked on the BoxOffice and I want Tinyiko to join me.

"Would you like butter salt on the popcorns?" she yells from the kitchen.

"Salt and vinegar," I call out. I prepare the sound system for the movie, pick the remotes and sit on the sleeper couch. It has been a lazy Saturday since morning. We didn't do much other than

swimming and cooking.

It is always great to have company! Gone are those days when I used to feel lonely to a point where I used to feel like pulling my own hair.

"I hope I didn't put too much spice," Tinyiko warns as she walks into the room. She hands me my popcorn and takes a seat next to me.

"Yukkk!!" I call out after tasting.

"Liar!" she says with a laugh. I am totally exaggerating. She spiced the popcorns perfectly.

The best thing about watching movies in the house is the fact

that you can fall asleep on the couch and repeat the movie the next day. It happened that Tinyiko and I fell asleep until my phone starts ringing on the coffee table.

Who would be calling me at this time of the night? I ignore the phone and lie back on the couch. The phone keeps ringing until I force myself to wake up.

"Dude," I mumble after answering the phone.

"Come to my house right now."

"What?"

"It is urgent," he says.

The bastard! It better be

important.

"What's up?"

"Maria. She is here," he says.

WTF? I hang up the phone and rush to get my sneakers and the car keys.

If there are cameras on the route to Gundo's house, all of them have clocked my abnormal driving. I have never sped like that ever in my life.

Gundo is in the kitchen when I get to their house. I am breathing heavily, ready to punch him if he is pulling a prank on me. I am ready to knock him on his face.

"Where is she?" I ask.

"Guest room," he says and points at the direction of the guest room. I storm towards the room. God am I dreaming?

She is not the Maria that left that night, but this is the angel I have been searching for. I don't know how many times I have thanked God for bringing her home at last. My chest is closing up but this is not the time to be a sissy. The love of my life is sitting in front of me.

Men don't cry but screw it.

fucking screw it. My eyes should be telling on me as I stare at

her. Her eyes seem like they can see through me.

Happiness. Guilt. Relief. Anger. Confusing – all emotions at once as I stare at the beauty that is before me. Only when I hold her do I know that it is real.

MY HEART! MY LOVE! ... is back.

My heart fell into a pit when Maria said, "I didn't want someone to pick your phone like someone did in the morning."

Knowing that she tried getting hold of me first and I was busy entertaining other things breaks my heart. If she knew how long I

had longed for a call from her. I longed for her for so long. I longed for her communication and this feels like a clap when I couldn't be there for her when she needed her most.

I left Gundo's house during breakfast and I am now driving home to get a few clothes for my visit to Venda. I pray Tinyiko didn't lie to me about the phone call. She picked my phone and I didn't mind BUT if she lied about not knowing who called, I will be so fucking pissed. I park on the drive-way and rush to the house. "Hey... I was worried about you,"

she says when she notices me walking into the house.

"Did you know?" I ask, my voice low. "Did you know?"

"Know what?"

"Who called my phone yesterday morning?"

"I couldn't hear anything...the phone was breaking," she responds.

"Don't lie to me," I yell at her face.

"What is...wrong with you. I didn't hear anything...I don't know who called you," she yells back.

"Don't you fucking touch my phone

ever again. Don't you dare my phone ever again," I say. I hate that I cannot control my anger right now.

Things are complicated.

I am fucking confused.

I turn and march to my office before I do something I regret.

I pull my luggage bag and throw the clothes in. I pick a few sneakers and packs my laptop bag and some paperwork that I am going to need. Maria doesn't seem to be coming back anytime soon and I will be camping in that village of hers until she decides to come back with me.

"Do you want to tell me what is going on?" Tinyiko asks. She eyes the bags which are on the bed. I move to the corner of the room to get all my chargers from the drawer.

"Maria is back," I say. She catches her breath.

This is fucked up! Even I know. This is fucked up, big time!! You know what is worse? The fact that she knows that I gave up on her too soon.

"How is she?" Tinyiko asks.

"She is fine. She came back with a baby. I am taking her home right now. I will be in Venda until she

decides to come," I say.

"What about the appointment with the doctor tomorrow? I wanted us to do the ultrasound tomorrow. I already booked."

I drop the bag on the floor and stare at her.

Is she hearing herself right now?

"Are you hearing yourself?" I ask.

"Are you hearing yourself? Did you hear anything I just said? I just told you that Maria is back. She has been lost and I have to be there for her....but here you are telling me about ultrasound. Are you hearing yourself?"

I don't wait for her answer. I

finish packing up my bags and pull each bag one after another. She cannot be serious.

The drive back to Gundo's house is short. I might have been pacing all the robots or speeding my arse off but I don't care.

Gundo is playing with the kids when I enter the house. This is the possible future for me – with two different baby mamas in the picture and children just a year apart. The boys run towards me when they notice me. Ciara smiles at me.

"Ciara, take the boys to your room," Gundo says. Without

protesting, Ciara takes each of their little hands and guides them down the corridor.

Gundo proceeds to the kitchen – to the fridge to be precise. He opens it and pulls a bottle of Heineken.

“Want one?” he asks.

“I’ll be driving. No.”

“Of course,” he says.

“Thanks for calling me last night.”

“Come on. It was the right thing to do,” he says and walks back towards the living room. He takes the couch and I stand. I just want to go to that guest room to

make sure that Maria is fine - I need to know that the baby is well too. "Look...I spoke to my dad; he will have a room available for you in his lodge as long as you need it. You know he has a lodge just nearby the village.

Alternatively, you can stay at home. I called them early."

"Thanks, man, I truly appreciate. I can never thank you enough," I say. There was no way that I was going to afford a hotel for a duration of - I don't know...so, I am grateful.

"You would do the same for me, man."

He is correct.

I need to see my girls, so I turn towards the corridor and head straight towards the guest room. My heart drops and breaks into pieces when I hear Maria sobbing. I stop at my tracks and rest my back on the wall.

"I had to protect him Thandeka...I had to protect him no matter what," Maria sobs. So she was protecting Luzuko all this time?

"How?" Thandeka asks quietly. I should leave but I am curious about how she could protect him. "He sent Njabulo to Durban...for a

fake meeting so that no one could be suspicious about the accident. I had to beg him not to kill Njabulo. I had to beg him. So, I begged him to spare Njabulo's life for anything he wanted..and what he wanted was to start a new life with him. I chose to leave with him so that Njabulo could leave."

WTF?

WTF?

WHAT?

I feel like a hammer has been thrown on my head. My heart drops to the floor.

"It is over now...Maria."

"It is over now but Njabulo decided to move on without me. That hurts me so so so so so much," I say.

Screw this!!!!!!

I march into the room. The girls turn towards me - both with teary eyes.

"I never moved on," I say. What am I saying when I have Tinyiko pregnant with my baby? My heart never moved on. It never. How do I explain to this woman who sacrificed her life for me that I never intended to move on but wanted something to hold me on. I need to live. I needed to

have a reason to live and God knows I didn't things I will tangle my love this way. I didn't know by me choosing to live, I'll be hurting people. I tried. I fucking tried. Everyone knows that I tried.

Thandeka clears her throat. I turn my gaze at her. she is probably proud that she was right by holding on to that hope that she had - hope that Maria was still alive.

I am beating myself right now for not waiting a little longer. I just needed to pull my head out of the water so I could breathe -

that is what happened.

"It's okay," Maria mumbles.

"It is not okay," I say while walking towards her. I kneel at the edge of the bed and pull her hands. "Please forgive me Maria, please forgive me."

"Njabulo, please," she mumbles while pulling her hands from me. Those nightmares I had for eight months - I am living the nightmares that I kept dreaming about. "I am ready to go."

I get on my feet with my tail between my legs.

"I'll take the things to the car,"

I say before picking the camp cot which is already folded and set on the floor.

Thandeka follows me to the car, with a baby car seat and a few blankets. These belong to Gundo's children and I would love to replace them soon.

"I would have loved to take her home."

"We have spoken about this," I say. I couldn't protect her the last time and this is my opportunity to redeem myself.

Nothing is going to ever happen to her or my baby. Ever. Nothing. This time I am going to need to

die first.

"She is going to need time; you know, right?" Thandeka asks.

"She is going to need time to get over what she went through. You had a reason to move and she understands...but give her time to grieve her hopes."

That is supposed to make me feel better but it only makes me shittier.

Maria's mother almost collapses when she sees Maria stepping out of the car. It took us so long to arrive since we had to stop for Maria to change the baby and

also I was driving like a normal person. All the way from Johannesburg to Venda, Maria was on the call with her mother. I never get used to Maria crying. It is worse now that she has thrown herself in her mother's arms. I swallow hard and try not to watch because it breaks my heart.

It breaks my heart that I, out of all people, failed her so much. I failed her. I failed the woman I love. I failed the woman who sacrificed herself for me.

Maria's brother also wrapped his arms around his sister. It is too

sad to watch but I have nowhere else to be but here.

"I have someone I want you to meet," Maria says walking around the car to the other side of the car. She unbuckles the baby and picks her up.

I hold my breathe when Maria walks towards her mother with a baby.

"This one kept me alive," Maria says.

"Is she my granddaughter?" she asks. Only now do I breathe. I watch as Maria moves the baby from her arms to her mother's.

"Yes."

"Ahh...I didn't know I was praying for you too," Maria's mothers say as she cradles the baby. Maria smiles – a smile so contiguous.

After unpacking the items for Maria and the baby, I leave to check-in at the lodge. I needed to give them time and I needed to be alone to beat myself up for being a bastard of a man.

Mr Radzilani made sure they booked me in one of the best rooms. This is going to be my home for a few weeks or even months. I take some time to unpack. It is already late so I

only make a phone call to Maria's mother to ensure that they are all fine. I decided to give them space to bond and to reconnect. I am just a few minutes away if I am needed.

The next morning after breakfast (breakfast I didn't even touch), I drive to Maria's home. Her mother will have to forgive me for just showing up before I even take her hand in marriage or pay the damages for the baby. Maria is cleaning the yard when I park under a tree in her yard. I didn't expect her to be cleaning around. I expected her

to relax and no lift a finger.

"Did you sleep well?" I ask while walking towards her.

Fuck! It is just after winter but this place is blazing hot.

"Yeah," she responds before picking the broom and the dustpan. She walks towards the end of the yard and throws the dustpan and broom in an old bucket.

"How is she? The baby," I ask.

"She is fine," she responds. She is cold towards me. It isn't like I expected her to be jolly with me. We have a lot to work on. She calls her brother to bring me a

chair. He rushes with a chair and places it just outside the kitchen.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"No!" I don't have any appetite. She grabs the other chair that her brother brings out.

"Maria, I am sorry about everything that happened," I say. Yesterday when driving here, she always asked me to sleep when I brought the topic up. We never got a chance to chat.

"You don't have to be sorry."

"I have to be. I overheard you and Maria...I am the reason he took you and it breaks my heart

that you did everything to protect me and I failed you."

"It was my choice."

"I know. I know...but ... I..."

Shit! I feel like a loser.

"Look Njabulo...I have a lot to deal with right now."

"Right! I know. I know."

Thandeka already warned me.

"And I need space to get my head around things," she says. "I had hoped for things to be different than I got them...and I am not okay..."

"What can I do to make things fine?"

"Give me space," she says. This is

not the answer I was looking forward to. "Give me space. Go back to Joburg. I need to start my life all over again. I need to start from the beginning."

"Let's start all over again. Let's start our lives all over again with our baby."

"No!"

"No?"

"I think it will best for us to separate. I need to focus on myself and the baby. I don't want to be dealing with your issues with your new partner. I don't have any energy left in me. Believe me."

"Maria!"

"Njabulo, please. I have no energy left in me. I am exhausted. Can I use this energy to focus on myself?"

"No!" I say.

She gets on her feet like a joke and leaves me sitting alone. She walks into the house and shuts the door – just like that.

Yah neh!!

EPISODE 36

MARIA

I didn't mean to leave Njabulo outside the way I did. I don't want to say things I don't mean because I am so angry right now. He cannot boss me around when I am telling him something this important.

I need space.

I need to breathe.

I need to make a choice about my life but here he is, bossing me around when we are not addressing his relationship status. It was unfair of me to expect him to wait for me when he didn't know where I am. But coming back to find his girlfriend

pregnant with his child – what a slap.

Okay, I am not angry at him. I am just disappointed and hurt.

Nobody, even him, must tell me about love. What is the point of holding on to love when it hurts like this? It is painful to love somebody and my heart cannot take another heartache right now.

“Maria! Maria!” Njabulo calls out while knocking on the kitchen door. Is he not disrespectful right now? Isn't he just selfish?

“What?” I snap after opening the door.

"Please, let's talk."

"I have nothing to say to you," I mumble. "I said what I wanted to say. I need some time."

He stares at me and I don't move my eyes from him. I am not intimidated and I am not going to back down on my word. I need some time to collect my thoughts.

"How long should I stay away from you?" he asks. We are going somewhere right now.

"Give me two weeks," I say. He will be gone by then - I am completely sure. Johannesburg is waiting for him.

"Fine! But can I come see my

daughter at least?"

"Fine by me... I just won't sit down with you for a chat."

"I understand."

"Thank you."

"I love you," he says - his eyes begging me to say it back. I won't and I don't. It is this love that has gotten me into this mess at the first place. It will be stupid of me to fall right back at it like I haven't learnt a lesson. He leaves me standing by the door watching him. It hurts to see him leave - even though I am the one who ordered him to. This is what you get when your

head and heart collide.

'I need to find myself.'

It has been a few days now and Njabulo has honoured my request of leaving me alone. I bet he has driven back to Johannesburg to pick up where he left his relationship.

It hurts but I have to live with that pain. What pains me the most is the jealousy I have for his girlfriend. She is going to experience the motherhood like every woman deserve to. I have to afford her that opportunity. He is going to the visit the doctor with her and he is possibly going

to hold her hand when she gives birth – something I never had an opportunity to do.

My pregnancy was so lonely. The only people I interacted with were Luzuko's friends. He had a doctor friend who would do check-ups every second month and load my vitamins. This was after I begged Luzuko to take me to clinic for check-ups. His friend attended to me like a private client. Luzuko never left me alone with his friends and I knew that they had an idea that I didn't want to be there. It is either money talks or the world is just

filled with filthy people. My child birth was the worst. It was around two men - Luzuko and his friend. He never told me his name but I am grateful that he didn't agree to take my baby away that exact minute after giving birth. Luzuko wanted him to take the baby with him. He refused, with a reason that the baby needs to be taken care of by its mother for a little while.

Now, Tinyiko will experience all of that - with him.

I shake my thoughts away and shift them to the good news:

Dikeledi is coming to see me. the

minute I called her, she told me that her boyfriend is bringing her here. I have already cooked lunch - all I am doing is waiting here for my friend to arrive.

It takes her just another hour to arrive. She is the first person to actually laugh when she sees me. She hasn't changed a bit. I give her a moment with the baby because she cannot get over the new member to the family. My photocopy!

"I didn't believe it when you called."

"How have you been?" I ask as I lead the way to the couches.

"Life has been hell," she comments. Her voice is cracking. It must have been hectic for her. I bet people wanted answers from her. We stayed together and were inseparable. Njabulo told me that she had to pack my room away with Thandeka. It must have been painful.

"Haaa.. you don't say," I gasp while taking her hand. She has a ring on. "Are you married?"

"Mo'guy wants to wife me," she says before we both laugh. It was about time they got married - they really love each other.

"I am happy for you," I say.

"Thank you! Njabulo must have been over the moon when he saw you. We almost buried your man. The guy almost went bankrupt searching for you," she says - exaggerating a lot of course. I drop my eyes. "Haw, what is wrong?"

"We are no longer together," I say. She almost drops her jaws on the floor. "He had moved on with someone and I don't want to get my heart broken again."

"That's bull," she says. "There is no way."

"That's what I thought too...but he is expecting a baby with

her...and you know I don't ever desire to be a Diana in his life," I say. I have told her about how bad Diana was to Thandeka and I don't want to turn into that type of a woman. Dikeledi doesn't say anything. First time ever that she is speechless.

"Wow!" she finally comments.

"Anyway...enough about me. Tell me about your wedding. When is it?"

"In three months...and you are the maid of honour," she happily says. I beam at her.

"A great reason to start jogging so that I fit in your bridesmaid

dress," I say.

At least! Something to look forward too.

THREE WEEKS LATER

"Her name is Thabelo." My mom named her the same evening we arrived. She said we are where we are because of prayer. I think the name suit her best. It will be a reminder of how great God has been in our lives. I will forever be grateful. No wonder I stayed sane the whole year away from everyone. My mother's prayer kept me in one peace.

To be honest, Thabelo was a shock to me until I remember the

night of the Josh's pre-party, Njabulo and I had a marathon of unprotected sex and Luzuko got me before I could even purchase the morning-after pills.

"I used to wake up Njabulo for a prayer. Just like most people, it got too much for him. Forgive him," Mom had said a few times. She has sensed the tension when she mentions his name and she tries not to bring him up when it is unnecessary. The last thing I need is people forcing me to do things I don't want.

I was taking a nap until now when Thabelo is crying.

"I'll take her," Mom says as she enters the bedroom.

"Thank you," I mumble.

"Njabulo is here," she says. I drop my head back to the pillow. He is forever here ever since two weeks ago. He stayed away for just a few days and thereafter started showing up, uninvited. He doesn't seem like someone who is leaving Venda anytime soon.

"You can take the baby to him," I say.

"Of course," she says while pulling the nappy bag from the bed. She changes Thabelo while I watch.

"Why are you nice to him?" I ask.

It feels like they have created a bond while I was gone. At times when he is here, I would hear them laughing from the living room. I never thought my mother would be this accommodative.

Sometimes he would join them for lunch while I nap.

"Let him see his daughter," she says. I respect that, that's why I don't stand in the way. What I won't do is to chill with him like everything is fine. I don't want to be tempted to ask how things are with his girlfriend. I don't want to know.

"I won't stop him."

When done freshening Thabelo up, she picks her and heads out of the room. She will feed him as well.

I cover my face with a throw because I am going to hear Njabulo's voice. I wish the walls were strong enough to keep his voice away from me. It still does things in the pit of my stomach. "There is my girl," Njabulo says - a smile visible from his voice. I cannot see him but I can easily imagine the wide smile he pulls when he is in love. I have figured - he is in love with Thabelo.

"One would swear we are already

feeding her solids," Mom says. Why is she so nice to him? I still wonder.

"She is a Buthelezi, this one. Shenge," Njabulo responds. There is silence for a little while until Njabulo clears his throat and asks, "How is Maria?"

"She is well. She is taking a nap." Silence.

"I need to pay damages for the baby. What am I supposed to do?" he asks.

Njabulo!

"We were supposed to go to your family u vhiga mulandu...and then you would do what is right. Maybe

it is too soon for Maria right now."

Thank Goodness. The damages are unnecessary, really and they the last thing on my mind.

"I understand."

"I hope she forgives me. I should have listened to you."

"She will come around. Everyone is allowed to be disappointed. You know we get more hurt when we don't get what we expected."

"I understand."

Njabulo sounds so different whenever he is chatting to my mother. I don't know if it is the respect he has or if it is guilt but

they have become very close.

There is no way I am going to fall asleep again. I decide to wake up. Njabulo will have to leave first before I go to the living room.

"Did you manage to see Pastor Ndouvhada?" Mom asks.

"I did. He asked me to see him tomorrow for another chat. He is a very wise man of God," Njabulo says.

Oh, wow! I had a chat with Mrs Ndouvhada during the week. It is always best to have someone to talk to. It will do him great.

I pull the headsets from the drawer, put on some music and

starts packing things around. I will have to do laundry tomorrow morning. Hopefully on Monday I will go to the bank to unfreeze my bank accounts. The money I probably have in my bank account can push me for a few months before I get a job. Mom doesn't want me to start looking for a job as yet. She is worried about me but I need to get a job very soon. I need to get my life back to normal. Dikeledi revived that part last week when she was here. She made sure we had some time off - for my sake. If it wasn't for Thabelo, she would have

taken me to a club.

I wish a lot can go back to normal but some things will never be the same. It kills me that I will never be able to model again.

Apart from the baby fats, I don't think I will be able to leave my daughter to pursue that.

Things are different now that Thabelo is here. Very different.

I feel a tap on my shoulder and I almost jump. With one hand on my chest, I pull the headsets off with the other. I have been folding Thabelo's clothes into the white drawer my Mom got for me. "I am so sorry. I have been

knocking for a little while. I thought you were sleeping," Njabulo says. Thabelo is sleeping so peacefully in his strong arms. "Uhm...sure..." I say. "You can put her down."

He moves to the cot which I had neatly laid and carefully puts his daughter down. He has gotten hold of things – he knows how to handle a baby with care.

I watch as he covers the baby with a tiny receiver and stares down at her.

"She looks exactly like you."

"She does."

He stands up straight and stares

at me.

"How are you?"

"Fine. You?"

"This place is flipping hot, man," he says. "But I am fine."

I smile. It really is hot for someone who is not from around.

"It really is hot."

"Can we talk?" he humbly asks.

"You can wait outside," I say. He walks out and I only follow behind a few minutes later. He is sitting just outside the kitchen door, on the floor. I join him.

"When are you going back to work?" I ask. He doesn't look like someone who is leaving and I am

not going back to Johannesburg. "I have set an office for myself at the lodge," he responds. "Mr Radzilani allows me to use his office sometimes when I need to use the printer or something. He allows me to go through his books. Maybe he can hire me part time for extra cash."

Extra cash?

Since when does he need extra cash?

"When are you going back to Johannesburg? There is nothing for you here," I say, making sure that we do not discuss unnecessary things.

"There is you and Thabelo," he sadly says.

"Njabulo!"

"I am sorry about what happened. I am truly sorry. I don't know how else to apologise. I am so sorry."

"You don't need to apologise."

I am calmer now.

"I do. I don't even know how to live with myself," he says. It breaks my heart to see him like this.

"How is Tinyiko?" I ask. maybe we have to touch this topic to remind him that his problems are bigger than he thinks.

"Fine."

"What plans do you have with her?"

"No plans."

"Of course, all men would say the same."

"Give me a break Maria. Give me a damn break."

"You are the one who wanted to chat."

"Tinyiko and I are not in a relationship. She was just one person who was there. And...when we went for a baby...it was because she wanted a sperm donor. She wanted a baby so bad and I thought it was a great

idea to jump in so that I can find something to focus other than my loss. I never intended to be in a relationship with her."

"Sperm donor?"

"Yes!"

"So, what is your arrangement? You donated the sperm and then? You didn't sleep with her?" I ask. He stares away. I thought so.

"It meant nothing. She means nothing."

"I am not going to judge you for anything. You had rights to do what you did.

And...now...unfortunately, you have to be there for her. You both

have to finish what you have started. She needs you."

"I need you."

"She needs you more."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because I don't want to go back to a place where love takes everything away from me. I was in this mess because I loved you whole heartedly. As twisted as it is, Luzuko thought he loved me that much to keep me with him. I don't want Tinyiko to turn crazy on me and do the unthinkable. I have Thabelo to watch over. I rather stay away from any harm."

"No one is going to harm you."

"Remember how we got together? Luzuko was broken and I can imagine how Tinyiko was. Do you think she is going to let you walk away from this again?"

"Tinyiko and I are not in a relationship. We are adults. We spoke."

"You are going to have a baby together. Why don't you focus on that for now? I don't want to jump back into a relationship now and go crazy when you return to Joburg..back to live your life."

"You will go back with me and stay with me. I will always be by

your side. No one will harm you."

"I am not going to Joburg."

"What do you mean?"

"I am going to get a job around here and settle. Joburg is not for me."

He takes a deep breath before saying, "I will relocate to here. I am sure Gundo and I can work out something."

"Are you hearing yourself?" I ask.

"Yes. I will just sell the house. I need the money anyway. I will sell my Joburg house and get something around here and also start my life afresh," he says.

"As long as you are part of it." I

laugh but he doesn't even smile.

"Maria, I am serious. I am willing to drop everything for you. For us. For you and Thabelo."

"Njabulo."

"Please. Let me do this," he says.

EPISODE 37 (Unedited)

NJABULO

"You know Njabulo, that is the last thing I would ever expect from you," Maria. Exactly what I thought she would say. She could sacrifice her life for me but she can never allow me to do the same. "I cannot expect you to

pack away your life just to come here and set yourself for failure."

"How so?"

"I wouldn't want you to drop everything...only to find out that this relationship is no longer worth it."

This relationship is not worth it?
Is she hearing herself.

"What do you want me to do?" I ask. "Tell me what I need to do."

"Nothing!" she whispers.

Wow!

I take a deep breath and stare at her. This woman right here has my heart. She has all of my heart.

"I'll give you more time to think about it. For now, I will be looking for ways to start over. I am also bankrupt and I am building my empire from scratch. If it wasn't for Gundo jumping in when things were bad, I would have been in a mess with the banks. Maybe I don't need to relocate here but I am going to need to move out of my house."

"What? Why?" she enquires.

I have been trying to keep things together but things are bad, really bad.

"I had a lot of people to pay for information and for hunting down

Luzuko. It kills me that none of those people were helpful but I had to commit to my request," I say. "And...don't worry, I will get back everything back to normal. I will take care of you and my daughter."

She stares at me for so long until she asks, "You were almost bankrupt?"

"Relocating will be the best idea to start from the ground."

"Dikeledi was not exaggerating?"

"About?"

"She said they almost buried you and you almost went bankrupt," she responds.

I huff out a chuckle, "I couldn't eat or sleep. And believe me, every penny I spend on your search was worth it. I just wish we could have found you sooner. I wish to have found Luzuko and kill him myself. I got a lead last week though..."

"What?"

"I have some people searching for him in North West and there is a lead."

"Why are you searching for him?"

"I will not rest until I know that he is in a lunatic hospital or he is a dead man," I say. She sees concerns but I don't need her

approval. She sees the best in people and in this case, it could be a wrong move. Changes are he might hunt for her when his head gets twisted again. I want to make sure that he is out of the picture. The biggest mistake I made was to take things easy for him. His words still ring in my head every day. His words: I am going down with you.

"I am sorry about what you went through when I was gone," she sadly says. She doesn't have to apologise. I pull her into my arms and let her rest her head on my chest.

"I love you so much...I had to do everything I could. I had to do everything I could," I say and plant a kiss on her forehead. We are standing in the middle of the kitchen and this right here is the closest we have gotten since we shared a bed in Gundo's house.

"Can I ask you for a favour?"

"Anything?" anything except leaving her alone. I am not ever letting her go. Ever.

"Go sort things out with Tinyiko before you think about us moving forward. You are not going to move here but sort out your life before expecting me and Thabelo

to be with you."

"Come with me?"

"No. Let me stay here with my mom...just for a little while," she says. There is hope. A little bit of hope.

"When am I going to see you?" I ask. I am not ready to pack away and drive back to Joburg. I still want to spend time with my daughter and make up for all the lost time.

"Maybe you can drive me to the mall on Monday. I need to unfreeze my bank account," she says.

"Without a doubt!"

Mr Radzilani's staff know me by name. they know my schedule and all my preferences. I just walked into their little restaurant and the waiter asked if he should bring a glass of Jameson.

"On the rocks," I confirm my drink order before walking to the balcony to set my computer to work. I try to respond to all emails sent by Gundo or any of our client. Just when one email pops up, I know I am in fucking shit. I forgot to attend to this client a week ago.

Just when I am about to respond

to the email, my phone rings. It is Gundo. He probably got a notification that I finally opened the email.

"Hello Radzilani," I say.

"Are you well?" he asks.

"Other than the fact that this place is unnecessarily hot...I am fine," I respond. I have been to places but I have never to been hell like this past week. I am from KZN, and as much it is the warmest place in the country, Limpopo fucking takes the cup. "Ngobeni Corporation," Gundo says.

"I won't try to run around the

bush... I forgot," I say. I haven't even opened the client's client.

"Njabulo? Are you kidding me?"

"No."

"Ngobeni Corporation is looking for a report back and are you telling me that you never worked on anything when I specifically asked you to handle just this one account?"

"Relax!"

"Are you insane?"

"Don't raise your voice at me.

Give me a break. Give me a break right now," I say. Gundo is the last person to act like I am

inhuman and don't have feelings. He - out of all people - should just shut his fucking mouth. I have been cleaning his mess when life messes with him.

"Dude! This one was going to redeem you."

"I don't care about any of that." He sighs deeply. I can easily hear him from here.

"How is everything?" he asks. A question he should have started with.

"She doesn't want to go back to Joburg with me. And I don't want to leave her and the baby here."

"What are you going to do?"

"If she didn't bash my idea of relocating to Venda...I would have been packing my life away to start my life in Venda. I think...hey...I don't know," I say. He doesn't say anything. He knows exactly what I am talking about because he has been through more shit than I have been through. Had I known that life brings shit to all of us, I would have stopped living there and then.

"Oh...well...who am I to judge you?" he says.

"I will work on the client portfolio

and thereafter email my report before forwarding it to Ngobeni Corp," I promise.

"Sure! I will hear from you soon," Gundo says, "Thandeka sends her greetings."

"Please put her on loud speaker, I want to ask her something."

"Sure," Gundo says.

"Hi Njabulo. How are you and how is she and the baby?" Thandeka's asks. I am on loud speaker now.

"She is holding up. Thabelo is growing faster than I thought. Can I as for a favour" I say.

"Yeah?"

"I am going on a date with

her...and I was wondering what to gift her...do you have any idea?" I ask. I am aware that I am just accompanying her to the banks but I will definitely ask her to have lunch with me and I hope to get her something special - but nothing romantic as she is still restricting my love.

"I think I have an idea," she says and tells me what it is; including where exactly to get it. "That'll be perfect. Thank you," I say. "Gundo, I'll be there on Tuesday evening so I will be back at the office on Wednesday. I will make sure that my ish is sorted

out and nothing is behind
schedule."

"Please!"

I think Thandeka has a fact.
Maria is going to love me for the
gift that I am going to get for
her.

The nightmares still haunts me
now and then. They are always
about Maria crying and questening
me why I moved on with her.
sometimes I would see Maria in
tears and it would hurt me. I
wish to move on from this
chapter. I am parked outside the
gate, waiting for Maria to show

up. Her brother saw me and he will probably tell her that I am waiting for her.

This feels like a blind date. We are just going to the banks but I am excited as if we are going on our first date. Maybe it is because this is the first time that I am going to spend time with her.

I fix the collar of the golf shirt as I wait for my girlfriend.

My jaws drop to the floor when I notice her walking out of the gate. She has the simplest white T on and a pair of dark navy jeans.

She looks fucking sexy like I have

never seen her before. it could be the little weight she has gained but boy oh boy does she look perfect. I quickly rub my penis so it behaves while she walks to the car.

"She is wearing a pair of wedges," I tell myself, hoping that I will be turned off. But NO - I am bloody turned on and it bloody hurts because she is not going to act on my need.

She greets as she gets into the front seat. "I am so sorry. It felt like Thabelo could feel that I am leaving her for a few hours. She has been restless since a few

hours ago."

"Don't worry. I understand," I mumble. She doesn't need an excuse to be late. I would have understood if she needed more time to do her hair and get her outfit together – she looks perfect right now.

I start the car and carefully drive us out of the village until we come across the main road. We have been silent ever since she got into the car.

I don't want to turn her off so I let her be and drive us in silence until we reach Thohoyandou. It doesn't take us long until the

bank teller that we need an affidavit from the police station, stating that the people who froze the account follow the procedures and do what is best. Without hesitating, we line up at the police station and wait for our turn.

"Do you know who was handling your accounts in Gauteng?"

Sergeant Khorommbi asks as he leads the way to the small office at the back. I have Maria's hand in mine because I saw this one coming and I don't know how much she is prepared.

"Mr Dube," I advise. Mr Dube is

one of the people that I have paid a lot of money to. I'll be lucky if Mr Dube remembers me.

He does remember me and he gave Sergeant Khorommbi a few pointers to our case. This made everything to run smoothly.

The first thing he does when we get to his dark office is to call Mr Dube to get an update on Maria Sadiki's case. Just as expected, they have given up on the case. I don't mention that I have sent some guys and there is a lead. If I do, I might jeopardize my research.

"Miss Sadiki, is there something

that you can tell us about your capturer," Mr Khorommbi asks.

"What about him?" Maria asks.

It looks like she doesn't want to entertain this topic.

Unfortunately, this has to be done. If there is any helpful information, I am going to need to forward to my guys.

"Did he violate you in any way?" he asks.

"He didn't want me to have contact with everyone other than himself."

"Did he hurt you? In any way?" I ask because I have been waiting for an answer to this question. I

have been waiting for a reason to kill him if he has laid his hand on her.

"No, he didn't. He believed that I was his soul mate so...he felt like keeping me with him was going to change my mind."

"Do you remember the surroundings?" the detective asks.

"He put something to obstruct me but what I know is that it was in the middle of nowhere. It was a farm house or a vocational house."

"Would you direct us there?"

"He had me wear a sack to

obstruct me from getting his routes. I just remember that we drove for so long to reach the hospital where he left me. He drove for so many hours."

"I see," the detective says.

After what seems like a decade, we leave the police with an affidavit and a certificate to unfreeze the accounts. When her mother and I froze the accounts, we had hoped that we were going to trace her whereabouts with this exercise.

She agrees for me to take her for lunch after the bank - exactly what I have been hoping for.

There is hope! Even though I am not supposed to get excited too quick, I am super excited.

Unlike Johannesburg, they don't have many options to dine but I have a perfect place. Mr Radzilani told me about a new luxurious hotel that re-opened in Sibasa and I am taking her there.

She keeps telling me that she misses Thabelo but I am not hearing any of that. I need this date to be perfect.

"Wow, this is beautiful," she says as I help her out of the car.

"It is."

"You didn't have to bring me

here," she says while I take her hand to guide her into the restaurant of the hotel.

"You deserve this and more," I say.

We get the best seat, as I have arranged. I hope this work. If it doesn't, then I will know I have tried my very best.

We fine dine for the first time in a year and two months. It feels like I am courting her all over again. Again and again, my heart is content with her. My heart is content with loving Maria.

"Thank you for this," she mumbles. I am glad that she is

enjoying. Even though I have forced her into this, she is enjoying herself.

"I have something for you," I say. This is funny but Thandeka told me that the idea is going to work. If it doesn't, I will blame Thandeka because she is supposed to know what her friend would love for a gift.

"What is it?" she asks.

"Give me a minutes," I respond while getting on my feet and heading to the car. when I return, I had to stand by the reception, watching her eat each bite of the steak she ordered.

Maria is still as perfect as ever. The more I look at her, the more I fall in love with. This feeling I have never felt before. I shake my head and cross the reception to the reception.

I place the small gift bag in front of her.

"You were serious. You got something for me," she says. "You shouldn't have."

I smile at her instead of telling her that she deserves the universe and everything perfect in it.

"Finish eating first," I say. I am enjoying watching her take each

bite of the juicy steak. Our date was necessary. It feels like she needed this outing more than I did.

"I hope it isn't Thabelo's gift," she says while cleaning her hands with a wet-wipe.

"Apparently, this is going to blow you away," I report. Apparently – according to Thandeka.

She pulls the gift bag and pulls out the gift. Like sunrise early in the morning, her face lights up. Watching her picking the books and paging it, fulfills me. From today, going forward, I am going to trust Mrs Radzilani's gift

suggestions.

"Wow! I wasn't expecting this," she says while turning her gift over and over again.

"Do you like it?" I ask, even though her smile is too broad for me to miss the excitement. This is the first time I see her smile widely like this.

"Are you insane? This is a novel by Takalani M. Of course, I love it. Thandeka and I have been waiting for *The Rival* for months and monthths...." She says but not finish the line. She has missed a lot when she was taken away from us. It is only our task to fill

her in.

"I am glad you like it," I say.

"Like it? I love it!" she says while paging through the book. I create content for books and magazines and never have I thought that one could be this excited to receive a book.

She smiles at me. I pray she doesn't say anything hurtful. I am not ready to have this bubble popped. If only she could stay this happy.

"Can we pay the bill?" she asks.

"Of course," I say before calling the waiter to bring the bill and pay for it.

I drive us back to the village in a great mood. This was a fruitful day. Even when I have to leave for Joburg tomorrow, I have hope that I will return back here to my old Maria. My old charismatic Maria.

When I get to her home, I pack outside the gate.

"Thank you for lunch...and for the gift," she says while getting her handbag from the back seat.

"It is only my pleasure," I respond.

"Travel safely tomorrow."

"I will come for you," I respond.

"I will come back for you and

Thabelo." She looks at me.

"Maria, believe me, I am coming back for you and my girl."

"Sure!"

What? Did she just say, sure?

She drops a quick kiss on my cheek and jumps out of the car.

A smirk creeps to my lips.

There is hope! There is so much hope here!

EPISODE 38 (Unedited)

NJABULO

I feel like I am betraying Maria and Thabelo all over again?

Watching Maria walking around

the room, trying to calm Thabelo from crying, melts my heart. My girls. It makes it even harder for me to leave for Johannesburg right now.

It has been a month, I need to get back to the office and work things out before I mess more portfolios.

"Let me take her," I say while getting up. Maria's mother has showed me how to carry her so many times that I have mastered it. Maria helps me to put her up my chest before I stroll around the room to soothe her.

"Maybe it is the heat," Maria says while dropping on the couch. "No. She can feel that daddy is leaving for a little while," I say and smirk at Maria who rolls her eyes at me. Anyway, I agree. It should be the heat. This place is too hot!

I mumble a song in her tiny ears while walking around the house. This, I am going to miss when I am in Joburg. If I can have it my way, I was going to beg Maria to come with me. She has made it clear that she doesn't want to leave. I don't want to piss her off when we are making this

progress. Thabelo stops crying as I cuddle her around the room.

Minutes later, I can feel her body relaxing against my chest.

"Is she falling asleep?" Maria whispers. I turn Thabelo's face towards Maria. "Almost."

Fifteen more minutes and she is snoring just like Maria. I lay her in her cot bed and return to the living room.

"I have got magic hands," I say.

"You do," she says and gets up. I follow her to the kitchen.

"I will be back soon," I announce – not that she will be sad when I am gone. I will be the one to miss

her and my daughter.

"Yeah!" she says. She walks towards the basin to wash the baby bottles. I follow her and hug her from behind. Her body stiffens while my boner gets even stiffer. I miss her so much. I miss her touch. I miss her everything. I pray that she doesn't push me away. I can tell that she is uncomfortable but she is trying her best to control her breathing.

"I love you so much Maria. I am going to do everything in my power to make us work," I say. I need to assure her as much as I

can. I am going back to Johannesburg but not to continue a life with Tinyiko – I want her to know that.

I kiss her on her shoulder and squeeze her tightly before letting go. I don't get a kiss on the cheek like last night but I am grateful that she didn't kick me out or push me away when I tried hugging her.

"Tell me when you get home," she says. I like that.

"I will definitely do," I respond.

The house is huge and quiet. I can tell that Tinyiko used to do visits here. it is clean and there

are fresh roses on the dining table.

I drop my bags in the bedroom before taking a quick shower and getting into a pair of shorts and vest.

Damn! I like how it is softly raining outside. I got here just minutes before seven and it was already starting to rain. I offload the fish and chips takeaway I got on my way to the house and thereafter settle at the porch. I am going to need a safety net for the swimming pool – for when Maria and Thabelo move here. My wish is to find ways not to sell

this house. I would love my family to move here. The house parties I used to host are no longer to be hosted here.

As promised, I make a call to Maria to tell her that I have arrived. Thabelo was yelling in the background and we had to cut our conversation short.

There is progress and I am going to make her proud.

I head back to the kitchen and wash the plate before searching the cupboards for something to drink. No Jameson but a bottle of wine.

I can do with a glass.

The key on the kitchen door turn. I turn towards it. Tinyiko walks inside and quickly takes off the leather jacket that she has on. "You should get an umbrella," I say and she jumps.

"What the hell Njabulo???" she yells when she notices that the voice is coming from me. She doesn't have any bag on her, so I guess she was passing.

"Sorry!"

"Dammit! You should stop sneaking on people," she says while taking her shoes off. I notice a swollen belly when she hangs the jacket on high chair.

"How have you been?" I ask.

"Fine. Thanks," she says while walking further into the house like she owns the place. Okay, she kinda did when I was away.

One thing I respect about Tinyiko is her ability not to nag a person. Never did I receive a call from her when I was in Venda.

That is how matured she is.

I don't like how she crosses the room to the study while I watch. What if Maria was here? It was going to be a war. I wait for her to do the rounds – probably this is how she used to do so when I was away.

"You should have told me you were back. I came by to check that everything is okay...and I usually make sure that people think we are home."

We?

That has to be corrected.

"Thanks...for checking the place when I was away."

"I don't mind. I used to watch all the TV channels without anyone interrupting me."

I pick my wine glass and walk back to the couch. I missed the rain. She comes and joins me.

"We need to talk," I say before a deepest sigh.

"How is she?"

I stare at Tinyiko, wondering why she cares, but don't ask. Instead, I say, "She and the baby are fine. My girl's name is Thabelo. It means prayer in Tshivenda."

"I went to see the doctor. The boy is growing fast," she responds as what sounds like a competition. Is she not acknowledging my daughter?

So, it is a boy!

"Is there any problem?" I ask.

Why does she sound like she is bitter when I mentioned my girl?

"No! I was just feeling unsettled last week and went to see the

gynae. She said not to worry, the boy is doing just fine."

"Tinyiko, we need to talk," I say.

"You are leaving me, aint you?"

she says.

Leaving her?

"Come on Tinyiko. You and I had an arrangement? And...I promised Maria that I will sort things before she returns home.

"Before she returns home."

"Yes," I say.

"So, where do we stand?" she asks.

"Where do we stand?" I ask.

"Tinyiko come on. You needed a baby, I needed a baby...and we

made just that. Why do you have to make me feel guilty about that?"

"Am I making you feel guilty?"

"Sure you are," I say.

"It isn't my intention to make you feel guilty. I am just shocked at how suddenly you have changed your mind. You act like we also didn't have plans for this baby together," she says. I know for sure that she just wants to know where we stand. I want to be with Maria and I don't want to disappoint her by continuing to complicate my life. If I don't put an end to this, things are going to get out of hand. The last thing I

need is my baby mama and my girlfriend to fight over me. Even though I know both Maria and Tinyiko, would never fight, I don't want to disappoint Maria or lead Tinyiko on.

"I will be there for you. Just not the way I had initially suggested," I say. Initially, Tinyiko was going to move in here so that I can easily take care of her. But, now, I rather have the room ready for my daughter. I will take care of my son. I will just need to find a way to make everything work.

Tinyiko gets on her feet!

"I will get my things," she says before walking into the house.

Yey!!!

I get on my feet and follow her behind. She grabs a few of her clothes she had in the closet. She picks two boxes of shoes and shove them into a bag.

"Tinyiko, please don't get worked up...you are going to upset the baby too," I advise.

"The baby! That's all you care about, right?" she asks, not stopping her task in hand. She marches out of the room and down the staircase to the kitchen. I watch as she grabs

the leather jacket and puts it on.
"Here!" she drops the set of keys
on the table. "Your house keys."
"Thank you!"

"It was only my pleasure!" She
zips the leather dark and jump
into the dark.

That was easy but not easy.

As promised, on Wednesday
morning I went to the office,
ready to redeem myself. Anza
didn't book me for any meeting so
that I could catch up on what
has been happening when I was
away. Gundo and Phuti filled me in
on a meeting they had with

Ngobeni Corporation. I am given until Monday to report back to the client.

Monday is perfect. I use the rest of the week and weekend, putting up a presentation on Ngobeni Corporation.

"Can you please get me a cup of black coffee, no sugar," I tell Anza as I get into the office.

"Yes sir," she responds.

I get into the office and set my laptop on the table. I have rehearsed the presentation more than ten times - I am going to impress them this afternoon.

Anza walks in with a tray. She

places a mug of black coffee on the table. I need this.

"Can you confirm the meeting time?"

"With?"

"Ngobeni Corporations," I advise.

"Eleven o'clock," she says.

Eleven o'clock is perfect. I can go throw a few notes and make sure I have everything covered for the meeting.

Time flies when you are busy. I only buried my head on my laptop for fifteen minutes and the next thing the clock ticks ten thirty. I am getting nervous by the minute. This client is going to

redeem me.

A soft knock goes on my door.

Where is Anza to attend to this?

The knock disturbs me again until

I call out, "Come in."

My guest opens the door!

What a surprise!

"Tinyiko??" I call out – in shock. I

didn't expect to see her here...on a

Monday morning. If there was

anything important, she would

have called.

"Can I come in?" she asks. Her

belly is visible on the white pencil

dress she has on.

"Is everything alright?" I ask as

she walks in.

"Yeah!" she responds while taking a seat. She perfectly sits and places her bag on the lap.

"Can I help you? I am going to a meeting in....say...what?" I glance at my wrist watch, "In fifteen minutes."

"I won't take long," she says while digging into her huge bag. She pulls a brown envelope and opens it before pulling white paper. "Can you please sign for this?"

"What is this?" I ask while receiving the papers from her.

"Parenting agreement," she says.

"Parenting agreement?"

WTF?

"This is what we initially agreed on...and this is part of the agreement. I want full custody of the baby and I need you out of this arrangement."

"What?"

"You were just a sperm donor...lets keep to that."

"So... this is your clap back after I told you that Maria is back with a baby?"

"This is me guarding my heart. You don't want anything to do with me and I don't want anything to do with you. I just want to have all the powers to

make decisions....including relocating."

"Are you kidding me?"

"No!"

"What if I want to be part of the baby's life?"

"When? When it suits you? No!"

A knock interrupts us. Where the hell is Anza to attend to my visitors? Another knock and the door slowly opens.

"Hey...Ngobeni's team is here. Third floor boardroom," Gundo says before darting his eyes between Tinyiko and I. They are early.

"I'll be right there now."

"Please," Gundo says before closing the door.

I shift my focus back to Tinyiko. Why is she doing this? she knows I want to be part of my son's life. Come on!

"Can we discuss this later?" I ask because I need to rush to the third floor. If I mess this meeting - we are doomed.

"No! just sign the agreement and have it couriered to my office," she says while getting up. She walks out of the office while I scan the document!

A sperm donor! That is what I fucken am!

We are not done here.

I unplug my laptop, pick it up and hurry to the meeting. Luckily, everyone is making themselves something to eat. I place my laptop on the table next to Gundo and Phuti's laptops. I don't have appetite, so I settle on the chair. Why would Tinyiko want to keep the baby away from? I huff out a quiet laugh. She is trying to get back to me for leaving her, right? She must be prepared to fight. I am not going to have my children wandering around the world, fatherless. We are going to find a way to co-parent with Maria by

my side.

"Njabulo!" Gundo almost hit the table.

"Sure?" I say.

"Sure? Sure what?"

"What did you say?" I ask because I seem to be too lost.

"Can you snap out of it? I asked you if you emailed Mr ngobeni the pitch?" he asks. I nod. "You are going to have to put aside your personal ish. We need to impress this dudes. We need them."

"I got this," I say. I take my phone out of my pocket, put it on vibrate and place it on the table next to the laptop.

"What do you have for us?" Mr Ngobeni asks.

This is my que to start presenting.

I get on my feet and start presenting the plans that Gundo and I came with, regarding the rebranding of Ngobeni

Corporation. I am flowing in my presentation until my phone starts vibrating on the table.

While presenting, I side-eye the screen to see an unsaved number. I have memorized that number by heart!

"Excuse me," I say while jumping for the phone. Gundo stares at

me with a warning look. "Hello!"

"We found him," the voice says. "I sent you the pin location."

No fucking way!

"Uhm...I need to go," I say to everyone. I rush out of the boardroom before they could even respond. I need my car keys. I rush up the stairs to my office. I need my car keys right now.

"What on earth is going on?"

Gundo asks. I met him by the elevator.

"Not now!"

"Not now? I thought you were in a middle of a presentation. Do you know Mr Ngobeni had to cancel his

Tokyo trip for this meeting?"

Who cares!

I need to get out of here.

"I need to go!" I say while getting into the elevator.

"What on earth is more important than this?" Gundo asks. He places both his hands on either side of the elevator door.

I groan because I didn't want him to find out.

"They found Luzuko. I need to go to North West, right now."

"What the?????"

"This is my only chance to put the bullet in his head. Please, let go of the elevator! I need to go," I

say. Gundo lets go of the elevator and walks into the elevator with me.

"What did you say?"

The elevator starts moving!

"This is my only chance to kill Luzuko! I need to go."

"Have you lost my mind?"

"No!"

"You are not killer Njabulo. Don't you dare fucking stoop so low."

"I had a chance to kill but I didn't. He took Maria away and messed with our loves. You won't understand Fokol...so just stay out of the way."

"You kill him...then what?"

"Then I live happily knowing that he is no longer on the picture." I have never used my licensed gun, but I am willing to use to use today.

The elevator opens at the parking lot.

"Njabulo!"

"If I am not back tomorrow morning, call the police and never ever tell Maria what happened! I don't want any of this break her even more."

Maria will never live with a murderer.

"NJABULO!" Gundo calls out as I slam close the car door.

EPISODE 39

MARIA

This is so unlike Njabulo.

It is Tuesday evening and I haven't received a call from him? He didn't call to say goodnight last night and he didn't call this morning!

Weird!

I try his phone and it is off!

Maybe I am being paranoid!

Maybe he is just busy! I just hate feeling helpless – the reason I didn't want to give him a chance as yet. See, now, I am wondering

if he is busy with Tinyiko and their unborn baby. I hate this but I only have myself to blame. Thabelo has been restless since morning. I have bathed her and tried keeping her in only her nappy but it is not helping. She is now napping but God knows I am slightly worried about her. I should be napping with her, but the more I shut my eyes the more I wonder where Njabulo is. "Get it together Maria," I whisper to myself and drop my eyes to the bible that I have been reading all day long. I need a new start! God knows I

do. I have just enough money in my bank account. The gig with Josh Chairro paid a hefty amount of money. What I did was to transfer all of it to my savings account so that I can use it in rainy days.

Mrs Masango! I always thought about her. She promised, together with Mikateko to visit me when they come down to Limpopo. I could ask her for my job back but that is story for another day.

Thabelo's piercing scream freaks me ask. I jerk up from the couch and hurry to the floor where she

is sleeping.

God! Her skin is burning. I am freaking out as I pick her up. Mom is not home. My brother is also not home.

The Panado syrup that I gave her in the afternoon did not work. This is beyond me!

My phone! I grab my phone and call my mother.

"Maria!"

"Mma, Thabelo is not fine. Can you please call Mrs Radzilani to help me take her to the hospital?" I say in such urgency.

"What is wrong with her? is she still restless?"

"She is burning....and I am worried," I say.

"Alright," she says and hangs up. I try calming her with no luck! I try holding her the way Njabulo always did - it doesn't work because she keeps screaming. When I give her my nipple to latch on, she doesn't want.

With her on my one hand, I try to grab her nappy bag so that I throw things inside. Luckily, she now has a clinic card, which I slide into the bag.

Relief! When I hear the knock on the door.

"Come in," I call out. I wear my

shoes and get a receiver and blanket to cover the baby.

Rudzani Radzilani walks into the kitchen. He hasn't changed from the charmer he has always been and now – he looks ever fresher. He doesn't look drunk either!

He greets and tells me that his mother sent him to pick us up.

The Radzilanis were the closest people with a means to transport us.

"Thank you," I respond. He takes the bag from my hand and leads the way to the double cab parked outside the gate.

Thabelo keeps crying now and

again - making me stress.
Rudzani and I are silent. I wonder if he even knows my name. Njabulo's phone is still off when I try to call it. I need him right now! I know I told him to go but it would be better if he was here for me.

Luckily, there was a doctor on site and Thabelo was attended to urgently. They kept me in a ward after giving her an injection. It was a pretty bad fever. Njabulo's phone is still off and I am starting to get worried. The doctor cleared us to go. I am

relieved to see Rudzani still sitting where we left him earlier. He gets on his feet when he notices us. He helps me with the bag.

"So, she is Njabulo's daughter?" he ask. We have been driving in silence before he decided to drop the bomb. "I heard them call her Thabelo...and it is the same as Njabulo's daughter."

"She is."

"He used to talk about her a lot when he stayed at the lodge," he says and chuckled. "He is a good fella!"

He really is a great man. I

wouldn't have been with him if he was anything opposite. I wish he was still here for Thabelo. I am disappointed in myself for allowing my head to mess with me. He may be taking care of Tinyiko while I struggle with my daughter. I am disappointed in myself.

"You changed a lot," I say, trying to change the topic. I cannot allow my head to mess me up.

Rudzani laughs loudly. I bet he gets that a lot. This guy is not the Rudzani we all know. The Rudzani I had a stupid crush on when I grew up. I have only mentioned it to Thandeka.

"I did?" he asks. He knows the answer to that.

"The Rudzani I know would be drunk right now," I say. I don't know how to thank him for waiting for me. I would have been stranded and confused.

"It was just a phase, come on," I say. I believe him. Thulani was once a mess but he changed to something else. Thulani! Where is he? I need to take a walk around the village and visit my old friends.

"Just a phase!" I say. "We thank God for that."

"So...are you also working in

Joburg? I haven't seen you around here in ages.

"Oh...well..." My throat gets dry from the question. I take it he doesn't know anything and I am not prepared to share anything with anyone. "I used to work in Joburg...yeah! But now, I am looking to stay here and get a job around here."

"What did you do?"

"I used to be a receptionist."

"Haw!" he says and drives in silence for a little while until he asks, "So, can you do some accounting clerk job?"

"Accounting?"

"It is more of balancing the receipts and all. Nothing hectic at all. Njabulo was helping us with that since the Intern guy left. Maybe you could jump in until you get a job you are looking for?" he says.

"I hate sitting in an office, searching for receipts and all. You can take it."

"If I can start after a week or so after I have made sure that Thabelo is fine."

"Yah! Not a problem. Whenever you are ready."

What happened to the Rudzani we all know? I am tempted to

ask about Ciara but then - I am not his friends and it is better to mind your own business.

Mom was sitting in the kitchen when we arrived. She was already in her gown but I bet you, she was not sleeping. She was probably praying.

I put Thabelo to bed and cover her with her little fluffy blanket. A knock on my bedroom door forces me to turn.

Njabulo!

He stands by the door and stares at me. My mouth goes dry when I notice his sweaty vest and a

rising chest. He was running – fast. He doesn't say anything but stares right at me with his chest rising and falling. He is trying to catch his breath while I watch. This must be the most sexual thing ever.

Does he know how worried I was about him? does he know that I have been calling his phone the whole day trying to get hold of him?

He slowly closes the door and turn the lock! I catch my breath as he keeps his icy eyes on me. oh, my God.

"Where you looking for me?" he

asks while reaching for the hem of his vest. I watch as he quickly pulls it off.

Wow!

Does he know that I haven't been touched sexually for a year? The last I did when was we conceived our daughter. After that, I never attempted to please myself. I couldn't risk Luzuko watching me from another room. Even when I was in the duvets, I couldn't even touch myself, thinking that Luzuko might be watching and he would be turned on when he sees the movements from the duvets.

I kept blocking the edge to please myself. And now, Njabulo is right here to confuse me. He knows very well that I asked us to take some time apart. I want to figure things but here is Njabulo, ready to devour me and make me turn against my words. "I was looking for you," I whisper. I have been looking for him since morning. "I wanted to tell you that Thabelo is fine." "How is she now?" he asks. He could walk to her cot bed to confirm that she is fine but he doesn't. instead, he keeps his gaze at me.

I am turned on! To the last degree.

"She is fine now," I report. He nods - his eyes on mine. I watch as he takes a few steps towards me. I love how he smirks at me.

It makes him look so so so handsome and confusing. I should be angry at him for going AWOL on me. But, here I am...getting wet just by looking at him.

He walks up to me, while I take my steps backwards. The more he walks towards me, the more I take my steps back, until he has battered me with the wall.

"Njabulo?" I whisper.

"Are you scared of me?" he asks. What? I can never be scared of Njabulo but I understand his question. This is the first time in a year and five months that we might get intimate. Of course, I am scared. Of course I am confused. Someone came into his life when I wasn't around. What if he matches our experience? What if he matches how we both look? I am no longer that model girl. I am a mother now and somethings are not back to their right position.

"No, I am not scared," I finally answer because it looks like he

has been waiting for my answer. He pulls one hand to my face. He caresses my temple ... and down the side of my face.

I swallow hard as I close my eyes.

Nothing between Njabulo and I has changed. He still takes my breath away and he still looks at me the same way he did.

"I love you. I never stopped. I will never stop," he says. I still have my eyes on. I let him tell me how much he needs me - still with my eyes closed. I feel like if I open them, I might ruin this moment.

"Yes!" I say, without hearing the question.

"You do?" he asks.

"What?" I ask and he laughs. His laugh is ripping me apart. All the walls I had built around my heart come crashing down without a warning. His laugh crushes every doubt I had.

"What did you ask?" I finally ask; ready to give him the correct answer.

"Are you ready to spend the rest of your life with me?"

"Yes!" I respond like he is going to change his mind. He laughs again. I am probably making a fool of

myself.

"I thought so," he says before dropping his lips to my neck. I gasp, slightly moving my head to give him more access. He drops more kisses. The more he does, the more I am soaking my underwear. He kisses my shoulders while helping me take the sleeping shirt off. I am proud of myself for picking a black lacey night dress tonight. He pulls it off and drops it on the floor.

"No panties?" he comments when he notices that I am naked before him. He stares at my body and then back to my face. "You

are beautiful."

I don't feel beautiful but right at this moment, I believe him.

"Thank you," I murmur; standing like a statue while he inspects me. He watches me and takes me in. I feel like he does admire me. I admire him too.

I place my palms on his bare and firm chest. He moves his eyes to my hand.

"I missed you so much when I was away," I say. He pulls me towards him. He embraces me before dropping kisses to my mouth. I gasp when he starts caressing me.

"My mom," I breathlessly say.
"She is not here," he says while leading me to the bed. I trust him enough to follow him. He watches as I lie on the bed. With a speed of light, he takes off his pants and underwear, thereafter jump to the bed next to me.

With his hands, he parts my legs.
"Njabulo!!!!" I whine.

"Let me," he whispers while fighting to open my legs. I allow myself to lose the battle.

OMG!

His tongue wets my opening and I jerk my body up. This feeling so foreign and satisfying. I gave him

the right to continue because he pulls my butt up and digs his tongue deep inside of me.

OMG!

"Njabulo!!!!" I call out. He doesn't stop. He continues to play his tongue inside of me while spreading my legs wider. One - two fingers join him and I push my body towards him to take all of it. If it is the walls around my heart that he wants to break - I give him permission.

Without a warning, I feel his penis penetrating me!!!

He grits his teeth while I call out his name so loudly. I don't care if

my mother is in the other room or not! This feeling this....is too much to take in.

Oh Njabulo Buthelezi! He starts rocking his hips. He rocks them in quite a rhythm until he tells, "I want to watch you cum for me." that statement fuels the desire I have him. I close my eyes as he rocks me with his penis.

"Thandeka!!!" Mom's voice interrupts us. Instead of hiding myself from her, I let the damn orgasm rip me apart as I cry out to catch my breath.

He presses my thighs together....like he ways does...and

I give him a display of multiple orgasm.

"Thandeka!!!" my mother calls out but she is too close.

I feel a violent shake and snap my eyes open.

"Mma!" it comes out as a whisper. I quickly sit up and act natural. I just came in my duvets. no sign of Njabulo here. Nada! He is not here.

"Are you going to need anything today?" she asks. "I am going to buy some stokvel supplies in town today."

"Nappies! I need just a pack of nappies," I report. Did I make

noise in my dream? I wonder.
Mom leaves the room, leaving me
embarrassed about what I just
did. I made love to the man I
attempted to take a break from
- I mean in my dreams.

I hate wet dreams! I do!!!!!!

Something is wrong and I can feel
it!

This has nothing to do with
Tinyiko. Something is wrong with
Njabulo! I am starting to worry.
The words that Luzuko kept
repeating are starting to make
me feel unsettled. He said he was
not going to rest until Njabulo is

down and out with him.

I was so relieved when Njabulo visited me in my dreams. Now, I am back to square one.

Thabelo chuckles – bringing me back from my thoughts. I promised myself to move away from Luzuko's case but the bad thoughts keep crawling in. Worse, it is almost evening and I haven't heard from him.

No call. No Whatsapp. No SMS. Nothing!

I swallow the little pride I have and call Thandeka. Maybe her husband can tell me that he is fine. I would understand if he

doesn't want to talk to me ever – as long as I know that he is fine.

"Hi Maria," she greets. "Maria, how are you and Thabelo."

"I am fine...and Thabelo had a little fever. She is much better today."

"That is good to hear. I cannot wait to come up there and see her. She is do adorable."

"Have you seen Njabulo?" I ask. I don't have the patience for the formalities.

"Uhm...no...I don't know..." she says. I know my friend – she knows exactly where Njabulo is.

"Thandeka, please?" I say. "Do

you know something?"

"Why?" she chips in?

"I am worried sick here. I just know that something is wrong. Please," I say.

"Well...I wouldn't know Maria."

"Luzuko kidnapped me for a year Thandeka. I cannot help but to think that he has gotten to Njabulo? Please. I am going crazy here and it is unfair of you to keep any news from. Any news! I know about Tinyiko...so if you are trying to hide that from me....you shouldn't. I don't mind him moving on with his life. I just want to know that he is fine and

nothing happened to him. please.”
She sighs deeply. I know that she knows something and she is trying to protect whatever it is from me.

“Maria!”

“Please Thandeka. I need to move on with my life here. Please.”

“Gundo...said...Njabulo said he is in jail,” she says.

“What?”

“I promise I don’t know why...Gundo doesn’t say. He says he doesn’t know...but Njabulo is in jail,” Thandeka adds.

“What is he doing in jail?”

“I don’t know. I swear,” she

responds. "Please don't worry...Gundo is sorting it out. Please. Please...don't stress."

"What do you think he did?" I ask, trying not to panic. I pray he didn't do anything stupid. I pray.

"Maybe he was drunk and driving. I don't know. Gundo left early this morning...he was organising a lawyer for him. Don't stress Maria."

How do I not stress? I have been stressed since Monday afternoon – it is Wednesday today.

"Please call me when you get an update from your husband."

"Yes. I will."

I drop the phone on the bed.
Njabulo, what did you do now?

EPISODE 40

NJABULO

I am doing it for my girls. No one has to understand anything. No one. Not Gundo. Not my sister. No one. I am doing this for my girls. As, I observe on my mirror, Gundo is still staring as I drive off from the parking lot. He doesn't have to understand what I have to do. I swing the car over to the main street and drive home without

the care in the world. Speed tickets! They can send those to my post box. Gundo has been flooding my phone with missed calls.

Gundo can wait!!!! He should be running back to that meeting and try to save the day. I messed things up but he can do the damn damage control. He is good at that by the way.

I park the car at the drive way and rush to the house while pulling my clothes off – one after another. By the time I am in my bedroom, I am shirtless and already sweating. I am going to

reach my destination in more than three hours - I don't want to waste time at all.

Black shirt. Black boots. Black jeans!!! I tightly tie my laces and hurry to my safe. I pick my gun and shove it on my back.

I have been waiting for this damn moment for fucking so long. I have been waiting!!

Everything I need is in my hands. I run to my car and start my journey to North West. So, the bastard had Maria right under our noses just three hours from us?

What the fuck!!!!

For the whole damn year and almost half, he was just three hours from us.

I stop by the garage to put on some gas. The more, the petrol attendant takes his time, the more I get pissed. I haven't called Maria to check on her and Thabelo; and I cannot call her. I don't want her to pick up that I am up to something. I don't want her to smooth talk me into dropping this mission. I don't want her to cry on the phone. While the petrol attendant fills up the car, I punch the location on the car navigator before

switching off my phone and shoving it into the glove compartment.

"Seven fifty," the guy says from my window. I pull the hundred notes that I had in my pocket. I count the eight notes and drop them into his hand before speeding off.

No music. I am not playing any music or even radio in my car. So many things are running thorough my head as I speed on the N4. What if it is a trap???

WTF??

'What if this is a trap?' a voice in my head is loud as I overtake the

cars which are fucking driving like tortoise on the fast lane? Who does that? Who drives 120 on a fast lane???

What if it is trap? Mlungisi wont dare do that to me. He is one of the people I trust in the world. He wouldn't turn his back on me and work with that lunatic; would he? He wouldn't. My only worry is if Luzuko caught him snooping and kidnap him, only to make him call me to drive all the way for four hours to a death trap!

Fuck!

What if that is the case?

I cannot call the police unless I

want them to stop this operation. I gave them a chance a year ago and they failed me. I cannot trust them now.

"In 3 km, slide left," the navigator calls out. I check the screen, I am an hour away!

An hour left for me to kill a man.

An hour for me to have my freedom. An hour left for me to live freely for the rest of my life.

An hour left to revenge for my girlfriend and daughter. Luzuko is going to regret ever laying his fingers on Maria.

Or, it could simply be an hour for me to fall into a trap!

Either way, I am driving to the pinned location.

"Slide left," the navigator directs. I am already on the left of the lane so I drive straight. "Slide left then keep right."

I change the lane to the far right!!!

Luzuko needs to die! If I want to stop looking behind my shoulder everytime, I need to find him and finish him off. Mlungisi better have a best way to dispose his body. I don't want Maria to find out what happened to this guy. Her conscience won't allow her to be with me as a murderer so

Mlungisi better do a best job in disposing the body. I am willing to die with this secret for the rest of my life. Only Gundo, Mlungisi and his guy know about this. It is possible for us to keep the secret and continue with life like nothing is wrong.

"In one kilometre, turn left," navigator announces.

I am close.

Thirty four more minutes to my destination. My heart is now jumping out of my chest as I take a turn. I am in the middle of nowhere. It is a gravel road that leads the way to what seems like

a farm. No house. No house.

There is no sign of a life around here.

What if it is a trap? – That voice again.

I shake the voice away and carefully drive deep into the bushes.

I drive for so long

without a sign of anything. Just mountains and dry land.

“I am doing this for my girls,” I

remind myself as I drive down

the road to my fate. The more I

see the remaining time left to

reach my destination, the more I

feel like throwing up. I don't know

what awaits me but I am ready

for the devil.

Ten minutes left.

"Whatever happens to me, Lord...take care of my girls," I silently pray. It is funny how I got so close with Maria's mother during my visit in Venda. She didn't play the mother-in-law but just a mother who wanted me to heal from the pain I went through for a year and months. She helped regain my strength. She prayed for me and asked me to pray for myself. She told me to pray whenever I feel an urge to do so, and right now, I feel an urge to ask God to take care of

my girls. It doesn't matter what happens to me, but may God protect my child and woman?

"In one kilometre, your destination will be on the right," the navigator announces.

"Shut the fuck up," Mlungisi yells when I push the door open. He, and his guy turn towards the aimed guy I have in my hands. Luzuko is staring on the ceiling with a cocky smile.

"What is going on here?" I ask, trying my best to keep calm. My forehead is already sweating from the nerves.

Luzuko drops his head and shoot a gaze at me.

"You," he murmurs before blasting into a loud stomach aching laugh.

The man is mad!

Who laughs at a gun pointed at them? He is not moved. He is not shaken. All he is doing is to laugh out loudly. Mlungisi turns his gaze at me and shrugs.

"Tell me when you are done laughing, I have the whole day to kill you slowly and painfully so," I say.

The lunatic laughs so loudly, I am starting to question what might be going on in his head.

"You won't."

"Tempting!" I hiss.

"You won't shoot me. You know Maria won't take you back if you shoot me. You know that very well...so if I were you, I would put the gun down."

Mind games. He is playing mind games.

"Shut, up," I call out from where I am standing. He is tied with ropes - both his hands and his feet but he still have guts to talk.

"Or what? Huh? Or what?" he asks.

"Or, I'll shoot you," I hiss back.

"It took you seventeen months for you to get me? When I have chosen to let her freely walk away? You are weak," he says and spits blood. Mlungisi probably had his fists on him. I had instructed that he is not killed but just captured. I want to see him take his last breath. I want to do it myself.

"Why?" the question rips out of my mouth without a warning.

Why Maria?

Why her?

Why me?

"She was mine before she was yours."

"Should that matter?"

"It does if you were going to interfere what the Lord has put together," he sternly says.

What the Lord has put together?

"Why?" I ask while shaking my head. why did he keep her away from us for so long? Why??? Why? I almost lost my mind. I lost everything. I lost a piece of me when I was searching for her? Why?

"Just shoot me," he says.

"Don't tempt me!" I hiss loudly. He mustn't test me because I am prepared for anything.

"How is the baby? Does she have a name now?" he asks.

WTF????

"Shut the fuck up! You don't get to ask about my child!"

"Your child? Your child?" he asks and laughs.

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

"My child, yes," I say. All this time, the gun is still pointed to his face.

"What makes you so sure?" he asks.

WTF???

Thabelo look like her mother. He is trying to play mind games.

That is what he is trying to do.
"Thabelo is my daughter," I say.
"Oh, that is her name??" he asks.
I find myself jumping to his face.
I throw claps and fists until
Mlungisi pulls me from him.

"Relax man, relax," Mlungisi says.
Why does he care? This lunatic is
going to die. Why does he care
that I am going to beat him
first before I blow his brains?
Why should it matter?

"So, her name is Thabelo," Luzuko
groans from his seat. His one eye
is almost closed now. I shouldn't
have punched him more to leave
him blind.

I spit on the floor before walking around the house – to calm myself. Just like the previous apartment, he has screens of computers around the house. This room, which seems like his, is too basic – apart from the machine of computers he has on the tables. One by one, I go around crushing them. I smash the screens on the floor and pull all the cables from the electric socket.

I walk to the other room. My heart almost stops when I notice how feminine the room is. How clean and fresh the room looks. A cot is in the corner of the room, by

the window. I walk to the closet to find the clothes folded and hanged.

Maria!

It was Maria's room. He kept Maria here.

The baby items are also packed in one of the drawers.

"Thabelo! Thabelo!" Luzuko calls out. I march out of the room and charge towards him. I give him endless punches, including knock offs from the back of the gun.

"Shut the fuck up," I call out as I beat him endlessly. If he dies in my hand, let it be. The aim is to kill him. The aim is to take his

life. "Shut the fuck up!!!"

The room is silent as I throw punches in and out. I am only stopped by the sirens that are ringing from afar. I throw hundred more punches as Mlungisi and his partner yells at me. Everything is playing in slow motion – my fists landing on Luzuko's face and Mlungisi running out of the room – everything is playing in slow motion.

"Shut. The. Fuck. Up," I call out as I continue to throw punches at him.

"Police!!!! Lift your hands up, right now," an angry voice interjects. I

don't stop punching him. "HANDS UP RIGHT NOW," the other cop yells out. "Put your gun down and step aside now."

I don't stop punching him on, as tired as I am, I don't stop throwing punches.

"Njabulo Buthelezi, drop your gun right now and step aside," the cops yell.

WTF!

They know my name.

I drop on the floor and drop the gun. Luzuko is breathing heavily, blood filling the floor beneath him. one police gun runs to where I am. He kicks the gun towards his

mates and reach both of my hands. I drop my shoulders and let him pull my both hands to my back.

OUCH!!!!

Fucking ouch!!

"Call the ambulance," the lady cops calls out.

Damn right, he needs an ambulance.

"You are under arrest!!" that is all I hear before the police recites my rights. Rights that I don't give a fucking damn about right now. I should have finished him. They should have been calling the

team to collect the corpse. "You are under arrest."

I have a right to make a phone call but I didn't exercise it. The first thing I did when they throw me into the holding cell is to throw myself on the floor for a nap. It has been a long day. I don't care about the one phone call - all I care about it to close my eyes and sleep. My knuckles are painful but no pain is unbearable. If I survived Maria lost for a good year, I can survive anything. My heart is with Maria and Thabelo. I wish I could finish

what I started, for their sake.
That man Luzuko deserves to die!
He does. Maria won't mention it
but I bet you, she will live her life
peacefully the day she learns that
he is dead. I wanted to make
that happen - for her.

"Njabulo Buthelezi," a loud voice
echoes in my head. Followed by a
loud bang on the steel doors of
the holding cell.

A pounding head!!! I pull myself to
sit as the guy swears at me for
wasting his time.

Bastard!!

"Njabulo Buthelezi," the guy calls
again, close this time.

"I am," I try to lift my hand.

"Follow me," he say.

I pick myself up and drag my feet down the corridor where the man leads. It must be Mlungisi here for me. I don't even know where the fuck I am.

He opens the room and makes a way for me to pass and enter the room.

"Oh, you," I dryly say while picking the steel chair.

"Yes, me, you idiot," he responds.

"Fifteen minutes. You have fifteen minutes," the cop says and leaves me with my visitor.

"What were you thinking?" he

hisses.

"How did they find me?"

"What were you thinking?" he asks instead. I see, this is the battle of the fittest.

"How the hell did they fucking find me?" I hiss back. He messed my only chance to put the end to this. If I go to jail for this, I am not going to forgive him. He fucked my only chance. "How the fuck did they find me. You were the only one who know what I had planned."

"They tracked your car via your insurance company. What choice did I have when you were about

to do the biggest mistake of your life?"

"Fuck you!"

"And then...thank me later," he says. "At least, Thabelo will have his father home."

"Gundo....you messed this for me. Remind me to remove you as one of my emergency contacts if you are going to work against me. What kind of a friend are you, huh? What kind of a friend are you."

"The smart friend. You are not a killer. I was not going to sit and watch you throw your life away. Maria was not going to forgive

you. You have already thrown your future away by walking away from one of our biggest clients."

"About that...I am...."

"Don't you dare apologise because we lost him. He had cancelled his trip for that meeting and you had to screw things up for us. So, please, don't mention it. It was your pleasure."

I am sorry for messing the meeting for the team.

I am truly sorry!

"You know how important this trip was to me. You know...and you had to come in and screw everything for me."

"You will thank me later."

"Don't flatter yourself," I groan at him. I won't forgive him for interfering with my mission. "Did you tell Maria?"

"What do you take me for?" he asks.

"What do I take you for? You called the police on me," I hiss while pointing at my chest. "Why would I trust that you didn't tell my girlfriend? When I asked you nicely not to tell her."

"What do you take me for? I didn't tell her. I didn't tell anyone."

"Good!"

"What were you thinking?" Gundo asks and bangs the table. He has no right to be frustrated right now. He is being dramatic.

"You should have called the police a minute later than you did. He would have been dead." Had they arrived a minute later than they did, we would have been talking a different story. I was fucking ready to blow his brains away after those punches. I was pretty ready to kill a man. I was ready but my friend here thought they were smart enough to call the call on me.

What a betrayal!!!

What a fucking betrayal!!

"Dude!"

"I swear!" I say. "Where is he by the way?"

Where the hell did they take the lunatic? I would have been happy if they took him straight to the mortuary. Everything is blur.

Everything from the time to yelled at me to drop my

weapon...everything is blur. What

I remember is the police man

hand cuffing me, confiscating my gun and taking me to my car. We

didn't wait for the ambulance

before the police van drove away from that farm house.

"Intensive care! You put a man in Intensive Care."

"I was too lenient," I say. "Now that you managed to land me in jail, did you get me a lawyer?"

"What do you think?" he asks.

Of course he got me a lawyer. He has my back, the same I have got his back.

"You have no choice!" I respond.

"Get him here to take me out of this fucking hole."

EPISODE 41 (Unedited)

MARIA

Whenever my cell phone rings, I jump. Thinking it is Njabulo or at least Thandeka informing me what happened.

Njabulo will be the death of me! He really is going to be the death me! I cannot help but be worried about him.

Was he that drunk to be locked up for four days? How bad was it? But the problem is, the more I think about it, the more I don't believe this drunk story.

Thandeka also doesn't have valid points about the arrest other than Gundo seem secretive about it.

My mind tends to work overtime. I can't even celebrate the job I got at the lodge. Rudzani was not bluffing. Someone called me on Thursday, confirming when I will be started, because they need someone to start immediately. I promised to start on Monday.

Thabelo is much better after the shot she got from the hospital. I really cannot celebrate.

In no time, my mother will be asking where the supper is; so I put the pot on the stove so that I start the pap. The chicken is already in the oven.

When my phone vibrates on the

table; I also burn myself with the water from the pot. It is the call I have been waiting for, for so long.

"Njabulo?"

"Maria?" he responds. I feel my chest tightening up because I am ready to shed tears of joy. Does he know how much I missed him? I missed him so bad.

"Do you know how much I was worried sick about you Njabulo Buthelezi?"

"You were?" he lazily asks. I can just imagine a smirk on his face. He has his charming game on.

"What the hell happened to you?"

I ask. "Why were you in jail? What happened to you?"

"Drinking and driving," he says.

I am not convinced.

For some reason, I don't believe him.

"Njabulo, what did you do?" I ask.

"What? Drinking and driving."

"Where were you coming from?" I ask.

"Well...from...Sandton..."

"Njabulo???"

"Why do we have to dwell on this?"

Where is my sunshine girl? I miss her so much," he says, forcing me to smile.

"She is with her grandmother.

She wasn't well on Monday but she is now much better...in fact, she is fine now."

"What was wrong?"

"Fever!"

"Oh, I am sorry I wasn't around to take her to the hospital. Did you manage to take her to hospital?"

"I did."

"How are you?" he asks.

Apart from being worried sick about him? I believe I am very very fine. My life is kinda coming back to normal.

"I am good. I scored a little job at the lodge. Rudzani took us to

the hospital the other day, and he offered the job," I say.

Silence!

Maybe I shouldn't have shared more than I should have.

"Njabulo?" I call out.

"Babe!"

Okay, he is not really worked up.

I think the only concern he has, is the fact that I might not look forward to move back to

Johannesburg if I am starting a life here.

The truth is, I am not ready to move back to Johannesburg. I am not ready to go back to social media. I am not ready to officiate

my relationship with Njabulo before his other baby is born.

Truth be told, I am not ready.

"That means, you are not coming back?" I was right. He is worried about my return to Johannesburg.

"We spoke about this Njabulo," I say. "Did you sort out your issues with Tinyiko?"

"You know what, I need to go," he says. I can easily pick that he is disappointed or hurt or disturbed - I don't know which one it is.

Love is so difficult. Right now, I feel like a dagger is pressed deep down my chest. Does he know how

long I have been praying for this call? And now he wants to hang up just because he is pissed? So unfair!

"Did I offend you in any way?"

"No...no..."

"Then, what's up?"

"I thought I could change your mind about staying there in Venda. I guess I just need to be a little patient," he says.

He didn't even answer my question. I don't want to run back to him only to be tangled into a baby mama drama with Tinyiko. Did he sort things out with her? That was a question and he

didn't even attempt to answer it.
"Give me some time," I respond.
There is nothing more I can say.
"Of course! Take your time."
That was bitter!

It feels so weird! Getting into a pair of a formal skirt and a shirt feels very weird. I used to get up and get into my uniform everyday but right now, things are different.

I iron the sides of my skirt with my palms before walking into the lodge. A lady at the reception welcomes me with a smile.

Bravo! They are professional

enough!

"Is Rudzani around? I mean...Mr Radzilani, Rudzani," I asks. She nods while picking the landline phone.

"I will get him for you," she says while punching the extention number. In a minute, Rudzani walks into the reception area. He doesn't look like he is here to work. He is in a white golf shirt and brown shorts.

Who cares?

He probably owns the place now. I know Mr Radzilani has retired now. So, this lodge belongs to Rudzani, in some way.

"You made it," he says with a widest smile. I never knew this side of Rudzani existed. He looks fresh and too gentle. The lady at the reception cannot seem to hide the excitement away. She is giggling with her face on him. At least, some women still find him attractive.

"I did. Thank you again for considering me," I say while letting out a hand to shake his. He stares at me hand and thereafter shakes it.

"Follow me," he says before turning to the direction where he appeared from. I follow behind,

trying to stay calm.

This is Rudzani!

He isn't just Rudzani! He is the man I used to crush on. And for some reason, I am as nervous as the first day I showed up at Masango Logistics. I am not taking this job for granted. It is too important for me to undermine. So, I am nervous. Very, very nervous!

"So, you took your first day very serious, huh?" he asks with a smirk. I drop my eyes to my pencil skirt. I do look like I got carried away with my formal wear.

Everyone around here look so

chilled.

"I did," I respond.

"I like that," he says while closing the office door just after I enter.

"Take a seat."

"Thank you."

I look around the office. There isn't much, other than a cabinet in the corner and a few pictures on the wall. The table in the middle of the room is huge and it does look very expensive.

"So, is this short or long term?" he asks.

I bite my lower lip. I am so undecided, but that wouldn't be a great answer to a client.

"Long term," I quickly say. I need this job and nothing is going to stand in my way.

Rudzani pulls a few files from the cabinet and throw them in front of me. This must be my first task of the day - I am looking forward to start working.

He shows me what I need to do for him. Easy stuff. Rudzani prints out the supplier's list that I need to go through during the day. The list that shows all the supplies received in a day. I need to monitor it against the orders placed with the suppliers.

Easy pissy!

"Did you tell Njabulo that, you are working here? He already told me not to fuck around with you," he dryly says with a smirk on his face.

Language, please! Rudzani is no different from Njabulo. They unnecessarily use swearing words too often. You would swear they are brothers.

"I did."

"I won't fuck around with you...right?" he says.

Of course!

Oh, God! How on earth can he ask that?

Eeeuuuwww!!!!

By Wednesday, I have a hang of things. Suppliers are paid and their deliveries are received and recorded. The revenue received on Monday and Tuesday are banked and recorded accordingly. I think I can do this job in my sleep.

It is just after ten - it is time for my coffee break. I drop my phone on the table and walk out of the large office that I share with Rudzani and the other young girl who takes booking for the lodge. She always has her headsets on - from the moment she walks into the office until she

is gone. So, I literally don't have anyone to talk to if Rudzani is not in the office.

He is hardly here anyway. If you don't find him here at eleven, then the best thing would be to reschedule your meeting. He is never here after eleven. On Monday he showed me what I needed to do and then disappeared to where God-knows-where.

I pass the store-room before I make it to the little kitchen set for the guests. There is a restaurant here; it only operates in the mornings- for breakfast.

After that, they close down the kitchen and only show up the next day.

A strong coffee! I need a strong coffee!

I prepare myself a cup of strong coffee and take my mug with me to the office. I am invited into the office by my phone ringing loudly on the table. I set the mug on the table and quickly jump for my phone call.

"Dikeledi?" I call out while reaching for the couch.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

I am worried about her tone.

"I am fine."

"He did it for you, didn't he?" she asks. "I know that people are kinda taking it the hard way, but I know he did it for you."

"Huh?"

"I mean...Njabulo's post on Facebook. I know he did all of that for you. He loves you and I know he can be an animal for you."

What is she talking about?

Njabulo can be an animal for me?

"Dikeledi, what are you talking about?" I ask.

I hear her quietly swear before saying, "You didn't know ... did you?" Her voice is now sad and not bubbly anymore. I know there is

something more to it.

"What is going on?" I ask. She keeps quiet and I yell out her name. "Tell me, what is going on, please?"

"Oh...Maria...don't mind me!" she says. "It was just a silly post." She hangs up before I could beg her to tell me what is going on. I am not on Facebook anymore and I feel like creating an account right at this moment to check what she is talking about.

She wouldn't have called me if it didn't matter.

I could rush to the reception to ask the ladies to check for me,

but I don't want people to go on about my business.

Thandeka! I call Thandeka to ask her what is going on. And, just like Dikeledi, she beats around the bush, trying to hide the truth from me.

"Let it go, Maria. Let it go," I whisper to myself. I wish I could just let it go and focus on my work. I have a mark to make around here – there is no room to slack.

I set my phone aside and pull the new supplier file I need to work on. I can't concentrate. I really cannot concentrate!

With my hands on my face, I let out a loudest sigh!!!!!!

"Is the workload too much for you to handle?" Rudzani's voice makes me snap out of my position.

"What? No...no...no...not at all," I quickly say. I don't want to come off as if I have too much stress to deal with. It was just a moment of weakness.

"Then, why do you look like you regret taking this job?" he asks. He walks towards the end of the table.

I deeply sigh and get on my feet.

"Look...I was just thinking. It isn't a big deal," I say. He stares

at me and shakes his head before picking a white envelope from the drawer. "Rudzani, do you have Facebook?"

"Uhm...who doesn't?" he asks.

"Rather it than Twitter."

"Can I please check something out?" I ask. he is hesitant to give me the phone but he ends up giving me. I go straight to the search button on Facebook. He meets my eyes when I raise them to his. The name on the top of the search list is mine. He probably didn't get anything but I curious why he was searching for my name.

Njabulo Buthelezi! I type the name on the search button and wait for the results. Rudzani walks out of the room, probably to go somewhere to delegate.

11k views!

11 thousand views on a video on Njabulo's wall! My heart almost beats out of my chest. What the hell is Njabulo trending for?

I quickly walk to the door and shut it! I am praying that it is not his sex tape or something. I hope he didn't mess with Luzuko again because he promised to strike if we ever attempt to mess with him. My palms are

sweating as I press PLAY!

The sounds starts playing. A jiggle like that of WWE wrestling. Njabulo is going around the room, throwing computers on the floor like a crazy man. He pulls the cables and throws the screens to the floor. He angrily walk around the room, smashing the screen with the back of the gun. A gun. Njabulo has a gun.

I swallow hard as the video continues. It is edited. He moves to the other room. My old room in Luzuko's house. Everything is how we left it. My clothes and the baby furniture are there. In a

second, Njabulo is beating Luzuko into a pulp.

Oh, my God!

Njabulo!

What did you do?

The video ends when Njabulo is beating up a man who was not fighting him. This is going to affect Njabulo in his business. It really is.

I dial his number; luckily he answers on third ring.

"Maria," he says quietly. My heart sinks. He has been drinking - a lot.

"What did you do?" I ask; instead of asking if he is alright.

"I fought for you and Thabelo.

Why didn't you tell me?" he asks.

He is still too calm for my liking.

"So, you weren't in jail for drinking and driving, huh? You lied to me?"

"You are the last person to be pissed about my lie," he says.

"Don't you dare talk to me like that," I call out.

"I was in jail because I almost killed your ex-boyfriend," he says, so cold.

Why did he do that? Luzuko was just waiting for this little mistake for him to bring us down. He promised to stay away if we did. He promised.

"You shouldn't have went for him.

Come on...you know better...this guy programmed everything. He doesn't need to be there for him to run the show. He infacts watches the show like it is a puppet show."

"I shouldn't have gone after him? huh? You didn't want me to know the truth?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Is she mine? Thabelo? Is she mine?" he asks. I feel like the devil is pulling air from my chest. He fell for Luzuko's tricks. He did and he got manipulated. There is no saving him.

"I wouldn't say she is your when

she isn't."

"You wanted a decent guy to be the father, didn't you."

"Stop insulting me."

"I received an email this morning. The baby's certificate with yours and his signature. You named the baby Vuyelwa...and lied that she doesn't have a name when you returned here."

He goes on and on about when the forms were signed and how the baby's certificate was registered and printed.

"You are drunk!" I say. "Call me when you are sober."

"If you hang up, don't you dare

ever call me again. Ever!"

"You don't mean that," I say. He doesn't mean that.

"Dare me," he says.

"You shouldn't have gone after him because he has managed to manipulate you. You should have listened to me and stayed away from him. He told me to keep things to myself because he promised to go down with us if we attempt to go to him. You should know better; he knew long enough that you were coming for him and let's agree, he was smatter than you."

"Nothing makes sense. He is in

the death birth right now. I almost killed him...that is he is not dead yet. Where are these emails coming from?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"Is she mine?"

"Are you drunk?" I ask. "Please call me when you are sober enough to understand that this is a setup and you were not too smart enough for him."

"Is she mine?"

"Don't annoy me Njabulo. Don't annoy me."

What does he take me for?

He is drunk. Too drunk!

"That's why you don't want to

come back here and start a life with me, am I right? You are scared that Thabelo isn't mine, am I right? Why would he laugh at my face when I mention the baby? And why...am I getting these forms which you signed when the baby was born? The certificate?"

Because he is that manipulative, dammit! Luzuko is manipulative - he should have stayed away from him in the first place.

Rudzani walks back into the office. He raises his brow when he notices that I don't look fine.

"Can I call you when I have

knocked off?" I ask.

"Best you don't!"

"Fine!" I say.

Perfectly fine with me. That's what I needed, anyway! Less drama! Nxa!

"Everything fine?" Rudzani asks while taking his phone from the table.

"Everything is perfectly fine," I say and flash him my widest fake smile.

Everything is perfectly fine.

EPISODE 42

MARIA

FOUR MONTHS LATER

"Are you ever going to walk out of that office?"

"I just need to finish this work," I respond without lifting my head from the laptop. This is what I do best, burry myself with work. It is the best thing to keep me sane. And once I am tuned into my work, I can hardly focus on other things.

"You missed breakfast. And now, lunch?" Rudzani asks. Why does he care? I wish to ask but I don't ask him. Instead of being cold at him, I put the pen down on the table and lift my eyes up to where

he is standing. He has his back rested on the wall and his feet crossed. I smirk at him because he looks like a caring gentleman. In reality - I know he isn't. It is just a façade so that he doesn't offend me.

"I thought I could push some more work since I need two weeks off, I am going this week...I have something happening this weekend," I say. I have a lot of things to cover if I want to enjoy my weekend-away. The last time I skipped work, Rudzani had me on the phone the whole afternoon. He knows literally nothing of

what I do and if I am not here, it becomes chaotic. If I crack this figures and make the projections for the next month, I'll be sorted.

"What is special about this weekend?" he asks.

"My friend is getting married, that is what." I respond. He nods.

"Go grab lunch and you will come back and finish," he says before walking out of the room. When he disappears, that is when my stomach grumbles. I really am hungry. I pick my phone from my table and make my way to the

restaurant. The cook usually allows us to dish for ourselves if the guest left some of the buffet food. Other than that, I always have my snack in my lunch bag.

Buttered fish, grilled veggies and a spoon of savory rice – this must be delicious. I dish for myself and make my way to the little garden with swimming pool. I enjoy watching people diving into the water. The kids are the best swimmers around here. I dig into my food until I empty the whole plate. I have been trying to eat less so that I could fit into my dress. Dikeledi is getting married

and what she told me was a small wedding is a big ceremony. She asked me to be the best lady on her beautiful day. I couldn't say no to that. She was my friend and I am honored that she picked me. So, I have been on a liquid diet for a month until sending Dikeledi my dress measurements last week. Now the hard part is maintaining the weight I had when the seamstress took my measurements.

When I return back to the office, after lunch, I find Rudzani going through a brown file that I don't know about.

"What is on that?" I ask while getting on a chair by the window. "I have no idea. All I know is that the old man wants this to be incorporated to the coming month's projections. Something about the loan," he says while closing the file. He drops the file on the table with no interest whatsoever. He isn't enthusiastic about his job - I have notice since I started working here. I get on my feet and pick the file from the table. Browsing through it, I notice that Mr Radzilani is funding or investing in a carwash joint in Midrand. The loan he made

out came from his personal account and he would want it to be repaid by the funds from the lodge. Meaning, the investee will pay back the lodge in small monthly repayments. Easy peasy but Rudzani is not interested about any of this.

"Do you know about the car-wash joint?" I ask while getting on my chair. I can incorporate this in thirty minutes.

"The old man spoke about it."

I sigh!

"You don't seem to be interested about your father's businesses. Why is that?"

He stares at me and gives me a cocky smile. He then says, "Well, that is why you are here to make me look cooler than my parents things. When I get to oversee the perfect job that you do...they think that I am doing a great job. I don't like any of this."

"What are you into?" I enquire but he shrugs. "Bar...and drinking spots...and stuff, right?"

"Is it that obvious?" he laughs.

"If your father is investing in a stranger, why don't you draft a proposal for him to open a bar or a club for you? You would know what kind to bring around

here...that drinking spot down the street ain't fit for cool people like you." He stares at me like he is considering it. "Or...maybe you can turn one of your father's restaurant into gentleman's club or something."

"I like you," he says. Why am I blushing? Well...my childhood crush just told me he likes me. The information is void but for some reason, it made me smile.

My phone vibrates, saving me from my weird giggles. My smile widens when I see the caller-ID. "Hey you."

"Why am I the last person to

know that you are coming to Joburg?" Thandeka asks - no greetings. I take a deepest sigh and get on my feet so that I could stand by the small window and be as far away from Rudzani as possible.

"I am sorry," I softly say. "I didn't want you and Gundo to set anything for me with him."

"Maria, oh my goodness...why would I do that?"

"I am sorry. I just don't want to see him or talk to him...or talk about him...so...please..."

"I know where to draw the line Maria. I wouldn't dare cross that

line. Maybe Gundo might have thought about hooking up the two of you but he is in Cape Town til next week...and just like I didn't know, he doesn't know that you coming to Joburg."

"Dikeledi is getting married," I say. "She said it is an exclusive wedding so it will only be family and a few of her friends."

"Of course. Even if I wanted to attend, I wouldn't have made it. Nanny is off and Gundo isn't around. Are you bringing my girl with you?"

"No. I will be busy throughout the weekend and...I promised

Dikeledi one more party night on Thursday."

"Like I told you...I am stuck in the house this weekend. I'll baby sit her."

"I am catching a bus to Joburg on Thursday night...I cannot travel with a baby in a bus..."

"I am going to Joburg on Thursday morning," Rudzani intterups from his seat. What? Is he eavesdropping on my phone call? He shrugs when I narrow my eyes at him.

"Okay, looks like your brother in law is travelling that side on Thursday. If he is returning any

day after Sunday, I'll bring her with me."

"I'll personally call Rudzani to drive back after Sunday."

"Anyways...who told you about my journey to Joburg?"

"Oh, it was Mikateko. She has been calling all morning."

"She is probably calling me with a new number."

"That's what she said. I told her to text you." Right! Since four months ago, I don't answer any call from anyone other than the people I want to talk to. I sleep well at night knowing that I am content with the decision to stay

away from drama as much as possible.

Rudzani is not in the office when I am done with my cellphone. I wanted to ask about his sudden journey to Joburg.

'Hey, Maria. Please call me when you get this text. Mikateko.' – a text. I read it a few times before getting the courage to call her. She tells me that her mother asked me to come see her when I am in Joburg. I just know it has something to do with my old job – or maybe not – I don't want to get my hopes too high – or I

don't want to disappoint her by not agreeing to take the offer.

Rudzani insisted that his trip was planned before he even knew that I am leaving for Joburg. What I know for sure is that Mr Radzilani did send him to drop some documents to Gundo before he goes on his drinking spree with his buddies in Joburg - I heard it when his father passed by the office yesterday.

"Drinking spree? I am going to spend time with Ciara this easter weekend," he had mumbles when his father seemed disappointed

that he might go back to his old ways. Ciara. I didn't want to ask anything yesterday and I am not going to ask anything today.

We have been travelling for hours and Thabelo is quietly sitting and playing by herself on her baby chair. She is the sweetest baby, ever. I stare down at her and shake my head. As if she wanted to prove a point to Njabulo, she looks everything like him. She still has an overdose of melanin like I do, but she looks like a Buthelezi. It is funny what they do.

Sometimes, the children that are rejected by their fathers tend to

look like them – to prove a point. Thandeka's house is chaotic when get to Joburg. The boys' building blocks are all over the porch.

What she does best is to close the door and let them play outside while Ciara plays her pink piano which is set outside.

"How are you going to handle Thabelo? She is a busy as they are," I ask while reaching for the bar chair. Rudzani is outside with the kids.

"The more the merrier," she responds. Luckily, Thabelo is sleeping. I should warn her that she is recharging the energy for

later. "I'll put her in Ciara's bed while you get her camp cot here." Thandeka takes Thabelo away while I walk back to where Rudzani is.

"Can we get the bags from the car? I need the camp cot for the baby," I ask. He nods and walk with me to the drive-way.

It is crazy how much I have packed for just five days. But, travelling with a baby is crazy. I know she is going to need all these little clothes and cot bed and all.

"Do you seriously need all these things for one baby?" he asks,

once again. I saw it coming. I cannot help but throw my head in laughter. He asked the same thing when he picked me up and here he is, still surprised like he didn't pack these things in the boot of his car. My laughter turns to a frown when I notice the car turning towards the driveway. This cannot be happening. I clear my throat and cross my arms while I wait for Rudzani to pull out the camp cot. Njabulo is getting out of the car while Rudzani twirls towards me to give me the items from the boot. "Maria?" A question. He looks like

he wasn't expecting to see me.
His brows furrows when he turns
his gaze towards Rudzani.

Regret? Fury? Disappointment?
I cannot seem to read the
expression on Njabulo's face and
guess what? I don't care if he is
disappointed or curious or hurt. I
don't care anymore.

"Thank you Rudzani," I sharply
say while reaching for the heavy
cot and turn on my heels, to walk
away from all this.

"Maria!" Njabulo sharply calls out.
Not a question anymore.

"What do you want?" I stop on
my tracks, but still having my

back towards him. I am disappointed in Thandeka for lying to me. I am angry because she promised me that she knows where to draw the line. She should have drawn this line.

"Please, leave."

"Can I have a word with you?"

I start moving, picking up my pace, dragging the heavy camp cot, towards the door. In a second, he is standing in front of me.

Jeezzz!!

"I have been trying to call you," he says. "I tried every day...but I couldn't reach you....please..."

"I am going to kill Thandeka, I swear," I meant to say this to myself but it was loud enough to make Njabulo widen his eyes.

"Oh, no... she doesn't know that I am here. Gundo sent me to pick some documents from his brother. I had no idea that you were travelling with him."

Relief!

I was disappointed in my friend and right now - I am relieved.

"Where is she?" he asks. I laugh.

"I know I was a jerk...and you were not picking up my calls when I was trying to call you. I tried with thousand other numbers..."

That is because I only picked the phone numbers I knew. His was blocked and any odd number that showed on my screen - I gladly ignored.

"Please excuse me...MY baby needs this cot."

"Can I have a minute?" he asks.

"What do you want?" I ask. He didn't expect me to give him a minute. I didn't expect myself to

be this calm. Maybe - it is this sad look in his eyes that is

melting my heart. He looks sad.

He looks like he doesn't have

peace and it break my heart. Why do I care? Njabulo broke my

heart but here I am, feeling pity for him. The man I had sworn to never talk to ever again. But, he looks like a broken man. A very broken man.

"Can I see her?" he asks.

"To what? To confirm if he is yours or Luzuko's?"

"I was a jerk." He sighs deeply.

"What does that even mean?" I say. "What makes you a jerk, huh? What exactly makes you a jerk Njabulo Buthelezi?"

He drops his head. It is either he feels like a jerk for believing Luzuko over me. I, personally, am disappointed in him for that fact

and I had already made peace in raising Thabelo alone. That is what I want. But, that girl went on and betrayed me by choosing to be a split image of him – in just four months.

“Maria!” His voice is low.

“Look...she is extremely tired and sleeping right now. You can come see her tomorrow. Thandeka will be baby-sitting her.”

“Can you give me a chance to talk to you tomorrow, then?”

“I won't be here. I am not staying here. I have busy days coming so, no, I won't be able to get a chance to talk to you.”

I simple words, I do not want to talk to him.

"Where..." he asks but I shake my head, cutting him off. He is pushing it now.

Oh, saved by the kids! The twins are running towards him the moment he follows me into the house. Ciara's face also lights up like she hasn't seen him in ages. He won't dare ignore them.

"Please excuse me," I mumble and leave him trying to answer Ciara's questions.

Thandeka lets me freshen up in her house. I am sleeping over at

Dikeledi's apartment before we go to spend Friday evening at the lodge where the wedding is at. I am starting to get excited as I get my perfect make-up done. We are going out for dinner and drinks when I meet her. She told me tomorrow will be the longest day ever.

'Please use an Uber. I am dropping my cousin to the cake's lady' - a text from Dikeledi and another text follows with the address to her new apartment. I download the App while finishing styling my hair. She is right - we have a long day tomorrow. I have

to fit my dress, and I need my hair done in the morning. Friday is out of the picture.

"Are you sure you are going to meet Dikeledi for supper?"

Thandeka asks from the door.

"Do I look that good?"

"Sizzling hot. I like it."

"Please call me if she needs me.

I'll see her tomorrow morning before it gets busy."

"Maria, please go enjoy yourself.

Thabelo is my guest. Believe me, the kids will keep her busy when she is up. She won't even miss you."

Well, I call for an Uber. It should

be here in six minutes. When I confirm my pick-up area, I quietly drop a kiss on Thabelo's before picking my luggage. "My driver should be here in a minute, I'll wait at the drive-way."

I roll my luggage back towards the drive-away!

"Oh, just perfect," I murmur while marching to where the white Corolla is parked. Njabulo is having a word with the driver.

"This is my ride," I say. What is Njabulo doing here? He was supposed to have been gone hours ago.

"This must cover the local trip,

right?" Njabulo says while giving the driver a few notes. He taps the door and the driver is getting ready to reverse the car.

"I am supposed to rate you after my trip," I say and the driver immediately stops. Njabulo begs me with the same eyes that used to stare at me when we were in love. Were. That was a while ago but I still feel how they tell a deep tale from deep down his heart.

"Please man...I don't want to get in trouble," the driver begs.

I sigh deeply before telling the driver to leave. He hadn't logged my drive. Njabulo picks my luggage

before I could even resist and throw it at the back of the car. He opens the passenger door and wait for me to jump in.

"I am going to Edenvale," I advise after a few minutes of silence, not wanting him to confuse my silence with agreeing to go out with him. He punches the address on his Maps App and start driving down to the main road.

This is crazy! It wasn't part of the plan. I wished to avoid him at all cost but it didn't work.

"What is happening between Rudzani and you?" he asks and

steals a glance at me. I stare out of the window to avoid spitting venom towards him. "I don't blame him." He sighs deeply. "What can I do to redeem myself? anything."

"Nothing!" I correct him.

"Anything, Maria."

"I said nothing."

"I realized what a mess I did after a few days. I hurt you. I know, I did. I was ashamed but when I tried to reach out to you, you didn't ... pick any of my phones. And...the case...is not concluded. I could even drive out of town."

"What is happening with the

case?"

"They keep postponing the hearing..." He shakes his head.

"...I couldn't come for you...and...."

"Njabulo, we don't have to talk about it. I am way-over it."

"We do."

We drive in silence while I contemplate what to say next. I survived four months without him. I can survive more. And thereafter, I can survive a lifetime without him. I need peace and a relationship with him won't afford me that.

"I wish you could move on with your life. Start a new life, you

know? After you do the DNA test, which you won't even need to do, I promise I won't stand on your way to have a relationship with Thabelo if you want. Thank God my mother gave me a piece of advice after your phone call four months ago."

"I am not going to give-up on you, Maria. I was a jerk and I am going to prove myself to you until you forgive me," he responds while I roll my eyes. It is not a secret that my heart beats for him but my mind still functions perfectly fine. I am not getting back with Njabulo Buthelezi. "Tell Rudzani

Radzilani to stay away from you because I am not going to give up on you."

"Oooh..."

"Believe me. I fought for you when I have nothing left in me to fight. I am still fighting. So, I am not intimidated by a mere man who doesn't even have a full beard," he says, as if he is talking to himself.

Why am I tempted to smile? I shake my head and turn face towards the window.

EPISODE 43

MARIA

'Your destination is on the left,' the navigator announces. Njabulo turns towards the car while I fish for my cellphone to call Dikeledi. She didn't give me the unit number and right now, we are stuck outside the gate.

"I am outside the gate," I say when she answers the phone.

"Oh, my God friend...I am still far. I have the keys to the apartment and I will only be there in about twenty minutes. Oh my God...I am such a mess. The caterers have been..."

"Hey, hey, relax! Relax! I will wait," I say. She must be stressed about Saturday's wedding.

"Are you sure?" she asks - the noise in the background tells me that she is busy.

"Yeah!" It isn't like I have a choice. Why would I want to stress her more than she already is? I know how stressful weddings are.

Njabulo overheard my phone conversation because he is reversing the car. He carefully parks the car by the street.

Perfect! Just perfect! There is no

running away from him. I am stuck with him right now.

I could fight to get out of the car but where am I go? I have no choice but to wait for Dikeledi here.

"You look great," he compliments quietly.

"Thank you."

"What do you have planned?"

"Just supper with friends." He nods at my answer and rolls the window so that we could have some air. I need some air right now.

I unbuckle my seatbelt and relax while going through my phone. I

scroll to a series of whatsapp chats from Rudzani. I smile at what he has written.

'Your man has lost a screw, dude.'

'Tell your man that I am not after your ass. He is here interrogating why I drove here with you.'

'Give this man some booty. He looks like he could need some.'

'Maria, I am serious. The salt is killing him.'

I giggle, trying to imagine what was going on at the drive-way at that time when I was in the house. All the texts were sent at once, just a minute apart. It

looks like they had an episode outside. Knowing, Njabulo, I know he was giving Rudzani a hard time.

"What is special about him?"

Njabulo asks. I turn to him, to notice such a sad face. I give him a tight-lip smile and turn my gaze back to my phone. The best way to deal with Njabulo is to keep my mouth shut. "What is special about Rudzani Radzilani?" he asks. Oh, I roll my eyes. "Wee Maria, do not roll your eyes at me."

"What do you want me to say? I don't want to talk about this at

all. We all moved on, so how is my business any of yours. Do you hear me asking me about the girls you hang around with?"

"I don't hang around with girls."

"Good for you."

He sighs deeply and watches me respond to Rudzani's text. It isn't any of my business that Njabulo concluded that Rudzani and I are dating. Come rain or thunder, I wouldn't date Rudzani Radzilani. If there was one man who comes with baggage is him. I bet you, he is not going to marry from our village. Never. He has a history!

"How have you been?" he asks. I don't mean to, but I laugh so hard. He stares at me until I pull a straight face.

Truth be told? It was hell. The past four months have been hell. I missed him so much but I had to take a decision to put myself first. It was hard but I made it work. It took me a few weeks to hold my chin up and put my past with Njabulo behind me. It is crazy how your heart can betray you. Right now, watching him look at me the way he is looking at me, my heart wants me to take his hand and tell him that

everything will be fine. My heart wants to drop my lips to his mouth and tell him how much I have missed him. My head tells me something else.

"I have been very fine, thank you," I respond, trying very hard not to let my voice tremble. I miss Njabulo Buthelezi so much but is only known by my heart. There is nothing more to talk about, so I continue to go through my phone while he steals glances at me. I can notice how he swallows hard and stops himself from opening his mouth. He probably doesn't believe that

I am here sitting with him. Just the two of us.

"When are you returning to Joburg?"

"Never!"

"Never?"

"There is no reason for me to come back here."

"Me?" he asks. I give him a tight smile and shake my head. "You are never going to forgive me, are you?"

"I forgave you a long time ago. But, let us keep it there," I respond. I am not trying to be difficult. My wish is for Njabulo to stop asking me such questions

because he won't get the answers he is looking for.

"Thank you. I was a jerk and thank you for forgiving me," he murmurs. I glance at my watch. We have been sitting here for only ten minutes. I throw my head backward, to rest it on the seat. We still have twenty more minutes in here. "My family asked when are you visiting them again."

"I will probably meet them when Thabelo graduates," I say. I smile because that was just a lame answer. Njabulo cracks up a loud laugh, forcing me to join him.

What I meant was that there is no reason for me to meet them but they are welcomed when Thabelo graduates - that is how I meet them, right? During a graduation party.

"You still like me, don't you?" he asks. "I mean...there is still that little hope, right? That little fire that I can ignite? Right?"

"Don't flatter yourself."

"Oh...are you forgetting that your mother prayed for us to be together? What is bond on earth is bound in heaven."

"Ooohhhh..."

"I read my bible every day. And

pray that God touches your heart. He answered one prayer. I prayed that you forgive me for being a jerk. So, he is still going to answer that I win your heart back. If you were a typical girl, I would sweep you off your feet but I know that is not what you want."

"People change," I mumble.

"True. I was a jerk four months ago....now...I am a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!"

"Ohhh.."

"What? Second Corinthians 5 says so, it isn't me."

"Njabulo Buthelezi," I call out and laugh. Is he reciting the bible now?

"I knew I was going to touch your heart. I have been practicing for months. I have been practicing what to say when I meet you but when I saw your beauty, all the verses disappeared...but I have some engraved in my heart."

"What else do you have?" I fold my hands to my chest and turn my head to him.

Njabulo drops his head and sighs deeply. He picks his head and stare at me and say, "Whoever is

patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."

"Proverbs 14 verse 29," I whisper.

"Yep! It hit home when I found the verse. That is what I did. I shouldn't have acted on my temper at that time. I should have dealt with things in a different manner.

I clear my throat and take my eyes off him because right now I feel like throwing my hands around his neck and tell him that it is alright. I am over it. It isn't pride, I have. It is a

decision I took on my own.

"How have you been?" I ask, trying to change the direction before he touches the core of my heart.

"Do you have to ask? Look at me," he loudly says. He does look like a mess and that full beard that he is proud of is not even nicely trimmed. He still smells divine though. His scent still turns me on – now that I have been celibate for decades, his smile is honestly doing things to me.

Oh, yes! Saved by Dikeledi. She saved me before I could invite

myself to Njabulo's house for coffee. She parks beside Njabulo and rolls down her window.

"Mr Buthelezi," Dikeledi calls out. I pick my handbag and silently jump out of the car. Njabulo jumps out. He is not going to leave me in peace. He picks my luggage bag from the boot and moves it to Dikeledi's car. "Don't worry boss. I will take care of her."

Dikeledi! I roll my eyes at her.

Dikeledi's wedding was the best ever. It was one of the best weddings I have ever attended. It was an intimate wedding of

fewer than a hundred people in a private lodge. I don't even want to ask how much they spent. Only invited guests made their way there, driving from Limpopo and all. If I could get married, one day, I would want it done this way.

The décor. The cake. Everything was to the T.

I am exhausted! I haven't slept since the day Njabulo dropped me at Dikeledi's. That evening, Dikeledi had supper and partied almost the whole night. By Friday, Dikeledi had to be pampered before the rehearsal

dinner while I get my dress altered and my hair done. Luckily, we were sleeping at the lodge and they nail technicians spent the whole night with us. On the wedding day, we woke up very early and after the wedding when Dikeledi left the lodge with her husband, we partied until now. I am not used to this anymore. I roll on my bed and check the time.

09h45! I need to get up and get ready to check out. I jump into the shower and change into a summer dress. I let my braids fall - they are still sore and they

were tightly styled yesterday. After packing my bag, I join the other guests at the dining hall. It is just a few of us because the other guys decided to drink more than they could handle. I am grown up for that. But - I think it is more of holding back because I am a new mother now.

'Hey, I will be there in an hour or so,' - I text Thandeka. I don't want to just rock up at her house. I know her husband is not around, but it wouldn't be fair for me to just rock up announced.

An hour later, the Uber turns into Thandeka's driveway to drop me

off. I roll my eyes to the car parked in front of us.

I am never going to hide away from Njabulo, am I?

"Thank you. It was a great ride," I say to the driver while picking my bags from the seat next to me.

I push my luggage bag into the house.

Oh, wow!

Njabulo is walking around the house with Thabelo in his arms. He is in formal wear and he is cleaned up now. He looks like a gentleman. He is talking to her and Thabelo is giggling as if she

knows whose arms she is at. I stand there, watching. It isn't a façade. Njabulo doesn't know that I am watching him. He is genuinely having a moment with his daughter. By now, he is certain that she is his blood – they look alike.

"Aunt Maria...", Ciara calls out when she walks in from the porch. Only now, does Njabulo turn toward me. I wave at him when he blankly stares at me.

"I didn't see you there," Njabulo says. He walks towards me, Thabelo bouncing in his arms.

"I just got in," I say while

dropping my bags. I have been standing here for more than five minutes – watching and admiring. He lets me carry my daughter.

“Heading to a meeting?” I ask. I tilt my head to show him that I am talking about the attire.

“Church. I just got back from church. I thought I could pass by here before heading home...”

“Liar!” Thandeka says while walking into the room. “You literally lived here since Thursday night.”

Njabulo scratches his head.

“Well...I just couldn't get enough of her.”

"She is adorable," I advise.

"Boys! Come over here," Thandeka calls out from the door leading to the back yard. "Come and take a shower."

"Yesssss!" I hear the boys hiss.

The next thing, they run into the house and race to the bathroom.

Thandeka follows them behind.

"I didn't know you were coming in now. Would you like to grab lunch?"

he asks. I could proudly hold his hand and take a stroll down the mall right now - but no. I am tired. And I don't want to give him false hope.

"Some other time," I say.

"I'll hold you to it," he responds while taking his car keys from the table. I want to tell him not to leave on my account.

"I know you will."

Walking into this office brings back so many memories. Masango Logistics was once my family. A lot has changed around the reception. There are a new set of brown leather couches and the counter is white and glass. What hasn't changed is the fresh pot of flowers on the counter.

I clutch my bag and hurry to where one girl seats.

"No...no...sir...I will call you when she has an opening to see you," the girl says. I dart my eyes to the corner of her uniform. Her name is Angela. "Thank you, sir." I give her a smile when she drops the phone.

"Oh, wow," she says and rolls her eyes.

"Long day?" I ask with a giggle. I remember days like these when we had to attend to so many phone calls when Mrs Masango was in meetings with new clients. I know how difficult some clients are. The trick is to learn the client's portfolio so that you know

how to handle each individual looking for Mrs Masango.

"Crazy day."

"Is Mrs Masango in?"

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No. it is a personal visit. She asked to see me."

"Uhm...she said...ahh...let me check her calendar first," she says. I give her a smile while she struggles with the computer.

"Angela!" Mrs Masango calls out from down the corridor – her office. Angela freezes and closes her eyes.

"Hey, relax and give her your sweetest smile," I say before she

runs down to the office. I follow behind so that I see myself into Mrs Masango's office.

"Please call Mr Lewis and arrange a meeting with him on Thursday morning. Get me a slot somewhere on Thursday morning."

Angela turns around and rushes to her desk. I peep into the office and wait for Mrs Masango to notice me. Her smile widens while I walk into the office.

"Hectic day?"

"More than," she says. She gets on her feet and gives me a brief hug. "How are you?"

"I am great. How have you

been?"

"Fine!" she stares at me and smiles. "You look so beautiful."

"Thank you," I shyly say.

"Thank goodness Mikateko got hold of you. We have been trying your phone for weeks," she says. It means some of the Private number calls came from her office.

"Yes. She told me she flew to Paris on Friday morning. I was hoping to see her at the wedding."

"She doesn't stay at home."

"Yes!" I say with a smile.

"I need you back," she says and sighs deeply. "Mpho left a few

months ago and getting a replacement is tougher than I thought. Everyone we train does not get things right."

"Oh, Mrs Masango..."

"Are you working somewhere?"

"Yes," I say with a wide smile, "and I like it so much."

Her face drops. She sighs and asks, "What do you do?"

"Accounting clerk for a small lodge back at home," I say.

"Can I match their pay?" she asks. It isn't about money. It is about peace of mind. Mr Radzilani pays less than what I used to get paid here. "Relocation

package. A good pay.

Accommodation."

"Mrs Masango..."

"Yes?"

"Did Njabulo get you to give me my job back?"

"What? Did you see how Angela freezes when I call her name?"

Mrs Masango asks. I laugh when I remember she just froze a minute ago.

"Relocation package and accommodation?" I ask.

"And a good pay," she says.

"Can I sleep on it?"

"Let me send you an offer on the email later and you can sleep on

it," she says with a smirk. "You are going to like it. I can easily match your last pay and the accounting clerk package. It'll be good for your daughter's investment."

"If Njabulo...." I try to say but she raises her hand.

"I will send you an email later. You can start next week," she says, confidently.

EPISODE 44

NJABULO

Beating myself up won't do me justice at all but I am the jerkiest of all the jerks in the world – whatever the most foolish jerk is called. I am sitting in the lounge, TV playing in the background and my beer getting hot. I am still asking myself why I bought beer on my way home. I think it has everything to do with calming my nerves. I have been unsettled since Thursday when I saw Maria. Oh, my God. Angels have nothing on her. Be it her heart or be it how beautiful she looks. Since that minute when I laid my eyes on her, I haven't

gotten her out of my mind. She reminds me of the reason why I need her in my life. She is my life. She is my everything and I will not rest until I have her back in my life.

And Thabelo? A replica of what I look like on my baby pictures. She has my nose and my lips and her chubby face is exactly mine. I am even embarrassed to mention it to Maria. What do I say after humiliating like the way I did. Asking her if the baby is mine? I still beat myself up for being foolish about.

What got into me? Maria is not

one of those girls who would lie about the paternity of the baby just to cash in maintenance money. It is just that...that lunatic got into my head. I know very well how manipulative he is, but I went ahead and fell into his trap. He knew very well how to let me destroy my own future with my filthy mouth.

How do I even apologize to Maria? I don't deserve her apology but I will die trying.

A beep chirps on my phone.

'Doctor's appointment at 11:00.'
It is a reminder for tomorrow's appointment with Tinyiko.

I shake my head and get up.
What a shitty life I have right now. I huff a laugh. What happened to me? What the hell happened? Am I that cursed? I find love in Maria and my life turn a dramatic turn? All my life, since varsity, was more than perfect. I lived the best times of my life. I had everything under control. And now? Whatever I touch crumbles down like a sand castle when it rains. My intelligence is replaced with stupidity. I have lost my touch. And the more I fight, the more I lose the battle.

So, tomorrow, how do I go to the

doctor's appointment, knowing very well that I want to go see Maria before she leaves for Venda? My last chance to beg her to stay in Gauteng with Thabelo? I mean, the job offer should be able to make her stay, shouldn't it?

God, please!

I laugh at myself while picking a bottle of beer to go throw it away. I didn't believe it when they said a woman can turn your life upside down. I thought it only happened to happened to teenagers who are not experienced by life. I thought it

happened to varsity students like it happened to me then. I never thought, at this age, I will be torn because of love.

I retire to bed after going through my contract with Gundo's father. He is assisting me in funding the coolest joint in Midrand. My salary from the company won't be enough to live the life I want. I am getting peanuts now that Gundo had to jump in and save me before I could lose my house. Had he not rescued me, I would be homeless and trying to find my feet again. But now, I can focus on proving

to everyone what I am capable of.

It is Tuesday morning and Anzani has already dropped a few portfolios for me to run through. It is always hectic when Gundo is not around.

"Would you like me to get you something to drink?" Anzani asks.

"No. You can maybe shift my 14h00 meeting to tomorrow morning. There is something I need to take care of," I say.

"Noted. Is there anything?" she asks. I stare at her as she waits for me to give her another order.

"Would you like me to try her cell?"

"No."

"Oh..." she says, confused.

"I just need you to reschedule my afternoon meeting, that is all," I say. "Maria was in town."

"Really?" Her eyes light up. She had been on the mission with me. When Maria didn't answer my phone calls, I ended up asking PA to call her whenever she got a chance. Unfortunately, it only rang but we were always hopeful.

"Yes. So, thank you."

"It is my pleasure," she mumbles while walking to the door.

I pull through a few portfolios for two new clients and forward

my review to Phuti to contact the clients. More clients, more money.

I pick my landline phone from the table and dial Mrs Masango's office. I sweating as the phone rings unanswered.

"Mr Buthelezi," she answers. I can tell she is walking. This woman is forever busy.

"I am expecting good news," I say.

"I don't have good news, yet," she responds after a deep sigh and my heart drops.

"Does it look promising?"

"I can't tell, but I did send her

the offer yesterday."

"I see."

"I am hopeful. I need her too...maybe not as much as you... but I do need her to take the job back so the offer was too good for her to consider it. if she doesn't, then I'll know that it is more personal than anything else."

"Alright, thank you." I hang down the phone with a heavy heart. If only this woman knows how much I need her back in my life.

Whenever I picture my future, she is part of it.

I grab my jacket from the holder

and hurry out of the door. As I drive to The Radzilani's, I am praying that Maria chose not to go. But if she isn't, she will be confirming that she really doesn't want to be anywhere near me.

"God, if she stays. I promise to give her space that she needs until she is ready to let me," I softly pray. I know she doesn't want to let me into her life, but I promise to not push her. I just need her at arm's length. Selfish, I know but that is what I wish for.

My heart drops when I pull up at Gundo's house. Rudzani's car is

parked, just like on Wednesday when they arrived. He has my daughter in his arms and she is jumping happily like she did on Sunday when I was here to see her.

I tighten my jaw and try to breathe a few times before opening the door. If there is one last thing I need to do, is to play cool. One wrong move and Maria will definitely write-me off.

Before I could even greet, Maria walks out of the house carrying a bottle of milk for Thabelo. She notices me and gives the bottle to Rudzani, in exchange for the baby.

"How are you?" she asks while approaching where I am standing.

"So, you are leaving," I ask. She drops her head to the ground before lifting it up and stare at me.

"Did you come to say goodbye?" she asks. I don't respond. We stare at each other for a little while before she clears her throat. "Thabelo, say goodbye to daddy?"

I wish to ask her if she didn't take Mrs Masango's offer. She is supposed to start next week. if she is taking the offer, she

wouldn't be packing away everything I see in Rudzani's boot. Asking her, might even make her angry because Mrs Masango swore not to tell her that I bowed for her to call her for her job. I need her back more than Mrs Masango needs her.

Thabelo jumps happily in my arms. She is a bubbly girl. I drop a few kisses on her cheeks.

"We need to go before it gets hot. We should be home before it gets hot," she says.

"When am I going to see you?" I ask. She doesn't respond by she reaches to take Thabelo from my

arms. "Maria, are you ever going to forgive me?"

"I already forgave you."

"It doesn't feel like it."

"What do you want me to say? I forgave you and that should make you happy. I have nothing to give, other than my forgiveness."

"I want you to tell me that you will give me another chance."

"Njabulo, please," she whispers.

Rudzani closes the boot. I think it is a way of him calling Maria to the car without being rude.

"Please, let me know when you get home," I say. I am defeated but I am not going to break down in

front of another man.

"Will do," she responds and proceeds to Rudzani's car.

Don't be a jerk, Njabulo Buthelezi; don't be a jerk. I had to repeat that to myself as Maria buckles the baby. If I cause a scene, she is never going to take me serious - so, I watch her as she gets into the backseat and closes the door.

Dammit!

I jump into the car and drive away after Rudzani drove away.

'The doctor's appointment went perfectly fine.' - a text from

Tinyiko. I hit the steering wheel

before dialing her number and reversing the car.

"Hello," Tinyiko sadly answers.

"I am so sorry I missed the appointment. My phone reminded me last night but today...I had a lot on my plate."

"You should have told me. I had to swap my appointment with someone else...thinking that you were running late."

"I am sorry. I will join you on the next one."

"Njabulo...you don't have to do this. I don't need you to."

"Can I do just one thing right in my life? Can I be there for my

son?" I beg. I am very perfect at messing things up but I want to do right by my son from the get-go. I was never there for my daughter and it kills me so much. There is a good reason for that, but I always wish I was there for her and her mother throughout the pregnancy until now that she is a big girl.

"You missed the other appointment too...and it hurts that..."

"Look... when is the next appointment?"

"Next month...the 20th," she says. "It is your birthday and I

don't want to stand on your way to celebrate it with your family after work. The appointment is at 15h30."

"You say it like I have plans for my birthday. I have none.

Please...come to my office at 14h30 and we will drive there together."

"I'll see you then," she responds. Just like that, I am going to see Tinyiko on the 20th at 14h30 - that is guaranteed. Since we fought that useless terms and conditions for this baby arrangement, we are binding ourselves with the terms we

agreed upon. She wants me in her life for nothing but our baby. As hurtful as it is, Tinyiko is one woman who understands my love for Maria. There was a day where we spoke about our future – and there was no future to discuss. The heart wants what it wants and Tinyiko is matured enough to never compromise her happiness for any man including, me. Phuti tells me that it is a tactic of hers to come off as not desperate so that I fall for her. I disagree. Tinyiko has never been the kind of woman that was mentioned by Phuti. She is not

going to call me or try to reach me until the 20th! That one, I am certain about.

'She needs a month's notice at her previous job,' Mrs Masango's text.

Yes!!!!

"Happy birthday Mr Buthelezi," my PA beams at me while placing a tray on my table. Cake and coffee! That is what you get when you become older. No fun things.

"Thank you man. You shouldn't have," I say while picking the coffee.

"Why not? You are the best boss ever," she responds before picking signed documents from my out-tray and walk out of my office. My office door opens before I could even take a sip. I want to yell at him for not knocking, but today is my birthday and I am in a good mood. Okay, I have been in a great mood since Mrs Masango told me that Maria is serving a notice at her old job. She is starting at Masango Logistics on the 01st. – that is 10 days from now. So, no matter how much one would want to ruin my day, it won't work. Gundo walks in with

his hands in the pockets. He sways his eyes to the cake and lets out a smirk.

"Happy birthday," he says. "How do we celebrate this occasion?"

"As if you knew it was my birthday."

"Well, that is why you have a PA to remind us of this insignificant days like this."

The bastard! I laugh.

"What did you have in mind?"

"Drinks...on me?" he offers.

"Drinks on you. Perfect!"

"The old man is coming next week," Gundo says.

"Is he coming for anything

specific?"

"To visit his grandkids," Gundo responds.

"Damn! I should the place buzzing when he comes so that we take him there to show him that I am not wasting his money."

"Host a jazz session."

"Good idea," I say.

"I was with Mlangeni yesterday," Gundo starts. He gives me a feedback of a meeting he attended yesterday. I have been reclaiming myself, making sure that I work my butt off to redeem my name. in thirty

minutes, he leaves me to prepare for meetings I have all morning. It isn't like I have plans for my birthday. I am stuck at work for hours, doing what I do best. Making money.

I even skip lunch, since I am going to the doctor's appointment with Tinyiko. This time, I made hourly reminders since morning. I didn't want to disappoint her like I did the past two times. It wouldn't be fair of me if I claim I want to be part of my son's life. "Can I come in?" Tinyiko asks from the door. She is on time like I thought she would.

"Sure! Sure!" she says while walking in. She is dressed in a pink hugging dress. She looks so much bigger than the last time I saw her. The bump is way too visible and big enough to accommodate our baby. "And you had to bring a whole cake."

"Did you already have some?" she asks with a huge smile.

"Just a piece."

"Happy birthday."

"Happy birthday to you too," I respond and she laughs. What did I say? I am in a good mood. "Well, thank you. I am getting old, ain't I?"

"It comes with maturity. Doesn't it?"

"I heard it does."

She places the cake on the table and pull a chair.

"Can I finish this report and we will be out?" I ask. I trust Phuti and Gundo to make party all night so, I don't want to be hung-over tomorrow and swearing for not finishing this report. I burry myself on the laptop while Tinyiko walks around my office. "I just need ten minutes."

"You have fifteen minutes," she says from the window.

"That is more than enough."

She strolls around the office while I finish typing the emails to Phuti and the creative team to start working on.

A soft knock takes my attention. "Come in," I call out while typing this long email. The clearing of the throat forces me to lift my head towards the door. If it was Gundo, he would have already said what he was doing in my office. Anzani would have been standing by my desk right now, picking or dropping whatever file she has to.

"Hi...I can...come back some other time," Maria says from the door.

Her face – is unreadable. She sways her eyes between Tinyiko and I before dropping them to the cake she has in her hands.

WTF!

Two damn cakes.

“Maria, please...come in,” I say while getting on my feet. She doesn't move. Tinyiko is standing by the window, watching.

“Well...I just...wanted to say happy birthday. Nothing much,” she mumbles, not moving.

“I didn't know you were back,” I say and that makes her widen her eyes. Dammit! That was a wrong thing to say. It implies that I

was hiding that Tinyiko could visit me – not that she was visiting me. “Uhm...Tinyiko is here so that i don't miss the doctor's appointment.”

Maybe I should just shut up because I am messing up the moment.

“Not a problem. I should called first.”

“No...no...no,” I quickly say. “You don't have to call before you come here. You don't need to call.”

Tinyiko clears her throat before walking to where her handbag is at.

“I can wait in the car if you

want," Tinyiko says.

"Yes."

"The keys," Tinyiko says and lifts her palms.

"What?"

"Your car keys?" she asks.

"That's if you still want to join me."

"Well..." I say and Tinyiko stares at me with watery eyes.

"Look, I just came to say Happy Birthday Njabulo...and I thought you would need some cake for your day," Maria says while placing the cake on the table, next to the damn chocolate brought by Tinyiko.

Somebody, come and shoot me!!!

"I'll call on an Uber," Tinyiko says.

"Oh no...I wouldn't allow you to do that," Maria says. "I honestly didn't know you were here and like I said before, I should have called before showing up here."

"Uhm...maybe you could join us," I say.

Maria and Tinyiko laugh in unison.

"What?" I shrug.

"No," Tinyiko mumbles to herself.

"No...no, thank you," Maria politely says. "I'll make an appointment with your PA."

Where is that somebody to shoot me, RIGHT NOW????

EPISODE 45

MARIA

This is not funny, but I am tempted to laugh. I didn't mean to...make to make him feel like he is confused. I genuinely didn't know he will be here with his baby mama. Had I known - or if his PA was on her desk - I would have dropped the parcel by the door.

"Listen Njabulo...I am not here to stay. Mr Radzilani asked me to drop off this signed documents..."

I say while pulling the papers from my bag. I drop the envelope

on the table. "I came to drop this. But, since it is your birthday...I thought I could bring some cake." Njabulo sighs deeply and pick the envelope from the table. He scans through the papers. I learnt that Njabulo is the guy Mr Radzilani is funding. He did great by investing in him. Njabulo is a hard worker. This whole thing here....is awkward! Tinyiko seems to be unsettled. It could be that I am delaying them or she is pissed at me. I hope it is not the latter. The last thing i want is to fight with Njabulo's baby mommy.

"Well...let me not stand in your way. I will see you around."

"Maria!" Njabulo calls out before I could even reach the door.

"Yes?"

"Can we do supper when I am done?"

"I don't think that will be a great idea," I mumble. "I have to unpack and get the place ready and.... Yah..."

Njabulo is going to need to untangle this situation. His baby mama doesn't look pleased and I pray - from deep down my heart - that he doesn't break her heart. I know how much she needs him.

This is why I didn't want us to get back together before he fixes his situation with her. He needs to be there for her as much as I would have wished that he was in my life during my pregnancy.

"Can you at least pick up my phone when I call?"

"Of course," I respond. There isn't a reason to embarrass him at this moment. I close the door behind me and catch a taxi from the gate. This taxi journey from the office to town reminds me of the times when I worked at Gundo's company before Njabulo came by. It is funny how it seems

to be ages ago but it wasn't. It has been ages since I have been hustling.

I am staying at an apartment in Bedfordview. It is one of Mrs Masango's apartments that she lets out for income. She was right when she said there was no way I was going to reject her offer. The offer was fat and the benefits were heart-warming. There was no way I was going to settle for a small job compared to working hard for my daughter. I don't want to follow Njabulo behind to make him pay for maintenance.

I arrived two days ago, to get settled. The apartment is fully furnished, so I can bank my rent money.

I get another taxi to drop me by my apartment gate. It is a secured complex and I don't doubt that I will be safer here. Even though, I haven't slept for the past two nights. Whenever I hear noise from outside, I get up and watch TV so that I am aware of anything happening around here.

With my eyes swaying around the corridor, I unlock the buglar door and hurry inside.

'I need a room-mate before I lose my mind,' - I make a mental note. I thought I wasn't going to be paranoid when I stay alone. But, I was wrong.

I am not paranoid. I just want to make sure that no one is following me. I lock the door and drop my bag on the table.

Where is my girl? I grab my phone to call my mother. She insisted that I leave Thabelo with her so that I settle first before moving the baby there. I am supposed to look for a nanny while I am here settling and then I will get Thabelo from my

mother. If I didn't agree her, I would think that she is pushing me to live a little. She wants me to get back to live my life now that I stay alone. I told her that I would get a nanny as soon as possible, but she refused. Now I regret. Thabelo would be here to help me get my mind off things. She would have kept me busy until I retire to bed – that one I know for sure. She is crawling now, so I am forever after her.

I dial my mother's number.

"Maria," she greets. Thabelo screams from the background.

She is probably fighting for the phone.

"Mama. Why is that one screaming?" I ask with a chuckle. She isn't crying, so my heart is not beating out of my chest. I wish I could video-call her but I changed phones with my brother. I don't want a smart phone. I just need a small phone to receive phone calls. I settled for something untraceable – just in case.

"You know you child wants to grab everything from everyone," Mom responds.

"How is she? And how are you?"

"We are fine. How about you?"

"I am fine..."

"But?"

"I think I need to get someone to share this apartment with me. It is huge and

Sometimes....i get a little paranoid."

"God didn't give you a spirit of fear, nwana wanga..."

"I know..." I sigh deeply. "I know."

"Do get someone to stay with you until you feel fine."

"I can so maar get a nanny for Thableo."

"What is the rush? She is fine

here... she has already moved on with life."

"Really Mma?" I say. Is that supposed to make me happy. My daughter is going to move on with life without me and I don't want that. "I will come get her after a month or two."

"Two months is better. I don't want my granddaughter to come there to be locked in the flat.

When she is here, she can crawl around the yard and when we go to church, she charms everyone around there...she is famous."

It is going to be a fight when I go home to take my daughter

from my mother. I hang up and start preparing late lunch for myself. I filled the house with groceries because I don't want to feast on fast food. I have my sexy body back and feasting on take-away will take me a few steps backwards.

I jump when my phone vibrates on the kitchen counter.

Damn!!

"Hello," I whisper, trying to get myself to breath normal.

"Are you okay?" Njabulo's voice soothes me. I can tell Njabulo's voice even in my sleep.

"I am...fine...yeah," I mumble.

"Are you sure?"

"Njabulo, I am fine," I say. He can obviously tell.

"I am done at the doctor's appointment."

"How did it go?"

"Everything seems to be fine."

"Good to hear."

"Well..i wanted to invite you for a few drinks with some friends....just to celebrate my birthday."

"Uhm..."

"I am not taking no for an answer. Thandeka will be there with her husband."

"In that case, I am in."

"I'll pick you up at five," he says. I check the time on my wrist watch. I have an hour to get ready.

"Where are we going?"

"Thandeka picked San Deck. She calls it decent for an old man like me."

"San Deck it is."

"Are you going to send me the location?"

"Uhm...we might have a challenge," I say. "I don't have a smart phone."

"Okay, you can tell me where you are, I'll find you." I give him the address before hanging up and

putting away the veggies that I was about to prepare.

I rush to the bedroom to pick something to wear for San Deck. I haven't been there but I know that it is top notch. I don't have something proper for tonight, hey. Black jeans won't do. These formal pencil skirts won't work. After a good fifteen minutes digging in my closet, I throw myself on the bed. There is literally nothing to wear other than a short dress I wore when I went out with Dikeledi and her cousin a few weeks ago. Problem is, I don't want Njabulo to think

like I am trying to seduce him – because, the dress came from Dikeledi's closet and she is famous for wearing the shortest dress. I have no choice. It is either it or a pencil dress that's make me look like I am going to Masango Logistics.

Without wasting more time, I jump into the shower for a quick one before taking more time to make-up my face and style my braids. There isn't harm in looking beautiful. The dress hugs my figure. I pull it down to make it look a little to my knees. It goes up a little but I look decent

enough when I pull it all the way down.

"Hey, I am here," Njabulo says.

"I'll be right there."

I pick my clutch bag and throw a lipstick and my bank card, together with wipes and my make-up powder. Njabulo is parked outside the gate when I get downstairs. Luckily, he has his head on the face to witness me walking towards the car, trying my best to pull the dress down. After this minute, no more pulling it down unless I want people to give me judgemental eyes for not being confident on the dress I

chose to wear. I know on the window and he jerks his head up before pressing a button to unlock the door.

"Oh, sorry..." he says when I jump in. "I am trying to catch up with all these birthday messages."

"Not a problem," I mumble while getting settled.

"Oh...wow," he says - to himself before turning to my face, "You look stunning."

"Thank you," I say. He is never stingy with compliments. He never is and I am not going to hear the end of it.

He reverses and drives straight to where we are dining. I am glad the dress that I am wearing is decent enough for day-time. The sun is almost setting when we get seated.

"Looks Mrs Radzilani got us a perfect table," Njabulo says when we step to the deck. Damn, it is beautiful. The sun is setting from far and we got the view to watch it until it disappears. Thandeka is already here with Gundo and two other guys from Njabulo's work.

"Look at you," Thandeka says while getting up. "Look at you." I give her a hug before pulling a

chair next to hers. She is busy complimenting me while she looks like she has just walked out of a runaway. She looks perfect in a mustard cocktail dress.

The guys greet me while Njabulo calls for the waiter.

"I'll have a glass of water, please," I say and everyone at the table stares at me like I am crazy. "What? Can I catch my breath first?"

"As long as you are not here to drink water the whole night. We don't want no party popers," Phuti says before gulping his Heineken.

"You can share wine with me. My husband wants to get me drunk," Thandeka says.

"I still need my water though," I say.

"Please add a bottle of those," Njabulo says while pointing at Thandeka's wine and a bottle of Johnnie Walker. The waiter notes down the order, including the food order from everyone around the table. He returns with my glass of water and places the wine in the ice bucket.

Njabulo keeps stealing glances at me while the table cracks up on jokes shared by Phuti. I am

trying to focus on the stories around the table but Njabulo is distracting me. I know he misses me but when he looks at me, he has that thing in his eyes. That thing I fell in love with in the first place. The more he stares, the more it feels like he is digging deep down my heart to break all the walls around it.

"Right, Njabulo?" Gundo asks.

"Huh?" Njabulo snaps back to life and stare at Gundo.

"You were the smartest guy in varsity," Gundo says. Njabulo drops his eyes and lets out a giggle.

"Of course, you would have failed if it wasn't for me. I did ya'll assignments and you never paid me."

"Right?" Gundo says with a smirk. "Come on now...you don't have to expose me in front of my wife."

"That won't change a thing, my love," Thandeka jumps in.

"I am smart in my own way, correct?" Gundo asks his blushing wife.

"Of course."

"But, I should say my social life has always been fucked up ever since varsity. If I could choose...I

would rather be less smart and be socially clever," Njabulo says and shot the drink down his throat.

"I got fucked up in varsity because I was a so-called nerd. I wish it wasn't the case."

"Oh, please," Gundo says.

"I rather be smart and have a boring life," I jump in. Njabulo's comment sounds deeper than it is and only Gundo would understand the depth of it.

The food arrives and in no time, the table is clean again and no one wants to go for a dessert. We could settle for liquor desserts but none of us is having any.

"Please excuse me," Thandeka stands. "I need to powder my nose."

"Another way of saying, you are going to gossip about us," Gundo says.

"You know too much," Thandeka says while reaching for my hand.

"Come with me."

"Please, excuse me," I murmur while picking my clutch bag. I hook my arm around Thandeka's hand while we head to the ladies' room. Thandeka picks her little make-up bag and fishes for a powder. She taps her shiny cheeks with the powder brush –

making sure she fixes her face back to perfection.

"What is going on?" she asks without turning to me.

"Nothing," I mumble.

"Try that with someone else," she mumbles while dropping the powder brush back into the make-up bag.

"It is Njabulo," I say.

"What did he do?" she asks, this time, her face is on me.

"I am confused about what I want and I don't want to hurt him in the process."

"Why?"

"I feel like we should get back

together now. He wants us to try again but I feel like I am not ready but I don't want to hurt him in the process. Mostly, because he hasn't been lucky with women."

"Look, he is a big boy...he will be up. You don't have to do what your heart doesn't want."

"My heart wants him but my head is telling me something else."

"Tough! Huh?"

"Very," I say. I am still so in love with Njabulo - but...Tinyiko.

"You know...you have an answer in your heart?" I roll my eyes at her. Like I said, my heart and

head are in conflict.

"No one is perfect, you know that, right?" she asks.

"Your husband is; isn't he?" I ask and she cracks into a loud laugh.

"What?"

"Story for another day. No one is perfect but your love for each other will pull you through. So, if you dig deep down...you'll know the answer."

When we return to the table, the guys are laughing while Njabulo tells them a tale. I trust his sense of humour to get the table rolling in tears like that.

"Did we miss anything?" I ask

while taking a seat.

"Nothing important," Njabulo says.

This is so much better than staying in that enormous apartment. Thinking about going back there, to sleep alone, gives me a headache.

We stay until late for drinks.

Luckily, I am only going to work in a few days, so it wasn't a problem staying up until late.

"I had an awesome time, tonight," Njabulo says. He insisted on getting me to my door. The last time he left me by the

elevators, I didn't reach my apartment. At this moment, I wish I had more than a bottle of wine so that I go dead when I lay my head on the pillow.

"I also had an awesome time," I say while getting my keys from my clutch bag.

"Are you okay?" he asks as I look around before unlocking the door.

"Yeah!"

"Look...I can come in..."

"Njabulo!"

"I won't do anything you won't ask me to do," he says with a smirk. Really Njabulo, "I will leave when you fall asleep."

"Well..."

"Or, I can cuddle you to bed if you want. I know I am irritable," he says.

"Oh, please. You are drunk."

"Drunk in love," he says.

I unlock the door and lead the way inside. He follows behind and shuts the door behind.

"If you were not mad at me, I would be pulling you and kissing you right now," he says. I pretend as if that didn't turn me on. It is very dangerous to have Njabulo in here when I am this thirsty.

"Coffee?" I ask instead.

"Yes, if you want to stay up until morning."

"I'll make tea instead," I say. I don't want him to leave or else I will be sitting until morning.

I plug the kettle while taking off my stilettos.

Njabulo takes off his jacket, making himself at home in my apartment. He picks the remote and switch on the TV. He looks sexy as hell, even when he looks tipsy. He turns and stares at me while I make us tea.

"What are you looking at?"

"You!" he says. "You are damn beautiful."

"Thank you Njabulo."

"But, why don't you want to be my girlfriend? My wife?"

"Because you are a jerk," I say.

He stands there by the living room, watching me. I stare back at him as if we are in a contest.

Damn!

He drops the remote on the table and walks towards me. He walks, his eyes on me, until he stops in front of me. I can easily smell the Johnnie walker he has been drinking all night. He isn't drunk, just tipsy enough to have guts.

"You are mine," he says.

"I am..."

"Mine!" he says.

"Oh..." I drop my eyes to the floor but his fingers lift my chin.

"You are mine," he says.

"Njabulo...."

"If you don't want me in your life, this is your chance. Tell me to leave right now...and I will never bother you ever again. Right now! Tell me!" he says, without shifting his eyes from mine. "If you want me in your life...we are going to start over right now.."
My throat gets dry. He doesn't move. When I try to drop my head, his fingers are there to lift my chin up to face him. "If you

don't want me in your life, tell me right now. If you want me....we are going to start over, right now."

I sigh, deeply.

I cross my arms to my chest and stare at him.

"Right now! What is it going to be?"

The kettle goes off, tempting to disturb us but Njabulo does not move his eyes.

"What is it going to be?" He has never been this serious.

I clear my throat and put my hand in front of him and say, "Hi, I am Maria."

Njabulo drops his eyes to my hand. He lifts his eyes to me again before he says, "Maria, I am Njabulo Buthelezi."

He shakes my hand.

"Nice to meet you Njabulo Buthelezi," I respond while shaking his hand slowly.

"Likewise, Maria," he responds with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Likewise!"

EPISODE 46 (Unedited)

NJABULO

"Hi, I am Maria."

"Maria, I am Njabulo Buthelezi,"

I respond before shaking her soft little hand. I am fucken turned on, just by touching her.

"Nice to meet you Njabulo Buthelezi." Ah, Maria wants to drive me crazy. Her hand shakes mine slowly, while her eyes stares deep down my soul.

"Likewise, Maria. Likewise!" I respond and all she does is to smile at me. I am crazy, I know and I also know that she likes it. She really does.

"Uhm...yeah..you can stop staring," she says when she notices that I cannot help but just stare at her beautiful face.

I don't want to say anything to break this moment. I want us to just stand in this kitchen and reconnect.

"Do you kiss on the first date?" I ask. She closes her eyes for a second and snap them open in a another second. Damn you Maria, you are killing me right about now. "I don't kiss on my first day," she responds before licking her bottom lip and then biting it. Her words and her action don't match! But I not about to be a jerk ever again, so the growing snake in my pants should better forget this moment.

"Oh, so you are the 90 days rule kind of a woman?" I ask. She laugh, throwing her head backward as she fills the room with her sweet laughter.

"Unless you are irresistible," she responds.

"Oh, dammmn." I laugh out loud.

"You are a 90 days rule kind of a woman unless I am irresistible.

What makes a man irresistible?"

"Let me see," she looks up to the ceiling and pretends like she is thinking, until she stares back at me and say, "Your looks?"

"I see," I say. "I see."

She clears her throat after a few

minutes of staring contest. I am thinking of ways to rip her apart and make it up to her if she allows. I am thinking of ways to sex her up to remind her who I am and what she fell for in the first place. I am calculating ways to sweep her off her feet. I am thinking a thousand ways to make her scream my name.

"Tea! I need to make us, tea," she says, turning this whole moment off.

I am patient though. very very patient. I waited for four months to apologise to her when she shut me off her life. I can

surely wait for her 90 days which will be reduced to a few days.

I give her a smirk and nod at her.

"One teaspoon of sugar," I say, reminding her how I like my tea.

"I know," she says and winks at me before turning to the counter to finish what she has started. I return back to the living room, to watch the TV that is on and wait for that cup of tea that I don't even know. I will drink it though because I know how much it means to her for her to even suggest it. She wants to keep me here, and she can keep me here until whenever she wants.

She carefully brews two cups of tea and brings them to the living room for us. She takes a mug and sits on the mat instead of the couch.

"Those couches are not comfortable," she says.

"I thought it was me," I respond while getting up from the couch.

"Before you sit down...can you get us a throw from my bed? It is a bit chilly in here," she says while pointing at the direction of her bedroom. This is a perfect two-bedroomed apartment. The décor here is outstanding and the space is enough for her and a roommate.

I pull a throw from a neatly made bed and hurry back to the living. She is watching the music videos playing on the TV, her eyes glued on the TV and her lips on the mug of tea. If this isn't a heavenly moment, then I don't know what else would qualify.

She looks perfect. Very perfect.

"AKA or Casper?" she asks from the floor when she notices me standing behind the three-seater couch which she dims uncomfortable.

"None," I say, while getting on the floor next to her. I am honest. I am not a hip hop kind of

a guy.

"Thank you," she responds and get the throw from me. with me watching, she cover her legs and rest her back on the couch. I could kiss her right now. I could make love to her right at this moment but I might mess things between us if I jump to that conclusion. I know what I need to do. I need to go to Gundo Radzilani and take a few lessons on how to love a woman the right way. He looks like a man who has his game on.

An hour later, and I wish to sleep. The whisky I have been

downing the whole day is kinda spinning my head right now. I wish to sleep but that would be rude of me – mostly when she doesn't seem like she wants to sleep.

"Do you want to sleep?" she asks.

"Me? No! Why would I want to sleep this early?" I ask. She laughs, probably seeing through me.

"You can go home, you know?" she says. Leave? Why does it sound like leaving might change things between us? I don't want to leave only to find out that this was just a dream.

"I will leave when you fall asleep," I say. I mean it. She didn't look like she was fine staying here all by herself. I know, it has everything to do with Luzuko. Unless she sees someone about this, she won't be sane. I still look around for the damn man, so what about her?

"And if I don't?"

"Then we will sit here until morning," I respond.

"Yeah right," she says.

"If I didn't know better, I'd think you don't want to sleep because you don't want me to leave," I dryly say.

"Not, really," she says and I nod, not believing her at all.

Silence!

"When is he due?" Maria asks.

I clear my throat before I ask,

"Should we talk about it?"

"Of course! There is no running away from it."

"The 20th, next month," I respond. That is what the doctor said at our appointment.

"Are you ready?" she asks.

"Well, can one ever be ready?" I ask. She gives me a tight smile like I have offended her. I shouldn't have asked that, it might be sensitive for her.

"You can mentally be ready for him. I had to mentally prepare myself for Thabelo. Had I not, I think I might have lost it...honestly," she says. There is always a tremble when she talks about Thabelo's birth and I always feel bad for not being there for her. I would loved to hold her hand when she needed me. I would have done everything she wanted me to do when she was pregnant. But I never got a chance. No matter how much that is the past, it still affect us as much.

"I am ready," I respond so that

I can move on from this topic.

"You must be excited," she says, refusing to let it go. it is weird discussing this with her. It needs to be discussed but I wish it wasn't now when I am having this intimate moment with her.

"I am. I have figured that babies are blessing," I honestly respond.

"They really are. I don't know if I'd still be sane if it wasn't for Thabelo. Honestly."

"How I miss her," I say.

"My mom doesn't want to give her back to me," Maria says with a chuckle.

"She literally belongs to her grand mother."

"She does."

I feel exhausted, as if my limbs can be disconnected from my body. The light blinds my eyes when I open my eyes. I have my hand over Maria's body. It is morning and we are sleeping in the living room, on the mat, with the TV softly playing.

When did we even fall asleep?

I don't even remember but we did stay up until every late, chit chatting about everything and anything she wanted to chat

about. There was never a minute when she wanted me gone. I don't even remember when fell asleep.

Maria is softly snoring like she always did when I was in her life. I watch as her lips are slightly parted and her chest is rising and falling in a beautiful rhythm.

My head is pounding, a little but I force myself to wake up. Maria didn't sleep much so the best thing I can do is to give her room to sleep.

It is after nine o'clock but it is cloudy outside, so it still makes sense that she wants to sleep.

Dammit! We slept in our clothes. I head to the bathroom to freshen up before heading back to the kitchen, to check what I could prepare for her before I rush home to change before heading to Midrand to go run my side hustle. Gundo's father is waiting for good results, I don't have room to fail before he tells me that I am incompetent.

Just when I settle in the kitchen to fix something for her, she wakes up. She is as shocked as I am about the fact that we fell asleep on the mat.

"Did you sleep well?" I ask.

"Did we fall asleep on the floor?" she asks while lifting herself to the couch. She stretches her hands before rubbing her itchy eyes.

"It was your fault. You insisted that we chat up the whole night," I say. "You can go sleep in the bedroom, I have to rush to work...unless you need me to get you breakfast."

"You can go. I need to sleep," she says while getting up.

Damn! Her dress is up her thighs. I am turned on, strongly but I shove the thought far away as I fill a glass with cold water. I

down it while she drags the
throw to her bedroom.

It feels good to know that my
woman is back in my life. The only
woman I want to spend the rest
of my life with. It will take
everything to win her heart back
- that I am sure.

I park my car next to a small
room that is created as an office.
If I want this joint to make
money for me, I need to be here
every weekend unless I really
cannot show face. hard work is
not new to me; worse when I
have a reason to work hard.
Right now I have Maria, Thabelo

and my son to hustle for. I have no excuse to relax.

"Sure, grootman," Vuyo greets when I walk towards him and the three other guys I got to wash the cars. "Do you want your car washed?"

"No, thanks."

I got Vuyo and the other guys from the traffic lights, asking for a job and ever since I hired them – they have been working hard to prove a point. These are people I can rather have.

'I hope you guys are bringing your cars for car wash,' – I send text messages to Gundo and Phuti.

'I'll come by after lunch' – Phuti responds immediately. I doubt Gundo will respond. He has a gang to please before he gets time to fool around with friends at the car wash.

'I'll pop by in the noon' – Gundo responds before I throw my phone into a drawer and get to pretend that I'm working. What I am honestly doing is thinking about Maria. I am thinking of ways to not screw this chance up. I want her to trust me. I am thinking of ways to prove to her how serious I am about her.

By the time Phuti shows up with

friends, I had tried pulling ideas to bring market to this place. It is difficult to keep the competition tight when there are a hundred of competitors every corner. With time, I believe I am going to take over.

"How many cars have you washed before us?" Phuti asks as he drags his cooler box to the stretch tent prepared as a waiting area. I don't know how he does it. He was drinking all night before we parted ways and here he is, strong as horse and starting to drink all over again. I cannot keep up with him.

"About....seventeen," I report.

"Not bad! For a new joint," he responds. He is right.

"If you bring all your friends here, we might be talking a new story."

"See those six cars," he says pointing to the queue of cars, "...those are my friends."

He is right. He is one guy that know a million of people.

"This place looks promising,"

Gundo says as he walks towards us. We have already set camp chairs around one table.

"You think?" I ask while giving him a handshake.

"It does," he responds. Gundo is

one man I believe. He wouldn't lie about this. Business means a lot to him. It seems like it runs from the blood.

"Thanks, man."

"How did you go last night?" he asks, making Phuti laugh as if I was a topic when I left.

"And can I ask what is funny?" I dart my eyes between the two of them. Phuti's friends don't care what I am talking about.

"You were love struck last night," Gundo says before clicking his bottle of beer with Phuti's as if they are toasting.

"Oh... I am a joke now."

"Every man in love is a joke. You should have seen yourself last night. You were...weird."

Weird, huh? If weird scored me my woman, then I can be weird as much as I need to be.

"You followed the poor girl everywhere," Gundo adds. By following her everywhere, he means walking her to the bathroom a few times when Gundo's wife was in his arms.

"Who wouldn't follow around a girl like that one?" Phuti says before they both laugh at me like I am an idiot.

I don't mind though. I can be an

idiot for her.

"You two must stay out of my business," I say, pointing at them.

"It was sweet to watch," Phuti says.

"And I am proud to announce that I have my girl back," I announce. "So, both of you can suck my dick for making fun of me."

"Don't screw up again," Gundo says.

"That is what I am afraid of," I mumble. I don't want to mess this. I don't want to mess my chance with Maria. Whatever it takes.

"Want an advice?" Gundo asks. I nod at him. I trust Gundo more than any man. He seems to have this love thing by the balls. "You must jump to whatever she says. Always. In other words, she is always right even when you don't think so. If you get that right, then my man you are ready for life."

She is always right!

No matter what, Maria is always right!! I remind myself as I walk out of Woolworths. I got a bouquet of roses and the tinroof ice cream she asked me to bring

her. It is just after seven and I just knock off from the car wash. I park my car where Maria let me park last night before rushing to her apartment. Just one knock and she opens the door for me like she was waiting for me to arrive. "You couldn't wait for me to arrive, huh?" I ask and she gives me an awkward smile. It hit me - she doesn't like to be by herself. She isn't over the accident and I cannot blame her a bit.

"How was your day?" she asks while forcing a wide smile.

"It was long but fun," I respond.

"I got this for you."

"You are sweet," she responds while taking the flowers and plastic bag with ice cream from me. I follow her inside but turn to the living room while she turns to the kitchen. I just want to lie down on this couch! I am exhausted.

"Would you like some ice cream?" she calls loudly from the kitchen. "I want pap," I call out, forcing her to laugh out loudly.

"I'll be right there," she responds.

In minutes she walks back to the room with a tray of food. My heart skips when I realize that

this is how I will be served if I wife her arse like I had I wanted to so before this whole Luzuko thing. I smile at her, hiding the hurt in my eyes. That man ruined our life but I am right here, ready to make everything work. "Thank you," I murmur to her while receiving the pap and chicken that I asked for. She has cooked the spinach the way I like it. She watches as I eat while she digs on that ice cream of hers. When done, I help her wash the dishes while she disappears to take a shower.

I pull the remote and tune in to

the music channel while I wait for her to return.

What?

Damn you Maria! - I thought to myself when she appears to the living room in a fricking silk night dress. How am I supposed to resist this???

"Would you like some tea?" she asks.

"I want you!" I confess as she passes to the kitchen. How on earth am I suppose to drink tea when she is this hot??

"I am a 90 day kind of a girl," she says but that doesn't stop me from following her to where she

is. she is plugs the damn kettle before reaching for a mug from the cupboard.

"Am I not irresistible enough?" I ask, pinning her to the cupboard.

"Njab...."

"Shhhhhhhh!" I say while smelling the vanilla scent that is on her skin. How am I expected to wait for 90 days? I pray she doesn't ask me to leave her alone because I am going to fail Guundo's test.

"What..." she tries to say but I smash my lips to her. A moan escapes her lips. She is as thirsty as I am. "Njabulo, no!"

"No, what?"

"No!" she whisper but it is not strong enough to stop me for digging my nails in her thighs. She tilts her backward and receive my kisses on her neck. "No!"

"Allow me..." I say while showing her a chair. With dreamy eyes, she turns her gaze to the chair. It is high stool and there is no way I can sex her up from it. She sits and without a warning a spread her thighs and stand between them, kissing her as if my life depends on it. My life does depend on it. I am thirsty for her. so so so thirsty.

She moans in my mouth, forcing

me to bite her lips to drink from her. She allows and when she digs her fingers in my hair, I knew that she lost the battle. She lost the battle but I am not going to take advantage of her.

I reach for the hem of her nightie and she doesn't resist. She allows me to take it off - showing off her boobs.

"Babe!!!!" I whisper before dropping my mouth to one of them. She gasps as I lick the nipple and start sucking her boobs. My other hand caress the free boob and Maria's hands are pulling my wild hair.

"Ahhhhh!" she gasps as I switch the boobs. She is spreading her legs without me asking. BUT I wont take advantage of her. I leave the boobs and lower the kisses to her stomach before I reach for her underwear.

"Can i?" I ask...just for protocol. There is no way she is going to stop me. She nods like a hungry woman. I don't need to be told twice before I pull the underwear off and go straight for her glittering pussy. She is wet - there is no hiding and I am ready to drink from her.

"Oh...my..." she whispers while

catching her breath. I don't stop sucking her pussy for dear life. the more I flip my tongue, the more she releases the juices for me to drink. It has been a year and six months before we were this connected. She cannot hide her lust. She keeps spreading her legs while whispering my name. That is what I want. This is how we used to do it. This is me reminding her what she was missing out when she was miles away from me.

"Njabulo..." Her whispering my name doesn't stop me from sucking and licking and sucking and

licking some more. I might not take advantage of her tonight but she is welcome to take advantage of my tongue.

"Njabulo!" She still doesn't stop me from sucking the life out of her. 90 days my foot! She is going to call me to come give it to her.

"Are you close baby?" I ask, not knowing that I am taking her to the edge. She throws her head backwards while I dive in again to suck and lick and suck...until her thighs starts trembling.

Yes!

"Come for me baby," I say before softly teasing her clit with my

finger! Boy, she screams my name before fighting to push me away from her. "Still want to wait for 90 days...Miss I am 90 days?"

"I hate you!"

"I love you too!" I give her a smirk while watching her catch her breath

EPISODE 47 (Unedited)

MARIA

"I hate you!"

"I love you too!" Njabulo responds with a smirk on his face. Oh, my God I am blushing right now. when I have gathered myself,

Njabulo gets in between my spread thighs and pull me to hug him. Whatever this gesture means, it is very special. When moves his head and drops his lips to mine. The scent of my cum so loud from his breath. Oh, my God. I taste myself, moaning as I suck his lips. I want more than what he has just given me. I want him. I want all of him. He moves his lips from my lips to my neck. I jerk my head backward and let him caress my boobs. My hands are pressing on the sides of the chair, supporting a weight of him.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" he asks.

"Mmhhh," I moan out my answer.

I enjoyed myself. That was mind-blowing! More than, mind-blowing.

But I want more.

"I am ready for that cup of tea," he smiles at me and pulls himself away from me.

"You have got to be kidding me?"

"Me? why?" he asks while picking my nightdress from the floor. He helps me in it while I try to make sense of what he was doing.

"What are you doing?"

"What do you mean?" He grins at me. I know that look in his eye.

But right now is not the time to

fool around. He has to finish what he has started.

"Are you going to just...leave it like that?"

"Leave what?" he giggles. "What do you want? Say what you want and I will give it to you."

I look away, hiding the fact that I am blushing. I jump out of the chair with an attempt to finish making the tea that he disturbed me from brewing. We will see who is the strongest between the two of us.

Again, I fail the test.

He knew I was going to fail this 90 days test anyway. Mentioning

it was just a waste of time and a room for Njabulo to tease me. I am soaking wet. Why wouldn't I be? Njabulo took the mug from my hand and is now walking around the kitchen, making me that tea I wanted to drink in the first place. Who doesn't like a sight of a man making food for her? It is the sexiest thing ever. "I want you," I whisper loud enough to take his attention. I am shy to admit, but what is the use?

"What was that?"

"You are enjoying this, ain't you? You are horrible."

He leaves the cups on the table and turns towards me. Enough teasing, he wants me as much as I want him.

"I wanted you to admit it to yourself," he whispers to my ear while tugging off his shirt. I suck in a deep breath as I watch his muscles rip tightly when he lifts me off the ground. His hands are digging on my butt while he effortlessly walks to the bedroom. Didn't I miss this?

He throws me on the bed and reaches for his wallet at once, before getting rid of his shorts except for his black briefs. I will

tear those briefs myself. He searches for what I think is a condom. Did he keep one in his wallet all these time when I was away? Jealousy fills my chest but I close my eyes not think much about it.

I was not here. Now, I am back. Anything that happened when I wasn't here, must stay in the past. The wallet doesn't have what he was looking for.

Disappointment flicks on his face. I join him as he drops next to me. There is no condom.

I don't have one too. It isn't like I was planning to lure Njabulo to

my flat to have sex with me. He is just irresistible. I roll and get on top of him.

His hands find my full breasts. He gives me a weak smile as he caresses them while I dry hump him. Damn my seed is swollen and all I want is something to rub off until I come. He knows what I am doing and he moves his hips with me. When I drop my head to kiss him, he cups the back of my head and deepens the kiss. The more he groans in my mouth, the more I rock my hips to help myself. He lets me dry hump him. He lets me have my way with

him; he is never ever going to forget to bring a condom along with him when he comes here ever again.

It feels good, what we are doing. His hands on me, everywhere. His mouth on mine, his teeth digging into my lips now and then - I swear I tasted blood.

I feel him tensing up and I know I have to get what I want before he explodes. I rock my hips back and forth, keeping the fast pace that I have picked. This time I can feel my swollen seed pulsing, ready to get me to the edge. I don't stop rocking myself

until I hear Njabulo gritting his teeth and trying his level best not to call out my name. all he does is to squeeze his fingers into my thighs – causing me to roll my eyes as my orgasm reaches me. Oh. My. God.

I flop on top of him, catching my breath together with me.

“Taking me back to my teenage years,” he groans while I pull myself to sit on top of him.

“Isn't it just a perfect trip down the lane?”

“Damn right it is,” he says and pulls himself out of bed. He exploded in his briefs. He

disappears to the bathroom and a seconds later, I hear the water running. I pull the sheets from the end of the bed and curl on the bed, waiting for him to return. I shouldn't have taken that shower when I did. Well, the other part of me is glad I did. I am too exhausted right now to even force myself to join him. I drop my head on the pillow and let my mind go wild.

Boy, am I relieved that Njabulo is with me when it comes to unprotected sex. We need to go get tested like we once did when we started dating. I was

tempted to let it slide, but Njabulo was a man enough to know that there is no show without a costume.

What is going to happen to us now? Whenever I try to think about this, I get to the dead end. Somehow we are going to need to make it work for everyone who is affected in this whole entanglement.

My baby girl is out of the picture. Maybe it is for the best that she stays with my mother for a few more months before bringing her here to mess with Njabulo's head. With his boy coming in the next

month, I don't want him to choose between the two children when the times forces him. I never want him to feel guilty for being there for his son more than his daughter. I was not here when they made the baby - I need to remind myself that. I need to remove myself from whatever promises they made together - as long as I am not affected by any of this, I am fine taking a few steps back.

Sacrifice!

This is the time to make those sacrifices. This is the time to stand by Njabulo's side and make

it up to him for loving me more than I needed.

This connection we just revived; it was never dead. He still drives me as crazy as he did before I disappeared. His lust in his eyes. His love he confesses is still the same as before I was taken away from him.

It is like we never parted ways. Even when we miles apart – our souls were tangled together. It is going to take so much to put off our desire for each other. I tried. I didn't last long.

A few minutes later, Njabulo returns from the bathroom with

nothing but a towel on his waist.
"I'll go lock up."

A week flew by so fast. Today, I return to Masango Logistics. Njabulo has his hands on my waist when I open my eyes. He has been spooning me since the middle of the night when we fell asleep after a steamy session. His deep breath tells me he is still sleeping. What time is it? Today is my first day at work and should be getting ready. But, untying his hands from my body is the last thing I want.

My phone rings and vibrates wildly

on the pedestal, forcing Njabulo to take a deepest sigh and move his hands away from my waist. I turn to face him.

"You are up."

"What are you looking at?" he asks before closing his eyes again. I can watch him all day and all night.

"We need to get up," I mumble. While I get ready, he is supposed to be rushing to his house to get ready too. I just don't know why he never brings clothes to change for work. He has been living with me.

"Of course! You just had to remind

me."

I am the first one to grab my gown from the chair not far away from the bed. Njabulo decided to close his eyes again as I cross the room to the bathroom. Getting late on my first day is the last thing on my mind.

He watches as I run towards the bathroom. I put on the right water temperature for my shower and jump in.

A lot is happening today. First day at work and I am getting a new roommate. She is moving in when I knock off. I don't know much about her other than she is

a Masters student in UJ and also a waitress at a shopping centre just across the road. Also, Njabulo and I have an appointment at the hospital not far away from me.

We are doing the most important thing - HIV test.

Njabulo is already dressed when I walk back to my bedroom. He watches as I put on lotion, teasing him where I can, knowing that I will not open my legs for him unless I want to shower again. I pull my brown skirt and a white button down shirt. I got myself a perfect brown stilettos

to match my look. Njabulo drops me at work before rushing home to start his day.

Angela, is still the same jittery girl when I arrive. I give her a warm smile and tell that I will be joining her in the reception desk. I don't know if it is a sense of relief or confusing on her face. I am not here to steal her job if that is what she is worried about.

Mrs Masango only walks in a good twenty minutes after I arrived. She smiles at me and nods at me to join her in her office.

"Ready for your day?"

"Yep. I am ready," I say while

taking a chair at the end of the table. "What do you want me to do?"

"Run my calender. Run my life, basically while I search for the right person to fit into your shoes. Angela keeps messing everything and I am close to letting her go." That won't happen. I'll get her to learn all she needs to. "You can make a turn to Bassie so that she starts showing you our books."

"Thank you."

"How is everything?"

"You and Njabulo did this, didn't you?" I shrug at her. it doesn't

matter anymore; I am grateful to be here. "Everything is fine."

"Let me tell you something," she says and smiles, "I wouldn't have called you back if you weren't the best."

"I am glad it has nothing to do with you feeling guilty for the whole Luzuko issue. Everyone wants to take fault and I want us and everybody to move on from that chapter. Is that okay?"

"Have you seen a professional?" she asks as if she knows what is going through my mind.

"Not yet but I am planning to do so. I just want to move on from

that chapter. So, if possible, let us forget it ever happened."

"As long as you are fine. As long as you see a therapist if needed."

"Thank you."

"You can start by placing an order for breakfast. I feel like an Omelette. I still have coffee with skim milk with one satchel of sugar."

"You are still specific," I mumble while getting up.

My new roomie's name Thuli. A petite girl who seem a little queit. She walked in an hour ago with just a suitcase. Of course, my

apartment is fully furnished so she didn't need to bring anything but just her clothes. In this case, I am not going to get my feelings attached to her, she can easily move out without a stress.

I give her a set of keys before Njabulo calls me that he is downstairs. We are heading for our doctor's appointment for the HIV test and my contraceptive option because mo gherl is not getting pregnant anytime soon. We are going to play it safe. I am definitely clean; it is Njabulo that I am worried about. Tinyiko was part of his life and the baby is

the evidence.

That 90 days rule will be applicable to raw sex – no chances. The 90 days will be our window period because we are both negative.

The baby!

The baby is almost here. I won't lie and say I am not panicking about it, I truly am panicking. A baby comes with a lot of changes. Njabulo and I didn't take things slow since I got here. My attachment is as strong as before.

My phone rings as Njabulo and I walk hand-in-hand to the parking

lot.

"You are back in town and you haven't invited me to supper...just the two of us...," Thandeka says.

"Oh, my God Thandeka. I have been busy catching up with everything and settling in."

"Busy settling in or busy with Njabulo?" she asks.

"Both!"

"I have a visa tonight, can I spend it with you? No one is allowed to waste a visa approval," she says.

Oh, my God Thandeka.

"Fine. Supper on me," I say and

Njabulo gives me an eye. LOL. He is still jealous.

"Let's meet in an hour," she says after mentioning the restaurant. Njabulo hesitantly drops me off at the restaurant in an hour. I could leave with him but I need some time with my friend. We have a lot of catching up to do and we are not going to waste her VISA approval.

Mrs Radzilani is browsing the menu in front of her. Doesn't she look perfect in her oversize shirt she is wearing?

"You are glowing," I say when I take my seat. She lifts her eyes

to me and smile.

"I can say the same about you," she mumbles and blows me a kiss. I love this woman. She drops the menu and sips her wine. She licks her lips and turn her gaze back at me. "How was your first day at work?"

"Perfect. Nothing new. It was great," I respond while opening the menu set in front of me. I need something with a lot of ice. The waiter takes my cocktail order and food too. Before disappearing to the back, he fills Thandeka's glass.

"Where is your family?"

"Gundo took Ciara to a daddy's movie night with Ciara. When that happens."

"He is a great father."

"Njabulo too...right?"

I nod. I know Njabulo makes a great father. I witnessed him for a few weeks – even months – when we were back at Venda. And him wanting to be part of his son's life – can only be the evidence.

"What is wrong?" Thandeka asks. I shake my head, trying to figure out how I gave her a reason to ask such. "Why are you asking? I am perfectly fine."

"I am your friend."

"I know."

"So, what is wrong?"

I shrug and let out a longest sigh.

"Tinyiko is giving birth next month," I say with a shrug.

"Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against her and the baby....I am just trying to imagine how life will be for all of us."

It is a lot of us tangled in this love. Njabulo. Tinyiko. Thabelo. Me. The new baby. It is a lot of us.

"What worries you?"

"Am I going to make a great partner for Njabulo with the new

baby in the picture?"

Back then when I was at home, I thought I had everything figured out. I had a plan. The plan was to take things very very slow with Njabulo so that I don't get hurt when things don't go my way. But here I am, I just walked out of the doctor's room with an appointment for my contraceptive. I am already planning ahead.

"You don't have to force your support. It will come natural," she says.

"Yeah? But what if I choose to stay away from them...and not be

part of the baby's life?"

"Well...like I said, you don't have to force it. So, if you want to stay away from the baby, do so. It is just going to hurt when Njabulo has to be the father to his son."

"I know."

"So, it is either you let him do it on his own or you do it with him."

"She still she loves him."

"But he loves you."

The waiter sets our food on the table. Two pasta dishes and a new set of wine glasses. I stare at him as he pours the wine into our glass. I wish I had answers to everything that I am feeling.

"Maybe I should ask Tinyiko to let me into their little circle, right?" I say.

"You know what?" she says before taking a longest sip of her wine.

"What?"

"You are going to need to believe in the love that you and Njabulo share. No man loves a woman like Njabulo loves you. I think if you engrave those words in your heart, you are going to survive this whole thing."

My phone beeps from my bag. I smile when I see the name on my screen. He is missing me already, isn't he?

My smile fades away when I read the message.

"Tinyiko is about to give birth. I am rushing to Rosebank hospital now."

This is it?

I read the message a few times, wondering what he is expecting me to do?

Does he need me to do anything?

Do I sit here and dine?

Welcome to my new life.

EPISODE 48

NJABULO

Since my girlfriend decided to ditch me for a supper with a friend, I have nothing to do but pick a boring movie to watch by myself. There is no interesting game to watch or some deadline to catch so that I bury myself in my work. A movie is playing softly on the background as I bury my thoughts to my life now. Dammit! Life can make a fucking turn. My heart is swollen with the happiness I have for getting Maria back into my life. She is all I need.

It is funny how life has changed for me. As some point in my life –

before Maria of course – I never saw myself as a married man. But at the rate that my heart beats for Maria, I am going to be a married man soon. She completes me. Only her. I can climb mountains and swim in the most infected river for her. Only her. I was ready to kill a man for her – that scared the shit out of me. But that is what confirmed that I will never love any other woman more than I do her.

My phone vibrates from the coffee table. My wish is for it to be Maria, telling me when to pick her up.

It isn't her.

I jerk on my seat when I see the caller-ID. Tinyiko and I do not talk unless there is a need. That way, I can build my relationship with Maria without interfering anything.

"Hello," I respond. My heart almost drops to the floor when I hear someone crying from the background.

"No...no...try to breathe! Try to breathe, dammit Tinyiko," a panic voice calls out to my ear.

"Hello!" I yell but all I hear is the girl's broken voice and Tinyiko's agony cries from afar.

"We are here...we are here," the voice says in urgency.

"Hello!" my voice is fucking breaking now. Didn't she just call me? What the fuck is going on? This shouldn't be happening - we still have a month before the birth of our son. I hang up the phone and call the number again, while charging towards the bedroom to change. I was ready to retire to bed anytime - I am not decent at all.

"Hello. Hello Njabulo."

"What is going on?" I ask while struggling to get into my pair of jeans with one hand.

Dammit! I balance myself with the wall before putting the phone on speaker so that I can multi-task. Tinyiko's cry makes me cringe.

"We just got to hospital. Tinyiko is in pain," she says. I don't even know who she is.

"Which hospital is it?" Why is she wasting time with the formalities?

"Please hold on," she says.

Dammit.

I wait, listening as she opens the door or something.

"Hi abuti... can you get the wheelchair? My sister is giving

birth in the car." My insides freeze! Giving birth? So soon? Oh, fuck! I wasn't ready for this. All the techniques to keep calm fly out of the window. I have been educating myself and should know what to do in a situation like this, but I am a mess. I slide my feet in my sandals before jumping for my car keys and wallet.

I hang up the phone and call again. This girl seems to forget that she has me on hold.

"Hello?"

"Which hospital?"

"Rosebank. I'll send you the location on whatsapp now."

"Thank you," I respond, already reversing the car out of the garage. My phone vibrates with a Ping. It is close enough for me to reach it in few minutes.

I speed out of the estate and down to the main route towards Rosebank hospital. When I stop at the traffic light, I grab my phone from the passenger seat and text Maria.

'Oh my God Njabulo, do you want me to join you or are you going to be alright?' – Maria

My throat goes dry instantly. I didn't expect her to text me or offer to be by my side right now.

'I should be fine. I will update you.' – My text to her.

I take off but the second sets of the robot stop me. Dammit!

Another set of traffic lights goes red before I could even beat them.

'I'll pray for her.' – Maria's responds forces a smile on my face.

'Thank you.'

Dammit, I stop on the following traffic lights. There are cars in front of me, so I am stuck with them. I throw my hands in the air when the other traffic lights goes red. I think I have bad luck

when it comes to useless things like traffic lights when I am in a hurry.

'I hope you are not panicking. Because if you are, you are just going to make Tinyiko panic even more.' – Maria. I laugh at how trembling my hands are. I laugh at how well she knows me. I am tough man but little things like these scare the shit out of me.

'I am not.'

'That is how I know you are panicking. Call me if you need anything.'

'I love you and thank you.'

'My pleasure.' Not the response I

hoped for, but I am glad she did. It is going to take baby steps for the both of us and just because we have been having marathon of sex doesn't mean we can jump stages. I am willing to make it work.

Panic raises through my body as I hurry to the maternity ward. The receptionist points at someone who is seated alone by the corridors. They say Tinyiko was taken into the delivery room for an emergency C-section. I take it the girl sitting on the bench with a foam cup of water is the sister

that called me.

"Hello...I am Njabulo," I say while getting on the chair next to her. I need to sit down before I drop down dead. The girl turns her eyes at me – they are red and puffy.

"Salome." She sniffs her tears away.

"What happened?"

"She called me from Res. And when I got to her apartment, it was worse. Luckily I can drive."

"Thank you for bringing her here," I say. It stings that she didn't call me first when she thought she wasn't feeling right. I would

have been a better help than her sister who had to rush from Res. I shake my head and let it slide. We haven't been in good speaking terms since my birthday when Maria walked into the office with a better birthday cake than hers. Petty issues.

"So are you Tinyiko's younger sister?" I ask, to pass time and to calm my nerves. I didn't know Tinyiko had a sister. We didn't get to that 'meet my family stage' but I know she has two brothers.

"Cousins."

"Nice to meet you."

"Likewise."

"Did you bring the baby bag?"

Was there even one? She was probably supposed to start packing this particular week.

"My sister is coming. She will bring a few things," she responds. And as if the sister is summoned, she hurries in and comes to a halt when she sees Salome. Oh, this cousin I know. I get on my feet to get water while Salome explains what happened. If I could have coffee! But I am not going to risk leaving this floor only to find out that the doctor came back with the report.

This is nerve wrecking. Waiting for the doctor is the most nerve wrecking thing ever.

Only many minute later, the nurse allows us to see Tinyiko in the ward they have taken her to. I walk behind the nurse, waiting for her to give me a minute. I throw her with questions after another. "The baby was born a premature, so we are going to keep her in the NICU for a few weeks or until he is big enough to eat on his own. Congratulations Sir, you have a beautiful son," the nurse says and I let out a longest breath. Damn! I was fucking scared.

"Can I see her?"

"I will let you see her for just a minute before we take him away. It'll be just a glimpse though."

"I'll appreciate."

This feels unreal. Before my eyes is my son. A Buthelezi. My second born. His little chest rises and falls. He doesn't look like he is in pain, even in this little tube that they are about to wheel away. The laughter coming from the ward confirms that Tinyiko is doing fine. She is sharing a room with another woman but the curtains are hiding her roommate. "Ladies," I mumble as I walk

further into the room.

"Hey," Tinyiko mumbles with a dry smile. I shouldn't have come in here - she looks weak and a little of a mess.

"I will come see you tomorrow. The nurse said that you need to rest."

"Thank you."

I drag my feet to the car. I think I am overwhelmed.

'Can I come by?' I am about to call her when she responds back.

I am selfish. This is me being selfish, knocking on Maria's door because I want her to console me.

The door opens and before me is Maria with her beautiful smile and eyes on me. It must be hours before midnight but her smile is still as radiant.

"Are you okay?" she asks. I shake my head. I am not fine. I am overwhelmed. I am scared. I am excited. I am nervous. I am everything.

"He is beautiful," I say.

"I believe you. You make cute babies," she responds while making a way for me. I follow her in and lock the doors before ending up in her bedroom. She was already in bed, so I take off my

jeans and throw away my t-shirt. She switches off the light before I join her in bed.

Her body is warm when she lets me spoon her. This selfless woman.

"What did the doctor's say?" she asks.

"They'll keep him in for a few weeks until he is still strong enough to feed and all. He had trouble breathing ... something like that, that's why they had to do an emergency C-section."

"And how is she?" My breath catches when Maria brought up Tinyiko.

"She is okay. I will see the both of them tomorrow," I mumble and Maria's body stiffens. Maybe I shouldn't have said that.

"I should get the baby a few things and flowers for Tinyiko," she says after a little while.

Maybe I am reading too much into this. Maybe, Maria doesn't have any problem with any of this.

"Thank you."

"Don't hesitate if you need me. I will be there for you," she mumbles.

"You are a blessing, do you know that?" I ask.

"I figured," she says with a giggle while I pull her tightly into my arms.

When I wake up, it is already morning. Maria is snoring lightly beside me. I carefully get out of bed and head for the bathroom before checking if I missed any of the phone calls when I was asleep. Nothing! No calls. I slide back into the blankets before Maria can wake up. Gundo sends a hundred emojis of everything from beer to smileys, when I tell him that I am a father once again. I cannot help but smile. He has got my back. Zizipho calls me

immediately when I send her the good news.

"Hey," I whisper. "Can you call in an hour or so? Maria is still sleeping."

"What?"

"What do you mean what?"

"I didn't know you and Maria are back together."

"We are back together. Can I call you later?"

"Of course," she responds.

"Congratulation on the birth of your son. I am an aunty for the first time. We should celebrate."

"For the second time. Thabelo is my first birth. You are yet to

meet her," I say.

"Of course. Oh, silly me. I will come next weekend."

"See you then."

Maria beams at me when I put away my phone.

"Sorry I woke you up. I sent Zizipho a message and she insisted on calling."

"How is she? I miss her."

"She is coming next week."

This is the third day after my son was born. Tinyiko will be discharged today and she will be coming in and out to see our boy. We are supposed to sign the Home

Affairs forms which we couldn't discuss yesterday because her family was in and out of her ward during visiting hours. I also didn't want to come off as if I don't care about her feelings so everything I do or say is calculated.

I walk into the ward, to be welcomed by voices.

"No, I don't want that," Tinyiko says, her voice slightly raised.

"I am not going to let that boy humiliate you and disrespect my family."

"No. No. I brought this upon myself. I don't want him to be

part of my baby's life."

"Are you insane? Such a disgrace?"

"Please. All I need to do is to go away when my son is fine," Tinyiko says. "No one is going to make him pay for any damages. I am not damaged."

"You are still stubborn," the male voice says.

"Dad, please. We spoke about this."

"I am your father. I know better."

"No."

I clear my throat so that they can stop whatever bullshit they

are discussing.

"I will come and pay what is due to me," I say, my eyes focused on the old man standing at the edge of the bed. Tinyiko drops her jaws when she realises that I heard their little conversation. "And you are not going to run away with my son."

"Can you just sign the papers and give me the rights to my baby?"

"Your baby? Not ours?" I ask. We spoke about this. She is not going to go AWOL with my son. "How are you feeling today?" I change the subject. I will go and pay the damages. I will be part of my

son's life. Simple. She is not going to punish me for moving on with my life.

A nurse walks in, interrupting the staring game between the two of us. The old man is standing quietly in the corner and the patient behind the curtain can probably smell the tension.

"Your doctor cleared you," the nurse says. "You can go home."

"Thank you."

After a week, Tinyiko and I meet at the hospital corridor, so that we can see the boy together. She looks better than the last week

but the smile that used to be on her face is no longer there. It is awkward between us. The NICU has strict visiting hours and we never stay in there for long. They allow her to stay longer than I sometimes. Tinyiko hangs her bag and hurries down the corridor after our last visitation. I am going back to work and I guess she is going to get food which I could easily buy her.

"Tinyiko, can we talk?" I ask while hurrying behind her. She doesn't stop so I am forced to stand in front of her.

"What do you want from me?"

"Why are you mad at me?" I ask. I thought we were going to be adults about this situation. I would expect this reaction from Maria. If Maria is unhappy about this situation, she is doing a great job hiding it. Tinyiko is acting up.

"I am not mad at you," she says while she tries to walk past me.

"No. We are going to talk about this like adults," I say.

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Why are you acting like this? Are you worried about Thando?" I ask.

"His name is not Thando," she says. I roll my eyes because we have spoken about this name before.

"What is bothering you."

"Don't go to my father to pay for the damages, please."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want anything to tie you to my baby."

"You are crazy."

"What happened to what we agreed on? You were supposed to be just a donor. I don't want to be tied to you."

"Why not? Why not? I am not signing any form. I want to be

part of my son's life."

"No. No Njabulo. You are only taking me three steps backwards."

"How so? I am not crowding you. I am just doing what is expected of me."

"No. I don't want you to."

"Why not?" I slightly raise my voice. "Why, huh? Why?"

"Because she is back into your life Njabulo and I am in love with you," she snaps, immediately forcing me to shut up. "I have to watch you with her. I love you. I thought we had a future together. She is back. you love

her. I love you. It is all a mess. It breaks my heart to know that your heart is with her. I just want to go away and start a new life without you. I just want to go on and live my life the way I imagined before falling deeply in love with you not knowing that you were going to dump me the moment she walks back into your life." My shoulders sag. "It isn't any of your fault. It is mine. I can't bear seeing you all the time because it hurts me. It breaks my heart Njabulo. It does. I was never enough for your love. I will never be. So, please, let me go."

"There must be another way."

"What way?"

"I mean...I want to be..."

"It has to always be about you, huh? You get to win, huh? You get to be in love and also have your son to play happy family....while I watch."

"Does that make me selfish?"

"What does it make you? I am asking that you excuse me so that I heal. I came to you and asked for a donor...can you be just that?"

"I didn't donate my sperm."

"What did you do?"

"I made a baby with you. I am

sorry things didn't work out between us."

"Njabulo, all I am asking for is this baby only. That is all I am asking. Give me this baby and I will walk out of your life. You already have a baby. This one....will be mine. He is all I need to be whole. Please."

I look around, trying to figure out why the universe allowed me to be in this fucked up situation.

"Please. He is all I need and I will be out of your and Maria's life. Please."

"Tinyiko..."

"Please. Please Njabulo."

EPISODE 49

MARIA

Njabulo is silent on the couch, sipping on a bottle of Heiken, television playing in the background without an audience. I have tried everything to cheer him up but he doesn't look like someone who wants to interact with me. I tried. For hours now. "Njabulo, I am going to bed. Don't you want to sleep?" I ask while

standing by the bedroom door. It is almost ten o'clock and at this moment, the wine I have been gulping the whole day with Thandeka is making me feel sleepy.

"I want to watch the sports highlights," he mumbles and pull a long sip from his bottle.

"You have been staring blankly on that screen," I shrug at him.

"Come to bed and tell me all about it."

"I'll join you in a minute. I want to..."

"Good night," I mumble while turning to my bedroom. My head is

heavy right now. When he is ready to talk, he knows where to find me. I am already wearing a sleeping shirt, so I don't bother fish my closet for something sexy to wear for Njabulo. He doesn't even look like someone who is in the mood. I throw myself on my favourite side of the bed and stare at the ceiling. So, this is how my life is going to be. All in the name of love, huh? What happened at the hospital, for him to be so worked up.

Before I could drift to sleep, Njabulo drags his feet to the room. It is pitch black dark but

he doesn't bother to switch on the light. I close my eyes and wait for him to join him - but he doesn't.

I swear, he is going to drive me crazy.

"Njabulo, what is going on?" I ask.

"Hmmm?"

"You are starting to worry me," I say but in my heart I am saying, you are starting to drive me crazy.

"She wants to start her life with our son...without me."

"Oh," I say, while sitting up. I cannot see his face but his voice is

cold.

"Oh, Njabulo I asked you to be a sperm donor...can you please be that?" He mimics a woman's voice - I take it those are words spoken by Tinyiko.

My shoulders sag when I hear his longest, deepest, sigh. I drop my feet to the mat and cross the room to switch on the light.

Njabulo is standing in the middle of the room - an empty bottle in his hand. I grab it from his hand and drop it on the pedestal.

I get back into the duvets and wait for him to join me. It takes him a few minutes but he

eventually join me. In minutes, he is snoring without a care in the world.

What is the worse that could happen if Tinyiko walks away from his life? Okay, honestly speaking, that would be the best thing for us if we want to work but I am not a selfish person to wish for that. I have seen how Njabulo is with my daughter and I wish that each and every baby experience the same love from their father. Truth be told, Njabulo is a great father and I understand why it breaks him that he is being pushed away to

be there for his son.

I might have drifted to sleep during my marathon of thoughts. The sun is already up, beaming through the curtains. When I open my eyes, Njabulo is already up and seated not the edge of the bed.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"Yes, I'll figure out everything. Go, back to sleep, I'll see you later," he says while getting up. He drops a few kisses on my mouth and forehead before leaving me.

Only few days later, does he get back to his old self. His fights

with Tinyiko has been bothering him but he promised that the families will sort everything out. What he needs to do is to give Tinyiko a break. I totally agree, if there is anyone who could get into Tinyiko's sense would be her family. Njabulo might be the last person she wants to engage with. I understand where she is coming from - it is a lot to take in. It a Thursday evening and Njabulo is here for the evening. Honestly speaking, I shouldn't have gotten a flat mate. I have never had a decent chat with her since she got here because

Njabulo is always here to invade my space. I won't say I am not enjoying his company. I always do. "Tomorrow is Valentines day," I say while crossing the room from the bathroom. Njabulo hasn't said anything about the plans he has for us this weekend.

"Hmmm..." That is all he says. I want to make noise, but maybe not.

Njabulo wakes up first - he mostly does but today, my heart dance since it is Valentine's day. My smile reaches my eyes when I don't see him in the room - but

there isn't a smell of bacon or something to give it away.

"Oh, you are up," he says while matching into the room. He places a glass of water on the pedestal and cross the room to where his overnight bag is.

What?

No breakfast surprise or something?

"How did you sleep?" I ask, looking around the room for something special. Maybe flowers or something; I don't know but I am looking for something.

I give up when Njabulo starts dressing up for work.

"We are going to be late if you don't get up."

"Of course," I mumble while getting out of bed. I pull an over-the-knee dress from the closet. I wait for him to tell me to get something sexy because he has plans for us after work, but he doesn't.

At this point I give up.

I get ready while he scrolls through television channels - no attention on me or something.

When done getting ready, he picks his duffel bag and pulls his laptop bag out of the bedroom.

"Are you honestly going to ignore

the fact that today is Valentine's day?" I ask, before opening the door. Why did Valentine's day have to be on a working day though?

"Are you serious, right now?"

Njabulo ask, his brows furrows.

"No breakfast in bed. No roses when I woke up. No surprise gift?"

"I don't need a day in a random month to show you how special you are to me," he responds while following me to the elevator. My mood is shifted. I was hoping for some treat.

"Please, don't be that guy."

◆ "What guy?"

◆ "Unromantic guys who makes excuses about valentine's day just because they are unromantic." ◆

"Call me all you want but unromantic." He frowns at me before shaking his head at me.

"By the way, where was my breakfast in bed? Or this thing is one sided?" he asks. ◆

"Oh, well..."

◆ "Get your ass in the car. It is freaking 06h30...and here you are already calling me unromantic for not bringing you eggs and brown bread spread with Rama margarine to your bedroom. You

should be ashamed of yourself
Mme a Thabelo."

Zulu men!

Our drive is silent as he drives to Masango Logistics. All that Njabulo does is to steal glance at me and smile, probably enjoying how he has spoilt my day. I was so looking forward to it. I end up smiling at him as he keeps singing at the love songs that they are playing on radio. The presenter, who has the same sentiments about how Valentine's is just a commercial scam makes Njabulo laugh. He doesn't have to say it, but he is pleased that half of the

world thinks the same way.

"I'll see you later," I say while getting my handbag from the backseat. We are parked out Masango logistics.

"Later my love."

No kiss. Nothing? oh, wow.

Trust all my colleagues's husbands to be hopeless romantics. The reception is literally like a flower garden. All sorts of flowers. From red roses to pink roses, the reception is packed.

"Morning Angela," I greet before getting to the back of the desk.

"Happy Valentine's day," she says

happily. Oh, and she is wearing a red dress with white stilletoes.

"You are on Valentine's fever, huh?"

"Yes. I hope my crush notices me." Oh, I hope my whole boyfriend notice me too. Angela is in a great mood and it doesn't take long before her excitement rubs off from me.

"Looks like love is in the air around here," Mrs Masango says when she walks into the room.

"It is."

"Lucky you young starts. Some of us are old for this," she says with a giggle. "Angela, please get me

coffee. Maria, cancel my two morning meetings, I am going to lock myself in the office and go through new contracts,"

"Yes, ma'am. Do you have want me to cancel or re-schedule. Your Tuesday is not packed."

"Tuesday is perfect," she responds before disappearing to her office. Angela rushes to the kitchen while I get on my computer to reschedule Mrs Masango's meetings. When done, I call the recipients of the flowers and teddybears. Some of the owners are not a surprise, but others are a shock. Like this guy

who works in Finance. When he gets to the reception, he grabs the gift and marches to away before I could even ask anything. Forty minutes later, I am done. I have no idea why he is shy about receiving a gift. Some of us are stuck with unromantic Zulu man. The thought makes me laugh - other are stuck without a partner in their lives and here I am complaining about useless thing like Valentines.

"Tshifhiwa from HR received a car. Everybody was watching a live feed on her man's Instagram," Angela says as she

settles on the chair next to me.

"Her husband is sweet."

"Andddd..." she stops on her trail when she notices a guy walking into the reception area with a biggestest bouquet of roses. It is too big that we cannot even see the delivery guy. "Wow, this is the biggest bouquet of flower I have seen."

It has different coloured roses.

The delivery guy carefully places it on the counter.

"Hello," he greets and his smile widens when our eyes meet.

"Donald," I call out while rounding the counter table towards where

he is standing. I give him a brief hug with my greeting. "How have you been?"

"I have been great," he responds with a sweet smile. He still has that sweetest smile on his cute little face.

"Look at you," I say while shaking his head. "Are you working for a courier company now?" I walk back to my counter to get him the delivery register.

"No, I haven't moved," he says with a smirk. No way! Donald has been Gundo's messenger and was very close to us when I worked at Gundo's company. I didn't stay

long but I was close to almost everyone. "Mr Buthelezi sent me to drop this."

"What?"

"I'll be right back," he hurries out while I walk back to where the flowers are at. He walks back with a paper bag.

"This too," he says while handing a card and paper to me. "Enjoy your day."

"Thank you," I whisper as I open the car.

'Oh, I didn't know you love flowers.' I laugh at the first message. Of course, I am not big on flowers but it is Valentines

today. oh, and I'll learn to love them. Who wouldn't love purple roses.

"Is that from your boyfriend?"

"Yes," I say.

"Wow!"

"Yeah! I am blown away too." I carefully place the paper bag on the table and pull down brown food bags from Woolworths. A card on top of one bag.

'And this is how breakfast should look like. But I am sorry I didn't get you breakfast in bed.' I pull my phone from my handbag and call him.

"I take it your breakfast reached

you," he says.

"You have no idea how much I am blushing."

"Love the flowers?"

"I love them. Thank you."

"Of course."

"I am sorry I complained."

"Of course, you are going to pay," he says before hanging up. I bite my lips while wondering what he means. I know what he means but I can't wait to pay.

All morning towards lunch time, I try my best not to stare at the flowers or let my mind wander of - because I cannot wait to get home to make-it up to Njabulo for

this wonderful surprise. I cannot wait to thank him properly like he deserves.

"He is back," Angela says from her seat. I lift my head to meet Donald walking into the reception. A huge white box takes my attention when he drops it in front of me. His smile is wide like my reaction is satisfying him.

"For you, ma'am," he says before turning on his heels and walking away.

"Your boyfriend is so so romantic," Angela says from her seat. This is exactly what he meant when he said he will make me pay. He is

proving to me how romantic it is. A red long dress is neatly packed in the box, a note on top.

'Uber yourself home. I'll pick you at 18:00. Don't wear anything underneath.' My blood rushes to between my legs at his last sentence. Don't wear anything underneath? Oh, my God.

"What does it say? The note?"

Angela asks from behind. I quickly fold the note and drop it back on top of the dress and close the box.

"Happy valentines," I say with a cocky smile. Oh, how does this guy want me to focus until I go home? torture.

I have no choice but to tip the security guy. He has helped me carry the flowers into my apartment. He couldn't stop asking questions about how much flowers like these could cost. I could estimate but I don't want to say the amount aloud. Njabulo has blown me away. This reminds me of the day he wanted to propose to me. Such beautiful memories.

Without wasting more time, I jump into the shower and make sure that shave and I also bath in perfume. I want to make sure

that I smell great. And I do, My palms are sweating when he texts me that he is outside. The red dress he got me is a perfect piece ever created for a woman's body. It hugs me where it is supposed to and it is then flow after my hips. The slit on my right leg kind-of shows more than I would want to show off. I have a perfect silver stilettos on. The thought that I am not wearing an underwear and a bra is kind-of turning me off.

His eyes almost pops out of their sockets when I slide into the passenger seat.

"Like what you see?" I ask with a smirk.

"You have no idea," he mumbles before starting the car. He reverses out of the parking and straight to the main road. In no time, his hand is going up my thigh, landing on my inner thighs. When I am about to gasp, he takes away his hand.

"The night is still young," he murmurs with a cocky smile. He likes playing these games.

Did I mention that Mr Buthelezi, the man I had said is unromantic because I didn't get breakfast in bed, has a black suit on. A black

suit with a black shirt. He has freshly shaven too.

He takes my hand when we get to the hotel.

I know what he is doing. He is letting me relive the night he was ready to propose to me. The waiter takes us to the table that we once used. This time, there are other tables around here. I bet he couldn't get the whole balcony all to ourselves.

oh, my God.

I am all smiles when Njabulo pulls the chair for me and tell the waiter to bring the best bottle of wine. When the waiter brought

the wine, we order our drinks. I like the music that is playing in the background.

Everything and everyone around here looks elegant. The colour of the night is red and black.

"I am sorry," I mumble after a sip of the juiciest wine I have ever tasted.

"Angizwanga. Ngicela uphinde futhii?"

"I am sorry for calling you unromantic," I say with a smile.

"Well, now that I know that this white people's day is very important to you, I'll make sure you get breakfast in bed and

flowers every Valentine's day as long as I live."

"And we are no longer together?"

Oh, dammit, the words left my lips before I could catch them.

"Well, then your boyfriend will have to watch you receive breakfast and flowers on Valentine's day...because that boyfriend will be me. You are going to be in my life as long as I live. That is a promise."

oh, wow!

If this isn't sexy, I don't know what else.

The waiter sets the table and places the food before leaving.

"Why am I not wearing my underwear?"

"So that your juices wet your thighs as I turn you on the whole evening."

OH.MY.GOD. I choke on my food because goosebumps filled my body in an instant.

"Oh..."

"Are you turned-on??"

"Oh, Njabulo..."

"Are you turned on? Should we leave the food and everything?"

"Yes!"

"I thought so too," he says while lifting his hand for the waiter to come in for the bill. "Let this

unromantic man take you to the best suite that this hotel offers."

Jeezz! I am not going to hear the end of it.

EPISODE 50

NJABULO

18 SNL

Maria is like a woman accustomed for me. She was made for me to love. She was made for her to melt in my hands. This is the only way to explain our fire. My love for her is uncontrolled. My heart was made to love her this much

hence she drives me crazy.

By the time we climb into the elevator to the room I booked for us, she is silent as we share the elevator car with other hotel guests. One gentleman turn and drop his gaze at her, making me to flinch from where I am standing. It is like he can smell the arousal. He isn't supposed to smell shit, Maria is all mine to stare at or to smell. As if he could read my mind, he turns his head away from her and focus on the little box counting up to our floor. The elevator stops at the seventh floor and pings.

"This is us," I mumble while taking Maria's hand. Her warm sweating palms claps on mine as we make our way to the room that I had prepared.

To be honest, I don't give a damn about Valentines' day which was invented by who-gives-a fuck but I couldn't ignore Maria's wishes. She wanted it to be special, I had to go all out to make sure that I get her that. I didn't have any other choice. When I stepped at work this morning, everyone was in a great mood and if people weren't dressed in red, they were in whites. Roses filled the hall. I

just had to jump in and make Maria's day. And to mention that roses were fucking overprices is an understatement. I almost choke on my food when the florist gives me the total. Maybe I went too overboard but for a woman who stole my heart - I don't mind. This is me making up for the lost times. I missed our last valentines and the thought of her having those horrible memories about this day, I just couldn't let that happen. This is me replacing her old memories with new.

"Are you going to kiss me or you

are just going to stare?" She asks the moment I close the hotel room. A naughty smirk on her face turns me on as I stare down at an almost bare chest. I got this specific dress to turn the both of us on and it did a great job.

"Can I admire what is mine?" I ask, without shifting my eyes from her.

With my eyes glued on her, she takes off her heels and pushes them by the door. She drops to three inches less. My beauty. If only she knew what she is doing to me. Her innocent smile makes

me go crazy.

"Are you going to admire all night?" She asks, probably losing her patience. She must be horny to be this frustrated. It makes me smile to see her sexual frustrated. To see her sexually hungry for me.

"Come here," I mumble while pulling my blazer off. I throw it on the bed and get ready for her. She walks towards me and stand in front of me. When I drop my eyes, I can clearly see her boobs - nipples hard and poking out, ready to be played with. As if my eyes were telling her what my mind

wishes for, she lifts her hand and lands it on her full breast. She starts caressing it - knowing very well that I am to go crazy. I shake my head because I was supposed to be the one taking control but here I am losing my cool. An unexpected groan escapes my lips as I lift my hand to the other boob. My mouth sucking the barely there fabric on her nipples. "oh, wow.." she mumbles.

She throws her head back, giving me access to her neck. In a minute, I am unzipping her dress and shrugging the straps off her shoulders. She bites her lips when

the dress falls on the floor. While I unbutton my shirt, she steps out of the dress and gets on the bed to watch me undress.

"Enjoying the show?"

"As always," she mumbles.

"Oh, yeah?" I smirk at her while dropping the shirt on the floor, followed by my vest. Her eyes follow my hands working the belt before my pants follows to the floor. When I am naked, she steps out of the bed and walk to where I am standing. Without a word, she drops at her knees in front of me.

Ohhhh!

Her lips find my fucking hard penis.

Jeeezzz!

I am tempted to ask her why she is so perfect at this, forgetting that I gave her the lessons myself and she excels now. She licks her lips before licking me again, making me buck my hips to her face. Her eyes always find mine while she sucks the life out of my cock.

She...is....damn...perfect.

Her warm hand grabs on me while her lips work on me. Damn them lips. Damn them fingertips on my cock. I grit my teeth when she

increases the pace of her tongue on my cock. With my eyes closed, I welcome the rush feeling to my release. In a second, I have thrown her hand away so I could jerk myself to release. My white seeds are like lotion on her chest. She pulls a towel from the bed and clean herself while she position herself for me to get to her.

I like this. She knows that this is only the beginning. When I try to drop my hand down her belly, she shakes her head.

"That much, huh?" I laugh at her. I stoke myself as I kneel in

between her legs. Of course, her pussy is sleek and wet, ready for me to devour.

"That much," she whispers but moans loudly when I enter her without a warning. She wiggles her hips, allowing me to fully get deeper and deeper - and I do. I grit my teeth as I work my first thrusts. In minutes, she is panting loudly like we are the only guests in this hotel. Oh, well, not that I care - the other dudes are probably here for the same reasons.

In and out, slowly - without rushing anywhere. In and out as

I stare down at her closing and opening her eyes when she feels me inside of her. In and out when I pound into her. Her moans are louder and her finger always find her clit like it always does. Her mouth flies open when I hit the spot. Once I get the spot, I make sure to keep rocking to it, slow and nice and hard and slow, until she starts violently playing her fingers on her clit, round and round and round and round she plays with her clit until she explodes - her legs flying to air as I go in deeper.

Ohhh Maria!

Her face is priceless as she pants and jerks her body to the air as the waves of orgasm hit her.

When she relaxes, I increase my pace for my own release. It doesn't take long before I groan, my teeth gritted as I empty myself inside of her.

I throw myself on the side and try to catch my breath with her. One look at me and a smile spread on her face. Isn't she just beautiful. I love how perfect she looks when her smile reaches her eyes.

"I love you," I murmur.

"i love you too," she responds

when I least expected it. I turn on my side to stare at her, my body supported by an elbow.

"You do?"

"I do." She smiles.

I reach for her lips, my finger tips on her stomach. She trembles at my touch as I move my finger to her pussy.

Jeez!! My seeds are still warm inside of her. I pull out my finger and trace it on her stomach as she moans.

My dirty innocent girl.

"Wanna join me for a bath?" She asks.

"Yeah. I am game," I respond

while getting up with her. While she rushes to the toilet without spilling the seeds on the floor, I turn to fill the bath-tub with water. They don't have special salts and all those fancy things so I empty their two little bubble bath into the water.

I head back to the room to put the TV on a music channel. When I return to the bathroom with two glasses of champagne, Maria is already in the water. I pass her glass and carefully place mine on the floor before getting behind her.

"Thank you for today," she says,

if there is one thing I know about Maria is that she appreciates all my efforts. This valentines thing might be standard to someone - not Maria.

"I wanted it to be special."

"Did you have this planned before today?"

"Do you want the truth or a lie?"

"A lie?" She giggles.

"I booked this place a month ago and made sure that everything is delivered to you today."

"And the truth?" She laughs.

"I pulled a few calls in the morning. I didn't know Valentines means anything to you. It doesn't

mean anything to me."

"Thank you. I promise I will get you a gift too."

"I already have my gift."

"What is that?"

"You and Thabelo."

"You are sweet," she says and there is a word silence as we both sip from our glasses.

"How are you going to handle Tinyiko's issue?"

"Well...I have no idea. I don't want to think about her and other issues right now. I have all I need right here in my arms," I say. I need my son too but this is not the time to discuss it. We chill

in the water, chatting about the times we met. We met at Gundo's wedding but I started noticing her much when her friend introduced me to her at her business launch. Ever since that day, I have become a different man. A man who is always ready to sell everything for love. That is how much Maria drove me crazy. She made me realise that I am human after all. Meeting my son softened my heart into a bear. I am no longer that man that used to punish women for mistakes made by my ex-girlfriend. She, Maria, made all that

possible.

"Would you wash my back?"

"You are tempting me for other things Maria," I groan as I pick the sponge from the tray. I down it into the water and drop it on her chocolate back. I drop kisses on her shoulders too as I carefully wash her back.

This woman, this.

What is going to happen if Tinyiko doesn't want with our son? I am disturbed by this thoughts when I try to sleep again. It is morning but too soon to wake up and I cannot go back to sleep.

What if I could leave her alone to do what she wants? What if I just live my life with Maria and be happy with her and Thabelo?

I swear under my breath and carefully get out of bed not to disturb Maria from her sleep.

"You are just a sperm donor so be it," these words has made me angry over and over again. fine, I agreed to it at first but it wasn't so when I slept with her. Damn it! Why did I even sleep with her before moving on from Maria? All these things are my doings.

Maybe! Just, maybe...I should let

it go. When I asked my friend, Mr Radzilani, he is on her side. He agrees to let her heal far away from me. I had wished for him to be on my side but he rarely takes any side - and that makes him a better advisor.

I don't know man; I wish to have a relationship with my son. I want to be there. I don't want to miss his birthday and any of his graduations.

But! A big but!

Maria shifts from the bed. She doesn't deserve me like this. I know that she can be there for me as much as I need her but

sometimes it is hard on her when I am raged by my ex-girlfriend. Things are just so unfair for us. I need to make up my mind and stop complicating things for everyone. I can fight all I want but if Tinyiko doesn't want me, she isn't going to let things easy. A part of me understands where she is coming from. Maybe I am just that selfish.

"Hey, you are awake," Maria says from the bed.

"Go back to sleep," I mumble.

"What are you doing up?"

"just thinking."

"Is everything okay?" She is

sleepy but she looks concern.

"Go back to sleep babe, I am going to join you."

"What is the time?"

"It should be after five."

"Come back to bed," she mumbles, not allowing me to sit here in the darkness in peace. I surrender to her sweet voice and get into the duvets. I pull her close to me so that I can spoon her. Her body is warm.

I caress her shoulders until I feel her softly snores.

Spooning Maria worked because I am woken up hours later. Maria is paging through the menu. When

she notices my eyes on her, she gives me a smile - her smile so warm and welcoming.

"Want breakfast?"

"Yeah!" I say before rolling on my back. "Get us anything."

Maria's jumps out of bed before making a call to order our breakfast. I drift to sleep until I am woken up by a loud knock on the door.

"Room service," the voice from the door calls out. Maria jumps to the door to get the food. She has taken a shower but is in a white morning gown.

When she returns to the room,

she sets the plates on the small table in the corner of the room.

"Do you know you don't have clothes to change into?" I ask.

"Was it intentional?"

"I plan for us to stay naked the whole weekend."

"I can work with that."

"When you walk out of this place tomorrow morning, everyone will know you were in this hotel room to be shagged the whole weekend."

"Well, I bet everyone would envy me."

"Right?" I laugh while getting on my feet. I disappear to the

bathroom for a clean up before join Maria for breakfast. I fill my cup with coffee - black strong coffee with a rusk. After a few sips, I enjoy the most unhealthy breakfast ever. Greasy bacons and cheese grillers. Everything fried. But it doesn't matter - this is a weekend dedicated for her.

"What is wrong?" She asks.

"Huh?"

"You are miles away," she says.

Sometimes I do get lost in my thoughts - last thing I want when I am with her.

"I have been thinking," I say.

"Yeah?"

"Maybe I could give Tinyiko what she wants. It'll be hard but I think it'll be for the best."

She doesn't say anything but take a few sips of her drink. Am I doing the right thing? Am I?

"I'll support you in any decision you need to make."

"Maybe I could write him letters every year and put them somewhere where I would explain everything to the boy."

"Yeah," Maria says. She doesn't say much - probably running away from saying the wrong things.

"Does that make me a bad father?"

"No. I just hope that Tinyiko comes by and let you in when she is ready."

"Yeah!"

"Do you want me to help you with anything? Do you want me to talk to her? How can I help?" She asks while I clean my hands. I get on my feet and stand behind her, landing my hands on her shoulder for a massage.

"You have done more than enough by being there for me," I say while rubbing her shoulders. My minds must be doing a great job for her to moan and drop her head backward. With her chest in

the air, I drop my hand inside her gown to be welcomed by two full boobs with hard nipples.

"Are you sure?" She asks in a whisper.

"I am sure. All I want for us is to be happy. The two of us and Thabelo. I'll be the best father to Thabelo. I'll be a best partner to you," I assure her. She means the world to me. "When you are ready, I am going to marry you and make my happy wife."

She moans as I caress her boobs with both of my hands. She is moving with the rhythm of my hands. When she drops her head

backward again, I drop my mouth at hers. She breaks the kiss and get on my feet. As she stands in front of me, she undo the morning gown and let it fall to her feet. A weekend without a bra or an underwear - heaven. My lips cover her one nipple as I slide my finger in her already wet folds.

Damn!!

She drives me crazy. Her fingertips on my growing penis pushes me to the edge. There isn't room for foreplay. Maria agrees when I position her for a doggy. She supports herself on the bed.

"I don't believe I taught you all these dirty things," I say while cracking up. She knows how to position herself.

"Can you shut up already and ..."

"And what? And do sexual acts to you?" I ask with a laugh, when she tries to stand, I stop her and enter her without a warning, her scream filling the room. "What is wrong, huh?"

"Hmmm.."

"Did I hurt you?" I ask while sinking in one more time. She shakes her head.

"No."

"Do you love me?" I ask her while

rocking my heels. I know an answer I might get might change tomorrow when I am no longer buried in her but I ask it anyways.

"Yes..."

"yes, what?"

"Yes, I...love...you," she gasp as I go in and out of her tight pussy.

"Me too," I confess before increasing my pace. "Me too, baby."

"I love you," the words spill from her lips.

"That's right!" whether she is dicktised or not, I accept her words with open heart. This

right here, is the beginning of our forever. Just her and Thabelo.

Tinyiko can go fuck herself and I pray I don't live to regret it.

"I am close," she announces as I pump into her. Anger and passion - all in one head as I pump into her even harder/

"Wait for..." I don't even get too finish before she drops her head on the bed and surrender her body to an orgasm. I reach for her breasts and aim for my own orgasm.

"Njabulo!" She screams, waking up for another one.

"That's my name, baby." That's my name, alright.

EPISODE 51

MARIA

Sex, sex, sex! In that order - is how we spent the weekend. I am blown away - literally.

It is Sunday morning. When we slept, after midnight, I made sure to set my alarm for eight o'clock.

My phone is ringing on the pedestal - it must be eight o'clock.

"Switch that damn thing off," Njabulo mumbles beside me. He

pulls the duvets to cover his head.

"We need to wake up."

"Check out is at eleven o'clock."

"I need a change of clothes. Are you going to get the bag from the car?"

"What bag?"

"Change of clothes."

"I didn't bring a bag," he mumbles and changes sleeping position. Was he really serious about not bringing a set of clothes? He is such a horrible liar. I pull the duvet to cover myself as I lie on the bed. A sensation tingles the insides of my thighs -

just by a thought of Njabulo Buthelezi and all this crazy weekend. In hours time, we will be back to reality. His son. Tinyiko. Those are the things we cannot run away from. We need to face those.

Maybe I should go ahead and plan a little trip to Venda for us to see Thabelo. Something to put a smile on his face. I know he will appreciate my efforts.

I no longer have sleep, so I jump out of bed, making sure not to wake him and disappear to the bathroom to get cleaned up.

There is no way Njabulo is going

to wake up for a round of sex. If he does, I'll know that he has taken an overdose of a booster. I get into a white robe and slippers, before requesting room service. A perfect breakfast is brought into our room in an instant and I have it set in the balcony. It is almost ten, and the Mr is still recharging. Only when I finish my breakfast, does Njabulo walk out of the room to where I am sitting. He is in nothing but boxers.

"Don't tell me you want a round," he mumbles before dropping a kiss on my lips. He caught me admiring

his body. He is sexy and irresistible. But, I have had enough of sex. My private parts are sore.

He picks a bowl of fruit salad and doesn't waste time emptying the bowl. He downs a glass of juice before telling me to get dressed so we could go.

He wasn't kidding. Njabulo really did leave our clothes. He did this intentionally like he told me last night. The smirk on his face says it all.

Oh, my God - Njabulo Buthelezi. We are walking down the main hall to the reception so that we could

check out from our crazy weekend filled with nothing but intimacy. I am in my red gown - the same one that I wore on Friday evening when we arrived here for supper. The same staff that was here on the day is working the shift. I can tell that they recognise us. I may be crazy but I know they know that we were here since Friday evening.

"After this perfect weekend, you just couldn't get us a pair of fresh clothes. Leggings and a t-shirt, Njabulo?" I whisper to Njabulo's ear while we wait for our turn to check out.

"What is the fun in that?" He asks with a smirk. I am going to get him. All eyes are on us as we stand side by side, waiting for our turn. The flowers are not making any of this easy.

We move with the queue until it is our turn to stand by the counter. I wish it was those hotels that have key drop-off facilities by the elevators.

"Did you enjoy your weekend?" the lady at the counter asks while punching on her computer. She has a smile on her face - I don't know if it is knowing smile or if she is trying to be polite. From

how this look, it looks like Njabulo and I hooked up at the Valentine's day party and decided to spend the weekend together.

"We did. Didn't we, honey?"

Njabulo turns to me. The girl blushes on my behalf.

"We did."

"Everything is in order. Thank you for staying with us," the receptionist says. Njabulo takes my hand and leads me to the car.

"She envied you," Njabulo says when we get into the car. I don't care if she was jealous or not, I was shy the whole time as if people could tell that all I did the

whole weekend was to spread my legs.

Njabulo drives me home to freshen up before he could pick me up for lunch. My room-mate is home, watching TV. We haven't spoken much because she is hardly here but since it is Sunday morning, she is probably not working. She stares at me from head to toe before returning her focus back on the television. She isn't Dikeledi who forced a relationship between us. She is just an additional person who stays in my apartment. It isn't like I have given her much of a

choice - I usually spend time with my boyfriend.

I had the best weekend ever, ever, ever. Njabulo and I bonded more than we thought we could. There isn't much more I can expect from him, but our dinner date was for us to have a chat. While running a bath, I make a call to my mother so I could talk to Thabelo. Thank goodness she didn't ask me why I went AWOL.

THREE WEEKS LATER

Njabulo agreed to take some time off to go to Venda with me for

just a weekend. I had to insist on it when I have noticed how stressed he looks. He decided to allow Tinyiko to do whatever she desires with her son but Njabulo isn't strong enough to let it be. He is acting strong, I know he is and this is killing him. I booked at the lodge for us to spend the whole weekend with Thabelo. Njabulo got the clearance for this trip and Mrs Masango allowed me to take a Friday off, so I don't even start at work. Njabulo picked me at six and we are almost reaching Polokwane. He has been quiet the whole drive

from Johannesburg. At times, I would fall asleep and let him be but right now, I cannot take it anymore.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I ask.

"No."

"Please babe. You haven't been yourself since Valentine's day and that was how many weeks ago?"

I complain. It feels like he showered me with unbelievable love that weekend and thereafter turned cold towards me. Maybe things got real when he couldn't visit the boy in hospital since he got discharged.

It was easier for him for go to the hospital to just see him.

"I hate not being in control."

"I understand. Things will be okay. He is going to grow up and you will have a relationship with him," I assure him. These things works out at the end. As long as he sets up a trust fund for him and do what he suggested. I wish I was bold enough to have a woman-to-woman chat with Tinyiko to enlighten her with the damage she is doing. I am have no right to pick up a phone and make that call - so I won't.

"What do we women want, huh?"

He asks with so much rage.

Njabulo isn't much fun when he is frustrated. "One thing you want a person in your life. The next you kick him out of your life like a dog."

I keep my silence. Nothing I say will change the situation.

"I booked us at the lodge so you could spend time with our daughter," I say, hoping to change the topic. We need to be in a great mood before we get home.

"Thank you. I truly appreciate."
He stays silence for a little while before he says, "Do you think the

boy isn't mine? She wants to run away so that I don't see or find out the truth."

This is not the first time he is asking me this. And for the tenth time I tell him that I don't know what to think. I am a believer and all my prayers always hope for the best. Even on this one, I pray it isn't the case - just because Njabulo means so much to me that his happiness matter. I am going to try not to be selfish about it right now - I can only hope for what would make Njabulo happy.

"Look, the truth always comes up.

Why don't you ask her for a paternity test?"

"I don't want to sound like I am disrespecting her."

"You deserve to know the truth."

"I just didn't want to complicate all of this with court cases and all."

"Look, like we did on Valentines, let us not stress about this. Let us tune into a better mood for Thabelo's sake and we will ace this when we return to Joburg." He takes my hand into his and drive us to where our daughter awaits.

He might not mention it, but driving here was the best decision ever. Ever since we got here, Thabelo is in his arms. He is still such a great father.

Oh, he needed this. The smile on his face says it all. I make sure we do a little shopping for my mom, my brother and Thabelo. My weakness is the baby pink clothes. It doesn't matter how many times my mother tells me not to dare buy new clothes. Thabelo has dresses that she hasn't worn but I keep adding to her little wardrobe. It makes me smile - whenever I realise that this is

my very own family. If Njabulo and I got married. No, corrections. WHEN Njabulo and I get married, this is how perfect my family is.

My phone rings as I make a payment at Pick n Pay. It is a number I am not familiar with, so I ignore the call. Njabulo is playing with Thabelo far away from the till. My phone rings again and I ignore it until the till lady gives me an eye. When it rings for the fourth time, I decide to pick it - thinking it might be an emergency. Maybe from work or something.

"Hello," I whisper. I still need to make that phone call to a therapist about my episodes. Some things still trigger some bad memories.

"Hi Maria. Tinyiko here."

Tinyiko?

"Yes?" I applaud myself for being so calm. I only hope she is calling me with good news and nothing about the baby being back in hospital.

"Can we meet for tea? I need to chat to you."

"Uhm... I am out of town. I'll be back on Sunday evening."

"Can we meet on Monday before I

leave Johannesburg?"

"I am at work until 15h30."

"I'll come see you before then.

Please don't tell Njabulo I called you," she says. You see now, I hate where this is going. I wouldn't choose to hide things from Njabulo. "You can tell him after the meeting."

"Okay. I'll send you my work address."

"Thank you."

Just like that, Tinyiko ruined my weekend with my family. All I did was to wonder what she wanted to see me about. I have been wondering why she doesn't want

me to tell Njabulo. A part of me feels like she might have answers to all our questions. And if I am the one to solve this puzzle for Njabulo - let it be.

MONDAY

I must say, I am nervous about my meeting with Tinyiko. She has called half an hour ago, telling me that she is to arrive in thirty minutes. Nothing came to my mind when I tried to guess what her meeting is all about. Could it be that she wants to drop the bomb that the boy doesn't belong to Njabulo? Does she want to give me the location of where she is

relocating to? I almost choke when I realize the possibility of her coming here to confront me about what I did to her and Njabulo. She was in the picture when I came into Njabulo's life. I shake my head, trying to shake the thought away. She didn't sound angry, just nervous.

Just minutes before 12h15, Tinyiko walks into the reception of Masango Logistics. She takes her sunglasses off as she steps into the room.

Ah, shame. She looks exhausted. Being a new mother is exhausting.

"Hi," she greets when she sees me behind the counter. Unlike her, I have my suit on point. I must admit that I put a little more effort on today's attire. I didn't want her to show up looking like a goddess. But, I shouldn't have. She looks like a mess in a sweater and trackpants.

"Please come this side," I say while leading the way to the benches outside. Lunch is in fifteen minutes so there isn't anybody yet.

She takes a seat while I do the same. Her eyes don't meet mine as I face her.

"Thank you for meeting me."

"Not a problem. Is everything alright with your son?" I ask.

Does she need money for the hospital bills? Why is she here?

"He is okay. He is fine. My mom is taking care of him right now."

"Is he Njabulo's?"

Oooppsss! I didn't mean to say that out loud.

"What? Of course he is," she spits.

"I am so sorry. I am just wondering why you would want to see me. Remember you didn't want me to tell Njabulo."

"Did you tell him?"

"I didnt. i'll tell him tonight, like you suggest."

"Thank you." She sighs.

"What's up?"

"I am not having peace," he voice cracks. "I am not having peace at all."

"Why does that have to do with me."

"I want you to forgive me so that I can leave peacefully."

"Listen. I don't blame you for getting back with Njabulo. I wasn't there. It isn't my..."

"Not that."

"Then, what?" I ask. She stares at me for a longest time. I hear

people chatting from afar. It is lunch time.

"The time you were kidnapped, you called Njabulo and I picked up the phone. I was selfish to not tell Njabulo that you were calling for help.... I don't know why I did that. I just panicked. I panicked and didn't know what to do..."

I shake my head, trying to catch a breath.

"You did what?" I breathe out.

"I am so sorry. I just..."

"You did what?" I yell sharply, having that scene play in my head. When I pleaded to speak to Njabulo so that he could save me.

When she lets me listen to her and Njabulo making out...that scene is playing in my head right at this second. "You did what?"

"I am sorry."

"Say it again. I want to hear you say it again," I ask, shivering at this minute.

"I should have told Njabulo that you were on the phone that day...asking for help. I panicked. I swear, it haunts me, daily. I should have told him that you were looking for help."

"Do you know I could have died?"

Do you know what you put me through? You said the phone was

breaking. I heard you tell Njabulo that the phone is breaking..." I am shivering with fear.

"What the fuck is she talking about?" Njabulo's voice startles me. I turn to where he is. He is standing behind us, his eyes on Tinyiko. He is here to drop my lunch like he usually does on random days.

"Njab...."

"What the fuck is Maria talking about?" he asks again.

EPISODE 52

MARIA

"What is she talking about?" he whispers. I am still shivering at the revelation. Why bring up old wounds when I have moved on? Why now? Couldn't she stay the hell away from us like she wanted? My heart is in a battle. A part of it wants to nod at her and thank her for coming out but another part wishes that she should have kept it to herself. She should have kept the secret to herself until it killed her. Now, it makes sense why she is running away. She knows how Njabulo would be pissed about this whole thing. He is pissed right at this

moment. I am not pissed; I am broken.

"Njabulo," Tinyiko mumbles, getting on her feet so that she could move away from him. I don't why I am also getting on my feet so that I could stand in between Njabulo and Tinyiko. She wronged me and deserves his wrath. Maybe it is his fiery eyes. But I still get on my feet because it is the way he is breathing that is making me panic. I have seen that video when he attacked Luzuko. I know he is capable of losing his mind when it comes to me.

"What the hell is she talking about?" he raises his voice. He laughs. Not that genuine laugh. It is that sarcastic, heart shattering, cold laugh. He puts the Nandos take-away bag on the table and cross his arms. "I want you to say it."

"I am so so sorry."

"Sit down," he says softly. I am confused. By only a minute I remember he isn't supposed to be angry because he is going to lose his temper. And once his anger is uncontrollable, he will just cause chaos and he doesn't have the luxury to do that. His case is still

pending and he cannot do anything to compromise it.

With trembling hands, she reaches for a chair and sit. I remain standing while Njabulo grabs another seat. My head is all over the place.

Why did she have to wake the old skeletons when I was trying to move on with life. I shiver when I remember what I have been through in Luzuko's captive. We cannot, for the love of God, go back there. Please.

"So, what you are saying is that when Maria tried to reach out for me, you lied about not hearing

her?" He asks - his jaws tight. "I remember that evening. You dismissed the call and pretended that everything was fine. How? Tinyiko, how? How do you carry on with your life as if everything was fine? Why?"

"I was confused."

"That's bullshit. You knew what you were doing. But, what I want to understand is how you lived with yourself after that."

"I regretted everything."

"Who is Luzuko to you?" I turn my gaze to Tinyiko. She shakes her head. She seem confused.

"I don't..."

"Who the fuck is Luzuko to you?"
he raises his voice at her. "Who
the hell is Luzuko to you."

"I don't know..."

"Don't bullshit with me. The only
thing that makes sense is the
fact that you know him and you
were working with him to
sabotage my relationship."

"I swear...."

"Dont you dare me. If you could
live with me and pretended that
Maria didn't call you asking for my
help...then you are capable of
killing someone. You knew how
broken I was about her
dissapearance. I thought she

was dead. You let me organise her memorial...but..."

I don't know why Njabulo is blaming her for the choices he made. Thinking about the decisions he took is pissing me off. Honestly, the devil is playing with my head.

Two guys walk to the corner table. In an instant, I pull myself together so that I don't look vulnerable. I wish Njabulo could do the same. I wish to keep my private business, private.

"I don't know him."

"I am not fooled."

"I swear Njabulo."

I take a seat next to Njabulo, my chin up and no sign of panic.

"Okay, what do you want me to do with this thruth?" I ask. This apology of hers has nothing to do with me. It is all for her to live peacefully. It has nothing to do with me so I dont understand what is expected of me.

"I...I...i just want to forget everything and move on."

"Move on with my son, huh?"

Njabulo hisses.

"Look... look... I wanted a clean slate."

"You know what? Excuse me. I can't do this." I get on my feet

so I could leave. The last thing I want is to be emotional in front of my colleagues - more of them are filling the lunch area.

"Is he my son?" That is the last thing I hear before I make my way to the reception area. I am still at work - I need to be in one piece. If it wasn't that I had a week off, I would be asking Mrs Masango for some time off.

Scratch that - I am at work. I don't have room to sulk around and show people that I have issues. It was enough that people got hold of what happened when I was away.

With trembling hands, I pack the pile of papers neatly on the counter before telling Cindy to go on lunch. I have excelled in dishing out a fake smile to hide my sorrows. She falls for it before rushing out of the reception area to go buy lunch.

In a few minutes, Tinyiko walks towards me. I keep my chin up and stare at her.

"I am sorry," she mumbles. "And... thank you for giving me a minute."

I don't know what this woman wants me to say. Am I supposed to say, thank you for telling me

the truth? No! I am not grateful for her truth. When she realises that the response is not coming, she marches out of the reception area.

Sigh!!!

Double sigh!!!

Njabulo appears in front of me. He has the food in his hand. His shoulders are sagging as if he was beaten up for days. Between Njabulo and I, the one who is affected by my ordeal is Njabulo. Thus, I cannot live my life without him. If there is one thing I am sure in life is the fact that Njabulo loves me with

everything in him and he will do anything for me. Anything and everything. With my eyes on him, he drops the takeaway on the counter and walks around the barriers to get to me. He stares into my eyes before pulling me into a hug. This warm, warm, hug. It is inviting, that I rest my head on his chest.

How do I feel?

I am so angry! But the christian girl in me is calm as hell. I am of a view that everything happens for a reason. Sometimes, I think, the bible is the only thing that kept me alive.

This hug, this. He keeps me tight in his arms to a point where I want to cry but I won't. I won't cry. I am at work and I won't cry.

A minute passes. Two minutes. Five minutes pass in a silent warm hug. I bet people rooming around the reception area are watching us right now. I close my eyes and listen to his heart. He is in panic mode - I can tell by how fast his heart is beating.

"I am sorry," he says and kisses me on my forehead. "I am sorry about everything. I am sorry." How do I tell him that it isn't his

fault? How do I ask him to stop blaming himself for the decision he took when he thought I was dead? How I do I tell him to let everything go when I haven't moved on with life? How?

"It's okay," I mumble. And only then does he releases me.

"I am going to the hospital."

"Huh?" I pull myself out of his embrace. "Is everything alright?"

"I want to know the truth."

"What truth?"

"If the boy is mine or not," he clenches his jaws. "I will never trust her ever again in my life and right now I want to find out

if the boy is mine."

I don't know what to say. But, to be honest, Njabulo always had doubts about the DNA of his son. Maybe this is for the best that he gets the results.

"Are you doing the tests today?"

I aks.

"Yes. She went to take the boy so we could go to my doctor. I won't believe anyone but him. And, I dont trust her at all."

"I understand."

"Will you be able to hold up for a little while? I'll see you later or tomorrow."

"Babe, I spent the whole

weekend with you. I could need some time alone to catch up on life."

"Why does it sound like you are making excuses not to see me?" he asks. We both laugh before he kisses me on my lips and disappears out of my sight.

You know what love is? I am not an expert but I think I have an idea. Love is sacrifice. Love is about watching your partner happily live their lives. Love is giving your partner what they feel they deserve. Love is Njabulo and I. With everything that is happening to me, I still need to

be strong when my partner has to go up and down the corridors of the hospitals with the possible mother of his son - just because that would make him feel content with life after the results. Love, is Njabulo fighting my battles. That is love and it takes a woman or man in love to understand. Your pain isn't yours alone - you share the half of it with your partner. If it isn't the case - I am worried that you haven't experience the love like I have.

Njabulo waves at me, forcing me to shove away my feelings to the

back of my head. When I have
knocked off and I am home alone,
I will revisit these feelings and
maybe beat myself to sleep. But
right now, I don't matter much.

For the first time, ever since
Thuli got here, I wish she isn't
home. I am not lucky at all as she
is watching TV when I walk into
the apartment. I had wished to
sulk the whole night while she is
at work but that will be
impossible.

Even though we haven't spoken
much, she seems like a nice girl
but she isn't Dikeledi. I throw my

bag on the couch and head for the kitchen to get a glass of water. What a day.

Njabulo hasn't called me since he left Masango Logistics, following Tinyiko behind for the DNA test. I know the three to five days that we have to wait for the results will be the longest days of our lives.

"Hi, Thuli," I greet while crossing the living room to the kitchen.

She is watching television - a blanket covering her petite body. I don't understand how a person can be this thin at this age and time. Not when there is Nandos in

every corner. Worse for her, she works in a restaurant.

"Hi," she responds back without moving her eyes on me. I pick a bottle of left over juice I was drinking this morning. Thuli watches as I gulp it down. I am exhausted and this drink is all I need to survive.

I wish she was like Dikeledi. I wish I could talk to her about how fucked up my day was. I wish we could laugh at lame jokes that I always make.

"Is everything alright?" She asks. I am tempted to wave away the feeling but her face is

that of a someone concerned.

"I had a long day," I finally say while getting on the couch. She picks the remote from the table and searches for a channel to watch. I take a chance to stare at her. She looks so innocent and I wish I could protect her from the reality of life.

"What?" she shrugs at me. I might have been staring. I do this lately when I wonder about something.

"You know, I wish you could enjoy your youth," I say. We haven't spoken much but I know she is still young. Telling her where my

advice is coming from would destroy her. So, rather I keep it to myself.

"There isn't much to celebrate," she says.

"What? Oh my goodness Thuli, if I could re-live my youth days, I would. I really would choose to live once again so that I dont waste it on useless things, you know?"

She keeps quiet. Just when I thought we were bonding.

"Maybe, that is possible when no one has taken your childhood away from you," she says before getting on her feet. Before I could ask her what she means,

she slams her door - leaving me to deal with the demons all by myself.

Just as I thought, the few days towards the results of the DNA test were the most difficult days ever. If I could survive this - now that Njabulo and I are driving to the hospital - I wouldn't think this is possible. Njabulo is a special case and dealing with unconventional cases isn't his strenght. He panics a lot when he doesn't have things under control. I, as his support system, has failed him a number

of times. This is the first time that I am seeing him since three days ago when he decided to do the DNA tests. To be honest, nothing could prepare me to be calm and collected during news discovery.

Njabulo pulls at the parking lot. Our appointment is in twenty minutes. If it isn't that Tinyiko relocated after taking the blood tests, we would have been celebrating like a big family - only if the results were favourable for all of us. She didn't want to be part of this - and this make us panic as to whether she isn't

hiding anything.

Have you ever watched the person you love so much get hurt so much? I am in that situation right now. We are walking to Njabulo's doctor and I am right here praying.

A part of me wants negative results so that Njabulo could be set free. The problem is the other part that wishes for a positive result because I know how much Njabulo would be broken if the baby isn't his.

LOVE neh? I respect it. It doesn't mean anything if Love is tangled - love is love...and right

now, I am praying for anything that will make my man delighted. If a negative result delights him, I am all for it. If positive results delight him, I am all for positive results for that reason.

"Please come in," the doctor calls out. Njabulo leads the way inside the consultation room. His doctor stares at me before he gives me a warm smile.

"We haven't met before," Dr Neo says, reaching to shake my hand.

"We haven't met. I am Maria," I respond, shaking his hand.

"My girlfriend," Njabulo adds. Dr Neo's smile is welcoming and warm

until Njabulo tells him that we here for the DNA test results. I dont like how he flinches when Njabulo explains our reason for our visit.

"Unfortunately..."

"What?" Njabulo jumps in.

Unfortunately what?

Unfortunately the baby isn't his or what? What is it?

"Unfortuanately...i cannot give you the DNA result without Ms Tinyiko."

"What do you mean?" Njabulo asks, scanning the table. His file is on the table but the doctor wouldn't give us the answer?

"My policies. We need Ms Tinyiko here to give consent that I can share the results with you both."

"Can we call her, please?" Njabulo says. I feel sorry for him because he just wants to know the truth about the DNA of this boy.

"That would do. As long as she gives us consent," the doctor says before he pulls a folder and starts dialing the number on the cellphone. He puts the phone on speaker and places it in the middle of the table.

I am not ready for the truth so I wish she doesn't answer the phone. To my disappointment, she

picks the phone.

When the doctor tells her why he is calling, she agrees for the results to be read now.

Njabulo takes my hand and squeezes it. When we took a ride here, he had told me how he wished for the results to be. He wishes for the boy not to be his so he isn't connected to Tinyiko. I pray for the same outcome.

"What do the results say?"

Njabulo asks so we could stop beating around the bush.

"The results between Njabulo and the alleged son are 99% positive," the doctor announces.

"What?" I whisper to myself.

"Thank you doctor," Tinyiko proudly responds. I turn to Njabulo to find him disappointed. There! We are connected to Tinyiko for life.

I have never seen a man so disappointed about his own flesh and blood.

"Thank you," Njabulo says while getting on his feet. He walks out of the room in silence.

EPISODE 53 (unedited)

NJABULO

What more would a man ask for? Maria and I are sitting in the parking lot, in silence after she prayed for me for strength and courage after the doctor's appointment. She didn't take me by surprise; she is just being herself. She reminds me of the day I fell so hard for her when she asked her mother to pray for me. We were in my car, driving back from Witbank. Since that day, I knew I needed her in my life. I knew that jerk that had her was too blessed to mess with her.

Sitting here, in silence, with her

hand in mind kind-of assures me that this woman was made for me. If I don't see it, then I am more than a jerk who doesn't deserve her.

"Are you okay," she asks when she catches me staring at her. I couldn't help myself.

"I am alright," I mumble back at her. The results didn't take me by surprise; I just hope they were otherwise.

For fuck's sake - what kind of a person betrays someone like Tinyiko? If I get someone to balance me - how did she pretend that Maria didn't call crying for

help. The worse part is, she knew how broken I was by Maria's disappearance. She knew but she kept the truth from me. I don't even want to think about what Maria was thinking when all that happen. What she and I know is the fact that she knows I would jump to get to where she is. I would have made a means to run to where she needed me.

"Let's go home," she says.

I like the sound of that. I start the car without asking her which home she is referring to. My home is hers, so I drive us there in silence.

If there is someone who has my back is this woman. She hasn't brought up the topic about the DNA results but her face says it all. Everything will be okay. Her prayer said so too - everything will be alright. I turn to the kitchen while she goes to our room to freshen up. We have decided to order in or fix a quick meal and stay in tonight. We would have loved to take her out but the mood is just off.

After pouring two fingers of my favourite whiskey, I gulp it down at once. I repeat the dose and pick my glass to the porch where

I can clear my head.

Life is fucked up for me.

No matter I try, there is always something trying to pull me down.

The one thing I am pleased about is how I had made peace with Tinyiko running away with my son. When he is old enough to understand, he will know where to find me. Just like Radzilani said, I can be a perfect father from a distance. I'll be content when I know I have done my part as a father - leaving the rest to an ungrateful mother.

Ungrateful, huh? I guess every one is allowed to make choices for

their lives.

It is about to rain - I can tell by the clouds gathering and the cold wind starting to blow. I close the sliding door and return to the house where I hear my phone ringing from the kitchen. I take a few strides to where I left it.

"Zizipho?" I respond while setting the whiskey on the counter.

"Hey, Njabulo... I am stuck in traffic. It is raining hard this side," Zizipho says.

Oh, damn, I forgot she asked to come by this weekend. Her son left for KZN yesterday with her

friend and she wants to spend some time this side. I totally forgot. This week has been the longest ever, ever. "Njabulo, are you there?"

"Yes."

"Can you hear me? I am stuck in traffic but should be there in about thirty minutes. Just thought to inform you so that you don't worry."

"Of course."

"See you just now. Should I stock on booze? This is my only weekend to get sloshed and go crazy. So, maybe I can drink a few shots before we actually go to the club."

The last thing I want is to spend too much in the club." I had promised to go out with her this Friday. She mentioned that she wanted to go have some fun. I promised to allow her to get loose as long as I am there to protect her. With women going missing every day, I wouldn't want her to go out with her friends to get sloshed.

"Uhhmm.."

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Just that I have Maria over."

"Ohhh."

"I know. This week has been a

little hectic. I forgot to tell you,"

"Are you cancelling our date?"

"No...not yet. Can I call you in a minute?"

"I am coming there. We will talk when I get there."

"Sure! See you just now."

I pour more whiskey before dragging my feet up the stairs to my bedroom. Vanilla scent - that is what Maria used in here. I can smell it from the door.

There she is!

She twirls to the door, wearing one of my shirts and the tiny pyjama shorts that she keeps here. No bra and I wonder about

the underwear.

"Hey, there you are," she says before she frowns at me. "You look pale. Are you alright?"

"I am fine." I drop on the couch in the corner of the room. I am trying to search for an excuse for Zizipho to change her mind about going out tonight. On the line she didn't seem like someone who was ready to give it up.

"Should we order in or I can pop a frozen meal in the oven?"

"Zizipho is on her way here. I forgot I promised to take her out tonight."

"Oh," she mumbles. "Then, I

don't mind popping a meal into the oven." Isn't she a woman and a half? I thought she would sulk. "Why don't you come with us. It'll be fun."

"The plans didn't include me. You guys can go ahead. I'll just pick something on Showmax."

"Are you sure?" I ask. She nods while changing out of the tiny pyjamas which I like so much. She pulls a legging - decent enough for a visitor.

"Hundred percent," she responds. I get on my feet so that I can kiss her. She takes my empty

glass and leave the room so that I could freshen up.

Zizipho had her mind made up. She could let me change it and I was forced to stick to our agreement, so that it doesn't look like Maria is there to divide us. We left Maria watching a movie with a bowl of macaroni on her lap. My wish was to take her with so that we could have fun and clear our heads but she was right - I had to do this with my sister as I promised. Clubbing, huh! I haven't been out in ages.

Life!

Life happened and there are better things to spend time on. Zizipho is sitting excitedly on the passenger seat, fixing her make-up as I drive us to Taboo. Jeez! Out of all clubs, she wanted to go to this one. I don't blame her though. I used to bring her here and it used to be the hottest spot - I don't know about this one.

"What were you and Maria talking about earlier?" I ask. Zizipho arrived when I was in the bathroom and I only walked up to them when they were having a

conversation in the living room. I didn't get to hear what they were talking about since they both kept quiet and gave me fake smiles like they were planning something against me. When I asked Maria what it was all about, she didn't tell me anything. She dismissed me and told me they were just catching up. Her face was hard to read.

"Nothing. We were just catching up."

"I see."

"What is up with Tinyiko?"

"Tinyiko is out of my life for good. So, nothing is up."

"She told me you accused her of lying about your son's DNA."

"You are not supposed to discuss anything with her. She is toxic. I don't want you talking to her. If there is anyone you need to build a relationship with is Maria."

"Tinyiko was my friend."

"I don't care."

"Isn't...."

"This is not up for discussion. I don't want you to ever talk about Tinyiko with me. If you want to communicate with her - fine by me but keep her away from me. I won't even fight for custody. I want her do what pleases her. so,

if you feel it is so important for you to keep talking to her...just keep it between her."

She sighs! I know she is tempted to argue about it.

"What problem do you have with Maria."

"Are you aware that Maria is the one who ruined your relationship with Tinyiko? Remember that night when I came to pick you from the club...you were with her. You were cheating on Tinyiko...with her."

"That shouldn't even bother you. It is nothing of your business."
We ride for the next fifteen in

silence. Zizipho fixes her lipstick before getting out of the car. I lead the way inside. The minute she walks into the club, her mood switches to a hundred. This reminds me of years ago when we were pretty close. When I would take her out whenever I was in Johannesburg for a visit and her son was at a sleep over.

Life has changed now - we must embrace the changes.

Zizipho takes my hand as we cross the floor to the bar for our drinks. I'm already tipsy, so I order the last glass of whiskey together with water and gin for

her. The best is a bottle so we could mix ourselves than trusting a waiter to do it for her.

"There is an open table over there," she says, pointing to a three seater.

While Zizipho dances to every song coming in, I am on whatsapp with Maria. She is still up, keeping me company as Zizipho make new friends with the girls on the dance floor.

Maria: You know how to brother.

Me: I would rather be with you than here.

Maria: Zizipho deserves your attention too.

Me: What did you guys chat about.

Maria: Does it matter? We were just catching up.

Me: Would you tell me if it was inappropriate? If she said something to hurt you, would you tell me?

Maria: Why do you worry so much? You are supposed to be having fun with your sister. All ladies must keep away or else they have me to deal with.

Me: They wouldn't even get near me.

Maria: I love you. I am jumping in bed. Don't wake me up.

Me: Not even for one round nana?

Maria: Don't you dare.

Me: Goodnight. I love you.

I can never keep a smile away from my face whenever I chat with Maria. She makes me happy.

My smile fades away when a familiar scent forces me to turn from my chair. Turning my head back away from her, I regret being curious. It is who I thought it is.

"Isn't it the hottest bachelor in town?" She says while getting on a chair next to me.

"I am not a bachelor."

"Where is the ring?" She asks,

searching my hand.

"I didn't think you'll ever show your face here after what happened the last time you were here."

"The last time we were here," she corrects me. "I am here every weekend, looking for you."

"It has been over a year..." and many more months.

"I am glad I didn't give up."

"What do you want Amanda?" I ask and she licks her lips. Before I became this man that I am, it used to turn me on.

"Am I not allowed to greet you?" She says. "I missed you."

"You are a married woman."

"You didn't mind before," she says.

"Look!" I look around for anyone who might be staring at us. No one is, so I lean closer to her ear. She shifts so that she could get close. "Look, I would appreciate if you keep your distance. I am a changed man. I have a woman waiting for me at home and I would appreciate if you walk away right now and never show your face in front of me."

She stares at me.

"What is she doing...letting you roam the streets like a single man."

"She is at home trusting that her man loves her the way she deserves to be loved. She doesn't need to put me on a leash. So, please, excuse yourself."

When I head downstairs, I am welcomed by a smell of eggs and bacon. Trust Maria to spoil me. Zizipho and I got home after midnight. She didn't drink much so she was close to sober. I didn't at all at the club, I am as good as sober too. There isn't a need to nurse a hangover.

"Good morning," Maria smiles at me as she dishes more bacon in my

favourite plate - I take I get more bacon because she likes to spoil me.

"How did you sleep?" I ask her with a kiss. I didn't wake her up when I got home. She was sleeping like an angel.

"Great. I didn't even hear you come in."

"Good morning," Zizipho says while getting on the seat.

"I hope you guys don't need any orange juice. We are out but we have apple juice."

"Apple juice is perfect my love."

She places the slices of bread on the table and grab a chair. We

start digging in silence until my sister opens her mouth.

"You are trending."

"Me?" I ask.

"Yes."

"Me?"

"What did you guys get up to?"

Maria asks in laughter.

"All I did was sit and drink."

"Well, an owner of a hottest joint in Gauteng cannot just sit and drink without people getting a piece of him."

Well, since the success of the car wash slash chisanyama, I have been making the gossip news a lot. There is this Youtube channel,

Tea world, which likes to check on our greta vibe since celebrities has been showing their face in my car wash. It is good for business since we always get new customers every weekend.

"What did they say I did? I only trend when we host vibes at my joint," I say. Zizipho pulls her phone and turns it to Maria and I. Maria clears her throat before picking juice from the table.

Couldn't Zizipho wait for us to be alone before she could bring this up? On the picture on a gossip column is Amanda and I sitting alone, talking. That second when

I told Amanda to piss off, turned out to be a perfect picture for a gossip blog. We look cosy and flirting.

Maria knows better than to make a conclusion of this. Zizipho and I need to have a chat. I am ready to defend myself when Maria says, "Is it me or she has gained weight?"

"What?" I ask.

"The last time we saw her she wasn't that big." Maria takes a sip from her juice. "I don't blame her. Cutting down on curbs ain't easy. Look at what I am feeding you."

I try my best not to smile at my big girl. I might be wrong but there is a bad vibe between Maria and Zizipho. After this breakfast, Maria will tell me everything and I will deal with Zizipho with facts. If I need to suck her pussy for the truth, let it be. In fact, we need to talk now.

"You reckon?" I ask and she gives me a smirk.

"Yes."

I get on my feet and stare down at Maria who is eating her food without the care in the world.

"Babe, can I have a minute with

you in our bedroom," I start taking off. "Now, Maria."

EPISODE 54

(18SL)

NJABULO

I get on my feet and stare down at Maria who is eating her food without the care in the world.

"Babe, can I have a minute with you in our bedroom," I start taking off. "Now, Maria."

"Of course," Maria picks the napkin from the table and wipe her lips before throwing it back on the table. Her face might be

stern but I can tell how pissed she is.

I lead the way and open the door for her to enter. I shut the door for her and lock it.

"Why are you locking the door?" she asks with furrowed brows. I stand, with my back on the door, while she seats on the bed. I wish right at this moment I was as kinky as those men in movies. Also, I wish I had a bedpost where I could tie her to. The only thing I have in this room is my enormous bed with nothing but a huge canvas on the wall. No headboard whatsoever.

"You say you needed to talk," she says. How does she do this? How does she keep the straight face even when offended? I don't want her to be this kind of woman who is used to people making her a playing ground. I won't allow that. I want her to be as vulnerable as she needs to be. I have her back always. But, what do I say about a strong woman that I am blessed with? I might not have to live to fight her battles since she always fights them for herself.

Throughout, I want her to understand that I will fight all

her battles for her while she takes a pill chill. I'll run the race for her while she sits under a shade and sips her champagne. I want her to know that she doesn't have to lift a finger because I will lift a hand for her. That is what I wish she knows. "What is going on between you and Zizipho?" I ask, my eyes tracing her lips and then her perky boobs...then her shorts that need to be on the floor right at this minute.

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me."

"Why would I lie to you?"

"Because you think you can hide things from me," I respond without moving my eyes on her. The licking of my lips, which wasn't intentional, turns her on. I know her like the back of my hand. Her squeezing her thighs is a good sign. We easily turn each other on.

"I am not hiding anything."

See, I can play this game the whole morning, but I have other things in mind. I pull my t-shirt off - I know she is going to need to feel my skin- and throw it on the floor while pacing to her. She moves backward so that she can

easily lie on the bed.

"You are not?" I mumble while pulling her PJ shorts off.

"You should have just said you wanted a round...you know?" she whispers with a smile.

Her PJs are off, followed by the lacey underwear. Then, her t-shirt is on the floor, followed by a lacey bra. If I am not mistaken, she was going to give me a little show later. She doesn't waste this kind of outfits - she always makes sure I see them.

"Do I need to report to you?" I ask while parting her legs.

"No...yes..." she fumbles with her

words when my index finger lands on her wet folds.

"What was that?"

"No," she mumbles.

"No, what?" My finger goes up and down, carefully. "You don't even remember what my question was, do you?" I laugh at her.

When she attempts to put her fingers on mine - so that she could direct me - I move it away. I am on a mission here.

She wiggles as my fingers do its job. I know where to touch her and HOW. I know what ticks her off.

"Njabulo," she mumbles. I laugh

so hard at her. I haven't started but she cannot take it already.

"What?" I smile at her. My finger does stop moving but I make sure I don't slide it in where she wants it the most. She wants me to scratch that itch. But I won't. Not now when she is still lying to me.

She pulls herself up, supporting herself with her elbows and asks, "Do you want to do this or not?"

I drop my mouth to her pussy, and she throws back on the bed.

Ohh, I got my tongue where she wants before I start sucking and sucking and sucking until she

starts panting. On other days I would keep the pace but now? I stop!

She groans at me.

"We need to talk," I say and lift my head.

"What the hell?" she asks, staring at me. "What the hell?"

"We need to talk. Now."

"Have you lost...." before she could finish, my lips are devouring her.

She moans and shakes around the bed like I am killing her. Of course, I am here to suck her life out of her. I stop while she pants and gasps for air.

"What....the...?" she asks, her

voice a little frustrated.

"You know Maria I suck you until you come right now. You know I can fuck you with my finger right at this moment but I am not going to do that before you talk to me. What is going on between you and Zizipho?"

"What?"

I don't mind repeating myself,

"What is going on between you and Zizipho?"

Before she could answer, I shove my finger inside and watch as she snaps her eyes shut, and lift her butt in the air.

"Njabulo..."

"Tell me," I say before sucking her clit a few times. "Tell me."

"She hates me..." she pants, "She doesn't want me to be in...your....life." My tongue is doing magic because she is flooding like a river and her mouth is flooding the words too. "She says I am not right for you. And...that...I came in between you and... Tinyiko. She says I am...bad...for you."

"How does that make you feel?" I ask.

"I don't care about how she... feels about me," She wiggles as I suck and suck and lick, "...I am not here for her."

Her words make my dick twitch. I am turned on to no return.

"Who are you here for?"

"You."

"Who am I?" I ask. Don't judge me. I like my name on her lips when she is fucking turned on.

"Nja...Njabulo..." she cries as I do my magic.

"What else did she say?" I ask.

She won't stop - she is almost at the peak and it would be a waste of time to blab all these secrets and not reach the peak.

"That... I should leave you alone," she says. Her eyes are shut and I can tell she is focused so much on

the orgasm so that she cums and get herself out of this misery. For that, I pull away. Her eyes open in urgency and she stares at me in shock. "Why did you stop?"

"We are still talking," I say.

She is pissed and wants to roll out of bed. I stop her and spread her legs open so I could take her out of her misery. It doesn't take long until she is screaming my name and clutching on the bed covers.

I watch as she pants - her chest rises and falls - until her body relaxes.

"I hate you," she says while

sitting up.

"I know."

When we were done taking a bath, after a few rounds for me to apologize, we head downstairs to find that Zizipho is not in the living room. Maria told me that the reason she couldn't tell me was that she doesn't want to get Zizipho in trouble. I promised that I won't give her trouble, I will just sit with her like an adult. Now that she is gone, Maria and I are going out to the car wash. I am proud of my investigation tactics because I have my woman

blushing all this time as I drive to my joint.

"You know I wasn't flirting with Amanda, right?" I say. I even forgot to address it when we were in bed - that is how irrelevant Amanda is to me.

"Yes."

"How do you know?" I am just curious.

"Because you know that if I find out the truth, I'll walk out of your life and never look back. You wouldn't risk that."

Truth!

"I wouldn't risk losing you. She showed up for a chat and I was

telling her to excuse herself since I am done with her." Screw it - I felt an urge to explain myself even when I didn't need to. She knows that I wouldn't risk losing her. I am a changed man - since this woman walked into my life.

"About your sister..."

"Leave her to me. I will have a chat with her," I say while caressing her hand with mine. "I promise not to be a jerk about it. I'll talk to her like an adult."

"Good."

When we get to the car wash, I park the car behind the last Mercedes Benz which is in the

queue to get the wash. Before we jump out of the car, I take her hand and kiss it before keeping it on my chest.

"Thank you, babe...for being you," I say. I kiss her hand again. "I think Tinyiko's case would have killed me if you reacted otherwise to her revelation. You were my strength even though I was supposed to be your strength."

"I understand. Njabulo...come on," she says with a smile, "Don't go soft on me."

"Come, let's go before I shed a tear."

I have a great team working for

me and if I stay this focused, I will be repaying Mr Radzilani Senior his money back. It is noon but the place is buzzing. It is a normal Saturday with no party to host but it is fairly full. Like always, Phuti and his gang are here. If I can count the customer that this man brings in my joint, he will start asking for a commission. The only man short in this circle is the great Radzilani. We have made peace with it. The man is busy...what is that word that Maria uses? Oh, yes, he is busying 'husbanding'.

"Look who is here," Phuti calls out

as Maria and I appear in front of him and his friends. I greet the guys while he gives Maria a warm hug. He is not yet tipsy - if he was, he wasn't going to be this friendly to my woman. The way he loves his booze, he has been in trouble a few times and has learnt from his mistakes.

"I heard you have a new roommate who would make a good match," Phuti says to Maria who turns to me with a warning eye.

"I don't think so. She is too reserved for you," Maria responds while receiving a bottle of water from the guy I asked to bring us

drinks.

"You were once reserved before Buthelezi took your innocence away, isn't it?"

Okay, I was wrong; he must be tipsy to be mention such true bull shit.

"She is more reserved than I was, believe me. She is worse," Maria says, not offended by what the jerk said.

"I want worse," Phuti says.

"Isn't she your date?" Maria asks while pointing at the girl who is walking towards us. She is the one Phuti normally tag along. She has a long pony and shortest

denim shorts.

"Of course, she is." Phuti gets on his feet to welcome the girl. When she has made a round of hugs and all, she takes a chair next to Maria. She introduces herself as Pearl.

"Babe, can I quickly look at some work in the office? I'll be right back," I drop a kiss on her lips and leave her for the office.

We don't really have an awesome office structure but what we have does work perfectly. I have a small room - even though we use it to store some of our materials for the car wash. I pull

the file which Nkosi - the guy who runs the place during the week - left on top of our small table.

There are invoices I need to process tonight when I get home and salaries to program for our employees for the month-end.

This feels good. Getting myself back on my feet with a beautiful woman on my side.

'What more do I want, huh?' I ask myself as I page through the file.

I am deep in my thoughts when the door opens. Before me stands a beautiful, fucking sexy woman who drives me crazy. She smirks

at me before walking to the corner where I am seated.

"Did you hear what Phuti said?" she asks while sitting on the table and spreading her legs in front of me, her legs on either side of my chair. "You, Njabulo Buthelezi, has taken my innocence away."

I laugh so hard but she doesn't.

"I am glad I did," I mumble at her. Look at her now. She wouldn't have turned this spontaneous if she was married by all these boys who thought they deserve her.

She lifts her dress and hooks her

underwear with her thumbs.

Oh, jeez!

She didn't lock the door.

"You didn't lock the door."

"So?"

"Anybody can walk in here looking for a vacuum ... or..." I swallow hard when she manages to pull the underwear down. She drops it on my table with a cocky smile.

"Anybody....can..."

"Leave it!" she dares me. If I move she might change her mind. I pray that no one shows face while I steal this quickie. With her legs stretched like that, I need it.

Her sleek fingers shine before me when she pulls them out of her sweet pussy.

"You claimed my virginity Njabulo Buthelezi," she says.

"Yes, I did," I respond after clearing my throat.

"This is why you drive me so so crazy," she mumbles as I struggle with my belt. When I win, and my dick is out in the air, I pull her so that she could sit on top of me.

"Hmmm..." she moans when I slide it inside of her. She drops her head on my shoulder when I start moving my hips - both my hands

on her hips. My ears are open for any footsteps that might get closer to the door. No footsteps whatsoever but we can hear the noise from afar where the cars are being washed.

The noise is driving me insane.

This stolen quickie is driving me fucking crazy.

This woman is going to be the death of me.

You claimed my virginity, Njabulo Buthelezi! Her words ring as she moves her hips back and forth, riding the shit out of me.

I claimed her virginity.

It was me.

I loved her then. But I love her more than I did when I claimed her. My Love for her keeps growing by the day.

"I am going to marry you. Now," I mumble to her ear.

She freezes!

"What was that?" she asks, searching my eyes.

Why did she freeze? Has she changed my mind because of how fucked up my life is? Did Zizipho change her mind? Why did she freeze?

I give her an awkward smile. I am the boldest man in the world but when it comes to Maria, I

panic at times. She makes me panic. Maybe it is because I know she deserves more than any man can offer. She is priceless.

Before I could even repeat myself, there is a knock on the door and the door flies open.

"Oh, shit," I hear before the door slams again.

"Oh my God, we are busted!"

Maria laughs out loud while getting off from me. She giggles while picking her underwear from the table and putting them on.

"We are busted!"

Her giggles fill the room.

I am still in misery here: why did she freeze?

EPISODE 55

MARIA

Did Njabulo say something about marriage?

"Let's get out of here," he mumbles in my ear when we are dressed. Who disturbed us though? I was deep in it and now, I'm shy about it.

"Please," I say with a smile. His smile is no longer wide. I want to ask him what he said about

marriage, if he said anything. The last thing I want is to hint that I want to get married to him or something. I have told myself that he will do it in his own time and when he does, he is going to propose to me. No discussions about it. He knows how I feel about him and I know how he feels about me.

Njabulo leads the way back to where the guys are chilling.

"We missed you two," Phuti says with a smirk. I know he is the one who walked on us because he asks Njabulo to have a word with him. I guess he had an important

message for him. In a minute, Njabulo comes to tell me that he needs to go to the office to handle an emergency. When he asks me if I want to stay, I asked to be dropped at home. I buy myself a pizza on my way home. It is going to be me and the television tonight. I thought I would be home alone; Thuli is here, watching television. Phew!

It is either I sit with her and watch television or I go close myself in my bedroom. The latter would be rude, so I change into comfy pyjamas and join her in the

living room.

"How is it with your job?" I ask while setting a box of triple decker on the table and juice. I watch her sit up while I get back to the kitchen to get two side plates and glasses.

"I resigned," she responds.

"What? What happened?" I settle on the couch and take one slice. She does the same.

"The owner of the restaurant is a jerk." I am used to how she speaks. Her choice of words are very...different.

"What happened?"

"The idiot want us to dress up in

cat women costumes for some client's birthday party."

I laugh when she rolls her eyes.

"Is it that bad?"

"I have never seen a cat woman in a short skimpy leather dress but a full length jumpsuit. Now he wants us in a short dresses that shows off more flesh than it covers. That is just not so me, thank you," she responds. She sounds and look disgusted.

"So, are you going to look for another waitressing job?"

"I need to or else I won't be able to pay for this room."

I watch her down the juice in one

go. I am tempted to tell her not to worry about rent, but we are not that close for me to be generous. "Hope you get one."

"I will. Someone is always looking for someone to do some shitty job for them. I'll get a job," she responds.

She picks a new movie. A horror movie. Not my cup of cake but I brace myself.

"Thuli, can I ask something?" I bite my pizza, waiting for her to give me a go ahead for my question.

"What?" She asks. If I wasn't used to the way she speaks, I

was going to stop right here. She isn't rude - just different.

"How were you growing up? What kind of a person where you?"

"Can you ask my sister? She is going to join us in a minute. I hope you don't mind. I thought you were going to spend a weekend with your man," she says. I don't really mind. I don't really have rules for my apartment. As long as it is in its best condition.

"I don't mind. But why won't you tell me?"

"Because I don't talk about the past."

"I understand," I say. Sometimes it is best to keep the past where it is. I know that very well.

Before the movie even starts, the knock on the forces Thuli to jump.

Okay, this is a first.

She throws herself to her sister's arms. This is the side I didn't know she has. A vulnerable side. The sister is as petite as Thuli. With a longest weave and longest eyelashes. This is going to be interesting.

"Hey, this is my sister, Lebo,"

Thuli introduces me. "Lebo, that is Maria."

"Nice to meet you," I wave as the sister takes off her coat. She looks around the apartment while nodding her head.

"I love the place."

"But I won't be staying here for long," Thuli takes her couch back.

"That idiot fired me."

"Come on Thuli... don't blame yourself. I taught you not to settle for any nonsense that you don't want to do. It's okay."

"I know. It just sucks."

"Do you guys have gin in here?"

Lebo asks. "Let me organise some booze!"

When I said I don't mind having Lebo around, I didn't mean for her to stay for three weeks. It has been three weeks since she came to visit. When she showed up, she had one sleep over bag but she isn't leaving. I like her though, it is just weird to walk into a party every day after work. I do spend weekends with Njabulo but during the week I am home and have to share the space with the two sisters. I no longer watch my series in peace. They have a lot to talk about and all I do is listen.

I know it is Friday, but do we

need this much alcohol? The kitchen table is filled with alcohol and take-away food.

"Hey babes, go and change. We are going to have a party. Invite your friends over," Lebo says when she sees me. She is wearing a shortest jean skirt, the weave is still there.

Friends? My friends are married and Friday nights are for their families.

"Please Maria. This will be like a goodbye party. On Sunday my rent is due and the girl cannot afford rent," Thuli says. We will need to sit down when the sister is not

here. I don't mind her staying while job hunting. It isn't like I depend on her money. I just don't want the sister to feel like she is welcomed forever and forever. We can party tonight and tomorrow when she is sober, I'll have a chat with her.

"I'll join you but I doubt my friends will come over."

"Fine. Go and dress up. This is not a pyjama party," Lebo adds when I get into my room. Judging from what the both of them are wearing, I know a pair of jeans won't be allowed. I pick a black denim shorts that I have only

worn when I was Njabulo.

Something that I wouldn't wear if I am going out. I pair it with an over-the-shoulder bodysuit.

I don't look bad. I send Thandeka and Dikeledi an invitation, just for the records. Dikeledi told me she is staying in with her husband and Thandeka told me she just left her shop, she is on her way.

She caught me by surprise. She is the one I thought she wouldn't show up. I expected Dikeledi to come instead.

"Look at you," Lebo calls out when I walk into the room.

"You look yummy," Thuli says. I

laugh at the faces they are giving me. I always walk home in either a uniform or long skirts and all. I love how I dress but this is definitely different. I know Njabulo would think I look HOT but wouldn't allow me to step out of the door. Lebo mixes me a drink. Gin and tonic - now my favourite but I don't want to be a party pooper.

I dish the wings and tacos and join the girls in the living room.

Thandeka only shows up twenty minutes later, dressed in a formal dress.

"Ohhh..I look out of place," she

says when she gets into the room. "Then go and change before you sit down," Lebo calls out. I think she is already tipsy. I have only had a few sips of my drink. I get on my feet and hug my friend. She has been scares but the glow she has tells me she is happy and perfectly fine. I lead the way to my bedroom for her to change into something that would fit. We settle on a little stretchy dress that makes her look perfectly young but Mr Radzilani wouldn't dare let any other man see her like that.

"And, here is your drink," Lebo

happily says when we walk back to the room. Thandeka takes a sit next to me.

Looks like this is going to be a fun day. Sometimes one needs a break from the relationship and work and just chill with friends of the same gender.

"Let us play a game," Thuli calls out and stands up.

"What is the game all about?"

Thandeka asks while Thuli puts a bottle of tequila on the table. She gives each of us a shooter glass.

"Never have I ever," Thuli responds with a wiggling of her eyebrows. "We will each take

turns."

"What are the rules?" I ask. I haven't played this drinking game, have I?

"One will say something that they have never done, and if you ever done that particular thing, you take a shot."

"Okay, that's simple," Thandeka says.

"Right?" Thuli smiles and stares to the ceiling for a question.

"Okay, never have I ever twerk for a man."

Thandeka looks around the room and then pour a shot while everyone laughs. She shoots it

down her throat.

"Maria, haven't you twerked for Njabulo?" She asks like it is an abomination.

"Come on, I cannot dance to save my life. I'd turn him off if did," I respond. "Lebo, why don't I believe you?"

"Because I don't men darling. I do girls."

"Oh, my bad." I cover my face for assuming what seems normal. I didn't think.

"But then, Thuli must rephrase her question. It must be twerk for a partner," Thandeka calls out. She has a point so Lebo

takes the shooter.

"Okay, never have I ever cooked for a partner," Thuli says.

"What the hell do you eat when you are with him?" I ask because I am basically Njabulo's chef when we are together.

"What she eats when I am not there. I am not cooking for anybody until they put the ring on it. I am not gonna go around showing off my cooking skills to everyone," she says.

The three of us reach for the bottle for our turn.

"Never have I ever bribe a traffic officer," Thandeka says.

This is an easy one. Only Thuli drinks because of course only her and Thandeka drive.

"Why do I have a feeling that you have done so many things in your life Thandeka?" I ask while getting up because it is my turn.

"Okay, never have I ever had sex in a room with people."

"Please clarify. Do they have to be awake?" Thandeka asks.

"It doesn't matter. As long as they were in the same room."

"Do you want to get me drunk?"

Thandeka scream from her couch.

"What? You have? Oh, my God...how?" Thuli laughs at my

friend.

"Are my children regarded as people. They are not people, are they?" Thandeka laughs. I remember the video in the nursery and now I don't want to hear more.

"Yes," I say.

Thandeka takes the shooter and thereafter calls her husband,

"Babe, I think you are going to Uber yourself here to pick me up. Please come pick me just before midnight. I love you."

If there is a couple I want to be like is Thandeka and her husband. He didn't need to be convinced

that his wife is having fun and he doesn't mind all the Uber trouble in the middle of the night.

"Bring it on. I am ready for you," Thandeka says. She is fully aware that she is going to lose this game and she is going lose while pap drunk.

This is more fun than hitting the club. It is better than dancing to loud music. This is so fun.

Forgetting about partners and have fun. I missed it.

"Never have I ever cheated on anyone," Thandeka says. Just when we are about to argue whether I cheated on Luzuko

because I was emotionally done with him, I get on my feet and charge to the bathroom to throw up.

oh, my God. I can feel my stomach twisting and grumbling as I throw up everything I have eaten since the morning. Minutes later when I get on my feet, I feel like my head is spinning.

I guess it is game over for me.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah. I guess I have drank more than I should have. I am probably drunk."

"No honey, we mixed the tequila with water. You are not drunk,

you are pregnant," Thuli says.

"Oh puliz," I say, giving her an eye.

"Oh Miss puliz. Come back after the test," she says.

My heart starts beating faster than it should. When I remember how I have been easily irritated. How I feel that some clothes are a little tight?

But no!

"Are you thinking what I am thinking?" Thandeka says. "Why don't we go buy you a pregnancy test? I feel like going on an adventure."

"It is after nine."

"Netcare don't close the pharmacy. They operate from the back," she says.

Everyone is tipsy and excited. But luckily the hospital is just down the streets. Everyone puts their shoes on and follow Thandeka to the car.

They call this an adventure. How funny can this ever get?

I am going to remind them tomorrow if they don't remember any of it.

"Guys, remember never to drink with you. Are you even on your senses?" I ask as Thandeka drives down the street. She isn't

as sloshed, so she can perfectly drive. She parks just behind the Emergency door while I and Lebo walks to the pharmacy's emergency door. People are staring at our skimpy attire. How perfect? Now people are probably thinking that we are selling our bodies or something. The guy behind the counter gives me the early detection test with a tight smile. We hurry back to the car and drive back to my apartment.

"What would you do if you are pregnant," Lebo asks.

"I am not pregnant."

"Haven't you been having sex," she asks.

Lots of it.

"I am on contraceptives."

"Oh yeah?" Thandeka asks as she and the girls drop themselves on the couches.

I disappear to the bathroom for the test. I don't even know if it'll work with the shooters I took. What did I say? Njabulo and I went to the doctor together for the contraceptive.

I wash my hands and take the test to the living room. I put the kit on top of an old magazine and flop on the couch.

"What does it say?" Thandeka asks while getting on her feet. Why does it look like this woman wants me pregnant? Njabulo and I spoke about this. No babies for now. Maybe in the future.

"It is one line," I respond.

"No, it's not," Thandeka says. "It has one darker line and one faint line. You are pregnant."

"What?" I run to where she is standing. I pick the kit from the magazine and inspect it.

The girls watch me for a little while.

"Guess the adventure was worth it after all," Thandeka and the

girls laugh, "Haibo...Maria, are you crying? Are you crying?"

EPISODE 56

MARIA

I feel like crap.

Oh, my goodness. As I sit on my bed, I really feel like I have been drinking for days. Thandeka just left a minute ago and the sisters are still annoyingly laughing in the living room. The party is still on and I feel like throwing them out of my apartment right at this minute.

Standing in front of the mirror, I

inspect my stomach. My waist is still as perfect as I have been maintaining it for months. During the beginning of the week, the only thing that I have noticed is one skirt feeling just a little tight and that was on my hips.

No, I am not pregnant.

I am going to get more tests and find out the truth.

I change out of the party clothes and put on warm pajamas. When I see a text from Njabulo, I feel like hiding in my closet than tell him the news. I don't know how he is going to take the news. We didn't plan for things to be like

this. The guy was trying to get his house back in order when it comes to finances - and here I come to introduce a new responsibility.

Oh my God - my mother. What is she going to think? I wasn't responsible at first when I had Thabelo and now? The second child before I am even married? I don't care about what people would say but the embarrassment to my mother is what bothers me. I left her with a baby only to make another baby - before marriage.

Oh, my God.

This is so embarrassing.

My memories of the pregnancy I had with Thabelo are going to suffocate me. I feel so sick just thinking about this.

Now I regret not staying with my daughter. Maybe if I had her here, I wouldn't have too much time in my hands to make babies like I don't care about my future. I throw myself on the bed and cover myself with a duvet.

Luckily, Njabulo has to be at the car wash - I don't have to wake up from the bed and face him.

The first thing I do when I wake up is to go down the mall to

get two more tests to confirm the results. Each second that I am in this taxi, I pray for the results to be negative. I don't want to be pregnant. I don't want. I want to be married first. My hands tremble as I inspect the kits after urinating on them. The lines - two of them - are there.

I feel like the world is turning against me right now. Honestly. Thabelo is still a baby for me to have another baby.

"Hey roomie, do you want something to eat?" Thuli asks from my door. Why is she here?

"No, thanks."

"You look like shit."

"I know," I grumble.

"I am so thirsty," I mumble.

"I'll be a good roomie and get you some," she says and darts out of the room. Just when she steps out of the room, my phone rings and it is a whatsapp video from Njabulo. Thank God I look like a human being. So, I position myself and take the call.

"Hey babes," I pull a widest smile. If I show how crappy I feel, he is going to drop everything and rush here and I know he has a big gig today. Some soccer star is

hosting a birthday party there and it gets hectic when they have to run the place with a million of people.

"How are you today? We haven't spoken today."

"I am great, How are you? How is work?"

"Hectic." He says. "Heading somewhere? You look so pretty."

"I was in the shops earlier."

"Am I going to see you tonight?"

He asks. I am not ready to see him. I am going to just tremble in front of him.

"Babe...you are..." I want to say but he is disturbed by someone on

the side. I can get a glimpse of what they are saying. The caterer guys canceled at the last minute. Njabulo swears loudly and asks the guy what they'll do. The guy suggests a braai.

"The bloody guy is a snob," Njabulo says.

"We will make it fancy. Maybe get several women to serve the meat around instead of eating from one bowl. Like a snobbish braai."

"Now I know why I hired you. I'll be with you in just a minute. I am finishing up with madam," he says before turning his face back to the camera. "Hey, babe, sorry

about that. We have a little crisis."

"Never a perfect party without crisis, right?" I say. Thuli walks into the room and places the glass of water on my pedestal.

"Don't you know a few waitresses looking to earn extra cash tonight?" Njabulo asks and Thuli stops on her tracks. He turns back to give me an eye. She is a waitress and she probably knows more other waitresses. "Not even waitresses. I just need women to act as waitresses. The damn cater canceled seven hours before the gig. How pathetic. Please

come by and help me."

"Uhm..." I start.

Dammit. I cannot refuse to help my own boyfriend in crisis just because I am scared to tell him the news. He will be too busy to notice that I am hiding something from him. I still need time to get perfect timing to bring this up.

"We will do it," Thuli jumps in.

"Who is that?" Njabulo asks.

"My roomie."

"Yes, she is a waitress. Can she organise five more waitresses?"

"Yes, I can," she says from where she is standing.

"Perfect. Please organize them for me and have them here at five? Is that alright? I'll make sure I organize transport for them to return home."

"Perfect," calls out and dances out of the room.

"Are you coming?" Njabulo asks.

"Oh...yeah," I mumble. What kind of a partner will that make me? Having my roomie rescue the day while I stay in bed like I don't care. I'll go and see how I can save the day.

"I'll pick you and your roomie at four. I love you. I'll catch you later," he says and blows me a

kiss before he disconnects the phone.

Perfect! Just perfect.

I down the water and take back the glass to the kitchen where Thuli is organizing a few girls for the waitressing job. Her sister is chilling on the couch, she looks like she is having a rough day. Of course, she was drinking her life away since last night's party was her idea.

"Hey Maria, should I tell the girls to dress in some sort of uniform?" she asks. "As long as it's not some shitty revealing clothes."

"All black wins," I suggest. That

is what I see whenever I am out. Waiters and waitresses always dress in all black. Some could be in skirts or shorts or jeans or dresses - as long it is black.

"I agree," she says before dialing the next girl. I swear she is more excited about this. I understand though, she doesn't have a job right at this minute. Any gig is a good gig.

I join Lebo in the living room so that I don't seem rude and uninterested in my boyfriend's gig. I scroll on the channels until I land on Say Yes To The Dress.

"Can we watch something decent?" Lebo grumbles on the couch.

"Is this not decent?"

"Are you getting married?" she asks.

"I love the show. Can I watch it without being judged?" I ask while getting comfortable. But, a minute later her question hit home. Am I getting married? No, I am just pregnant, that is what it is.

Before I could even dwell on the matter, Thuli walks to where we are seated and gets on the free couch.

"Please send me the address so that I can forward it to the girls," I say. When I ask her why she is excited about just one night's job, she tells me that gigs are the most paying. And a soccer star party is beneficial since the guys tip in hundreds. When I tell her that they won't be waitressing, they'll be serving, she tells me that it is the same. If they are friendly, they get tips regardless. Okay, there is still a lot I need to learn.

Njabulo has an extra hand now that Lebo told us that she

cannot say, "No" to a party with free booze. She isn't in all black but she said she can always jump in if extra hands are needed.

Njabulo is stressed about tonight that he doesn't notice how much I am panicking. My hand was trembling when he held it for a minute in the car. I had to stop myself from telling him the news. There is always time for everything. Right now, we are going to make this birthday party a hit.

At six o'clock, the place is almost packed, even though the soccer star is only showing his face at

eight. I don't even know who it is but he must be very famous and rich to host a party like this.

Instead of having people bring their own cooler box, they have set up a bar for drinks and a cocktail bar for the ladies.

"This looks dope," I say to Phuti and Njabulo. The place is buzzing and the waitresses have started working. Taking orders from the people and dropping their drinks afterward - I guess those are the important guests because some of the people are going to the bar to get their drinks.

"If we nail this one, we are going

to win over so many hearts," Njabulo responds.

"So that one in jean is your roommate, huh?" Phuti asks. His eyes have been on her since we got here. "Why isn't she wearing a shorter nyana something like other girls."

"She prefers jeans."

"Look at that arse," Phuti says, staring.

"Really Phuti?" I turn to him.

"Really."

"How many times have I asked you to hook me up with her? I'll do it myself."

"I'd like to see you try," I

mumble.

"Watch and learn," he says and hoops towards Thuli. I have a grin on my face when I watch Thuli snap at him for disturbing her. Njabulo laughs behind me. When Phuti returns, he has a grin on his face. A game-on kind of a face.

"I am going with her."

"I'd like to see that too." I laugh at him. Thuli is my roommate and I know it will take a lot to crack her.

Njabulo doesn't allow me to help. He says after watching men drooling on me, he wants me to

himself. Jealous man. I am the boss's girl, sitting around with people I don't even know.

"Can I get you a cocktail?"

Njabulo asks when he notices the bottle of water I have hanging on since I got here hours ago.

"No," I quickly say. "No, we drank a lot last night."

"Right." He laughs. "I'm told someone couldn't even drive home."

"We had fun though."

"I must have been hell-of-party. You couldn't even answer my call in the morning."

I smile at him awkwardly.

"Hey man, don't you have some

cash on you?" Phuti asks. He takes a seat next to Njabulo.

"What do you need money for?"

"To tip her damn room mate. She pushed me away saying away that she is not going to stop collecting tips just to have a drink with me."

"Dude, I am not going to give you cash to take my waitress away from her job."

"She is a tough cookie, isn't she?" he has his eyes on her. "I like to crack tough cookies."

"Oh, my goodness Phuti," I roll my eyes at her.

"Why are you drinking water like a

fully pregnant woman? We don't want party poopers here."

Njabulo laughs, "Does she look pregnant to you? We still have a beautiful life to live before such obligations. Someone had too much alcohol last night."

I feel like vomiting at Njabulo's words. Exactly what I was worried about.

I wake up to a text that Thuli and Lebo got home safely.

"Forgot to text you last night. We got home safely. Thank you again."

I dozed off when Njabulo and I

got home. Phuti begged Njabulo to let him drop some of the waitresses so that he could get a chat with Thuli. They left just after ten after serving the food and when people were starting to get drunk to grab their own beers from the bar. Phuti never came back to the party and I am interested to know what happened when he dropped my flatmate home. The whatsapp text doesn't say anything.

Njabulo turns and faces the other side. He must be exhausted.

Other than I slept late, I don't feel exhausted at all since I

wasn't drinking. It is too early for me to start vomiting or feeling sick from the pregnancy, so I am perfectly fine.

Without waking Njabulo, I jump out of bed and grab a gown so that I could go watch television or something.

Coffee! I need coffee but crew me right now. I cannot even have a cup of coffee right now.

This is going to be the longest year of my life.

Why am I even worried? I have money. Staying in Mrs Masango's apartment leaves a lot in my pocket.

I take a minute to call my mother and Thabelo. My mother is enjoying being a grandmother but it is because it is her first. I am so scared to tell her. I don't want to hear the disappointment in her voice.

"You woke up early," Njabulo says while throwing himself on a couch next to me.

"Yeah."

"What is going on? You haven't been yourself since last night."

"We need to talk," I say. He quickly sits up and stares at me. I know - the line I used is scary. I am just so so scared. It is

either I tell him now or I let it work me up. I don't want to end up losing the baby to stress.

Thabelo was not planned but she has made me a happy woman.

Maybe this other baby will do the same. I just wished things were a little different.

"What's wrong?" he sounds worried. Trust a tiny sentence to disarm a roaring lion.

"I found out I am pregnant."

"What the fuck?" he asks while staring at me.

"I know. I know. It wasn't a plan. I was irresponsible. I have the money. You don't have to

worry about anything."

"Oh, wow," he sits up and stares up at me, disappointed. I had prepared a speech but I don't even know what I am saying.

"You have money; I don't have to worry about anything?"

"Yes. I know we didn't plan on this. You don't want a baby now. I don't want a baby now. I don't want it. But, I'll take responsibility. I should have been careful."

"I don't believe you, Maria. If you want to take responsibility for the baby...what does that make me? Don't you think that's

bullshit?"

"This is what I didn't want," I say while getting up so that I could leave.

"No sister, you are not going to drop a bomb on me and walk away when we are talking."

"I am pregnant. There is nothing more to say. You probably think...it is my fault."

"How is your fault when I was the one coming inside of you every night. I thought you were using a contraceptive."

"Means it didn't work."

"Fine. Fine. I am going to marry you...so I don't understand why

you sound so freaked out."

I sigh deeply, a tear ready to fall.

"That is what I was afraid of.

That you will be forced to marry

me just because I am pregnant.

I don't want my children to be

the reason why you decide to

marry me." I take more steps to

the kitchen.

"Am I ever going to get this

proposing shit right? I keep

messing the fuck up," Njabulo says

as if talking to himself.

"Oh no Njabulo, that is not a

proposal. That is you telling me

you want to marry me because

now I am pregnant."

"Will you shut up? You just told me you are pregnant. Are we not supposed to celebrate?" he says before laughing. I cry. "Why are you crying?"

"I am not ready for a baby. I am not ready for another baby Njabulo. I am not over Thabelo's pregnancy. I don't want to be pregnant."

"I am here. I am here," he says while closing the space between us.

I wish words were enough.
I am not ready for a baby.

EPISODE 57

NJABULO

"I am not ready for a baby. I am not ready for another baby Njabulo. I am not over Thabelo's pregnancy. I don't want to be pregnant," Maria's words rip my heart apart. I walk closer to her and so I could assure her that I will be by her side through it all. I wasn't there before and I am not going to miss any moment now.

"I am here. I am here," I mumble while staring in her eyes. She doesn't seem to buy my words but I stare at her so that she could get assurance from my eyes - if possible. Isn't that they say

one can tell how truthful a person can be from their eyes? Falling in love made me believe in such bull-
ish.

"Njabulo..."

"Listen to me. I am going to be there for you, day-in-day-out," I say. I mean it. "We are in this together."

She relaxes just a bit. I honestly don't understand the tears that are streaming down her cheeks.

They only make me wonder if she doesn't believe the words I tell her about wanting to spend the rest of my life with her? Does this woman even know that I

have always been trying to propose to her ever since I was certain about my love for her? It has been a while, even before Thabelo was born that I wanted to wife her arse. Isn't it obvious that I am crazy about her? Plans are plans but it doesn't mean it is the end of the world if they don't go accordingly. I know we had planned things differently and babies were not part of the plan.

Shit!

Did I just make three children in less than three years? Isn't that fucking crazy? okay, now

that I put it that way, she is not the only one freaking out.

But, what is a baby? A small human being that looks like you, right?

"You don't have to stress. We will be perfectly fine. The joint is making money now and it is sustainable. My job pays my bills and the joint gives us enough to do whatever the fuck we want in our lives. We will be fine."

She sighs deeply.

I am tempted to touch about the marriage but maybe I need help in this regard. Maybe - I need to get a different approach

to tackle this one.

"Can I take you out for breakfast?" I ask and she blushes. Trust food to solve problems. "Go get ready and I'll take you out for a Kota."

"You know that place is far."

"I don't mind. Now, go get ready before I change my mind," I say with a smile and she goes to the bedroom to get ready.

Phew!!!

Life changes now.

I throw myself back on the couch and sigh deeply. The man has got to make a plan now.

Three children? Three?

No more sleeping.

What did I think? I had my balls buried in Maria every chance I got. What did I expect?

I hurry to the bedroom to get ready as well. This isn't a time to panic or else I'll have Maria panic some more. I don't want that. I don't want her stressed about anything. The last I want is her thinking about her past pregnancy. That's why I'll have to do everything right so that I can have her stay here with me - if possible.

Shit! This baby changes everything. Every damn thing.

When I get into the bathroom, Maria almost makes me to drop that little white towel for a shag but her face changes my mind. She has lines on her forehead as if thinking hard while looking at herself on the mirror.

Is she that worried?

"Babe, is everything alright?" I ask while getting behind her and wrap my hands around her waist.

"Thabelo is very young."

"I know, babe. I know. But she is still our little baby. We will do our best to make sure that the new baby doesn't replace her."

I am grown up man now. I make

sense.

"What will my mother think? She will be so disappointed."

I snort at her.

"Your mother will be the happiest. Believe me."

She smiles, weakly. I turn her so that she can turn to face me.

"If it isn't that I want to feed you, I would be asking you to bend for me. I don't want you to get too hungry so I advise that you go get dressed. I'll be done in less than ten minutes."

"Fine," she says with a sigh and slide out of the room.

Sex neh?

Sitting in the car at Bokburg Kota Joe, Maria has hardly touched her food. It is so unlike her since she is the one who always drag me here. We opt for dining in the car so that can talk in private. Since the waitress placed her tray by the window, she hasn't touched some of it. But I want her to talk to me about her worries and everything that bothers her.

"Are you not hungry?" I am almost done with my food.

"Lost my appetite," she mumbles.

"You know that I love you,

right?" I assure her.

"Yeah!" She whispers.

"Ouch Maria! You don't sound confident and that hurts me."

"I know you love me Njabulo."

"Then what are your concerns?"

"Everything in my life is just upside down. Nothing is going the way I had wished for it to go," she says, bruising my manly ego.

Does she regret being with me? I mean, I am that motherfucker that messed with her perfect little life. Maybe all she needed was a church boy who would have waited for them to get married before even thinking of making

babies? Maybe she wanted her virginity taken at the honeymoon. But, here she is, stuck with a man like me who did nothing but changed her perfect life for the worst.

"Okay...How did you wish for your life to be?"

"Just different from this. My career. Just everything."

"I see." What is the man supposed to say. "I know you don't want to mention that you saw yourself married with a family at this point at baby number two. But you know very well that I have been wanting to

marry you way before we even made Thabelo. I wanted to propose but had to wait for you to be ready. You went away...I thought you were dead...and...I made a mistake. But that doesn't mean that I stopped loving you. I loved you when you were away for a year. I loved you. I made stupid decisions which I thought were a remedy to my pain then. I messed up. But I never stopped loving you. Come on, Maria."

She stares blankly into the space.

"Remember the day Phuti found us in the office when we were making out, I told you I want to

marry you. I am just not finding the right words to put it but don't tell me you don't see how much I love you."

She doesn't say anything.

"I am Njabulo Buthelezi. No one will force me to do something I don't want. If I don't want to be with you for the rest of my life, I would have told you. I own up to my shit because no one ever forces me into anything. Believe me, if I didn't see a future with you, I would have been straight up with you. You would have known that I am passing time with you and my connection with

you means nothing to me. I hope you know that about me."

She swallows hard.

"I know."

"Then tell me what your problem is. Where do you get thoughts that I want to marry you because you are pregnant with my second child?"

"Nothing."

"I want to do right by you. When you returned with Thabelo, I spoke to your mother but we couldn't go ahead with the whole process because she told me you needed time to heal." I don't touch the bull-ish I gave her

about the paternity of my daughter. I have apologised for that and I don't want to trek on that road again.

"I know..." she mumbles.

"No, you don't know nothing. Do you know how you have turned my world around? You, Maria, came into my life and scared the shit out of me. Dude, I never thought I would kneel and ask God for guidance but here I am. I read a bible. I think logical things. I am just not perfect but I try so hard to be the man I feel like you deserve."

"I don't want you to change for

me."

"Maybe you haven't felt love like I have. Maybe you don't love me the same way I love you. Of course, it isn't your job to love me. It is my job. I want to be perfect. Not perfect for the world. I don't give an F about what the world needs but I want to be perfect for you."

"Njabulo."

"Shut up and listen to me." I say. If I don't say my ish today, I won't say them anymore. "I don't have a ring with me. But let me say my shit. I am going to ask once and whatever answer you

give me I'll take like a man. I am going to ask once."

She stares at me.

"Do you love me?"

"Njabulo..."

"Do you love me, Maria?"

"Of course you know I love you. I love you."

"Do you see your future with me?"

"Of course," she frowns at me like I have lost it.

"Do you want to spend the rest of your life with me?"

"I do."

"Then we are going to get married so that we make that

possible because I feel the same way about you."

Maria laughs out loud and say, "Wow."

"Wow, what?" I ask with a shrug. "I love you, I see a future with you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you and you feel the same...so, yes, we are going to get married."

She shakes her head continuously then finally smiles at me and say, "Now, ask me nicely."

"Maria, will you marry me?" I ask in a heartbeat. Trust a girl to humble a man.

She gives me a wide smile and

says, "Of course, I'll marry you."
There!

What was so difficult?

I reach out to her side and give her a long kiss. The smell of Archar and vinegar from the chips fill the car but I don't care. She finally said YES!

Mr R, Phuti, Marcus and I are heading to the conference room for a meeting. My mind is all over the place. Since Maria said yes to my marriage proposal I have been planning what to do next. First, we are going to visit my home in KZN just to make a turn

so that I can chat to my family members. I have to start home. I haven't been doing things correctly and it is time to correct them. Apart for the family members she met at my cousin's graduation party, she hasn't met the rest.

I am man now.

A man of three children.

"You are miles away man," Marcus says as we take our seats around the table.

"Eish...grown up stuff," I say, inviting the other guys to laugh at him. He is the youngest and boy is innocent to know shit about

life.

"You had to bring that up," he responds.

"But he is right. You seem to be stressed. Should we excuse you?"

"I am getting married," I announce. The room goes silent for so long until I start darting my eyes between the guys. "What the hell? Am I not supposed to get married?" The room roars into laughter before they all get on their feet to give me handshakes and tap my shoulder. "No, I am not happy with your reaction."

"What?" Mr R says while

laughing. "It came as a shock but we are proud of you, man."

"No... why did you all get silent?"

I ask before there is a knock on the door.

This is not over.

Two hours later, we are done with the meeting. I am given a task to run to another meeting in Sandton and I am not very happy about it. If it wasn't that Phuti begged me so that he can rush to his apartment to sort some issues with his landlord who kicked him out without a warning - for a party he hosted last night - I wouldn't have agreed to attend

the meeting on his behalf. I had to give him my house key so he could crash in my house tonight. I don't know how many times we have told him to stop parting like a high schooler.

My meeting is done after 18h00. What a shitty meeting. That guy just wanted to waste my time for nothing. I don't know how Phuti does this - his patience is more than enough. If he wasn't a new client, I would have upped and left him talking to himself. New clients are sensitive. The minute I jump into my car I am welcomed by Maria's texts - one

after another.

"Are you alright?"

"What is going on? Is everything alright?"

"Gundo told me I mustn't allow you to be alone. You seem stressed today. What is going on?"

WTF? I am fine and was not stressed. But of course, I am not going to chase Maria away if she wants to spend the evening with me

The minute she jumps into the car, I assure her that Gundo might have over exaggerated my stress to her. She relaxes when she sees that I am in one piece.

"We have a guest tonight. Phuti. But he is going to leave tomorrow after fixing some issues with his landlord."

"Oh, he picked Thuli earlier."

"Oh, are they an item now?"

"She doesn't say."

"I hope he is not bringing her to my house because I am going to kill him," I say. We pass by Nandos' to grab supper. It is already late for us to cook when we get home.

I suggested the trip to KZN to Maria and she agrees to drive with me when we knock off on Friday. I don't know, but I think

I am super excited about this.

"Whose car is that?" Maria asks when I turn to our driveway.

"I am going to kill this man," I say as I park behind Phuti and the other car which I don't recognise. How can one be so fucking irresponsible like this? How do you call guests in someone else's house?

"Njabulo...come on...he is being himself," Maria says as she walks beside me.

"A party in my house?" I ask.

Maria wants to respond but when she hears the noise from where we are standing, she shakes her

head.

I push the door only to be thrown with rose petals.

"What the..."

"Supriseeee!!!" The guests, who happened to be ours, yell on our faces.

"You guys?" Maria calls out while laughing.

"You didn't know?" I ask her and she shakes her head. She is as stunned as me.

I shake my head while staring at Phuti who walks to me to take the Nandos takeaway in my hands.

"You were ready to kill me,

weren't you?" He asks with a laugh.

"I was going to kill you."

"Come...come Maria...we need you out of those slippers," Thandeka calls out and take Maria's hand before they disappear together. So, Phuti took my house keys so they could get a dinner setup in my house. These friends of mine. How sweet!

"Well... my wife happened to tell me just minutes after you left Boksburg," Gundo says. That explains the reaction they gave me today. I had thought maybe they thought I wasn't a sort of

man that deserves to be married. Mr R passes a glass of whiskey and laughs at how shocked I am. They did a little set up at the garden with fairy lights everywhere. I think this is how Maria and I are going to spend our birthdays. My yard is more beautiful than I thought.

When my girl walks back to where I am standing with the guys, she is wearing a red dress. I smirk at her because she knows how much I like her in red. It blends with her skin.

"Thandeka got me this," she says before dropping a kiss on my lips.

"It is perfect."

"Everyone, lets take our seats,"

Phuti calls out happily.

In just a few minutes, we are all on our seats. Mr & Mrs R, Phuti and Thuli, Marcus and his girlfriend, Zizipho and my nephew, two of Maria's colleagues and four of my cousins. The waiters drop starters on our tables as everyone joked about how they waited for my proposal. Zizipho is trying her best to be on her best behaviour, but maybe we need to talk. The last time we did, I was a little harsh.

"I don't a see a ring sis Maria.

How did my cousin propose?" one of my cousins asks. I confided in him about failing to propose the last time I did. I am on my feet telling him to shut his mouth because that question sounded like a mockery and I am certain that he is mocking me.

"Well...so...we were having bunny chows at Kota Joe in Bokburg....and...." Maria doesn't get to finish the sentence before I am the joke of the night.

"You just had to do that...didn't you?"

"Sorry sis Maria. You were in Kota Joe and then what?" My other

cousin asks.

"So we were at Kota Joe and...."

She says and I give her an eye.

If she tells them that I

ambushed her with questions...I

am going to walk out of this

table.

"I don't know why you guys are

laughing at your cousin. I think

Kota Joe is perfect. It is

romantic and different."

"Thank you Mrs R," I nod at her.

"We were at Kota Joe and he

poured his heart to me. I'll tell

you all about it on our wedding

day," Maria says with a warmest

smile ever. The smile I fell in love

with. Dammit, she is very beautiful.

"Ohhh...there is a wedding??? A wedding, wedding...like alilili kind-of a wedding?" Phuti asks - shocked - and the table is over joyed like they have heard the greatest news ever.

Haibo! How do these guys take me???

EPISODE 58

MARIA

"I would like to make a toast," Phuti gets on his feet. This is after main course is served and

everybody has a chance to laugh at my man. I ruined the little make-up I had on. I laughed tears when jokes came flying from all around the table. Phuti gets on his feet. Thuli has her back rested on the chair like she is ready to hear what will come out of his mouth. Like, she is going to judge him from this little speech he is about to make.

"I don't know how you did it...but you got a winner for a wife my friend," Phuti says. I think Phuti likes me for his friend or he is just fascinated by our relationship. Njabulo lifts his finger to him. "I

mean...when I first met you, I never thought you were this man that you have been in the past three years. It can only be her - who turned you around. The first day I was introduced to you, I knew I could hang around with you because your life was as fucked up as mine. But look at you..."

"Hey...are you intending to change her mind?" Njabulo asks.

"Believe me...you give her too good, she is not going anywhere." Njabulo throws him with a napkin while Thuli rolls her eyes - he lost a point if not two. "But on a

serious note Mr Buthelezi, I wish you the best. Congratulation to you and your wife to be." Phuti raises his beer bottle and everyone does the same.

"I won't say much but if there is one person in this room who knows how much of a loving man you are...is me," Mr R says. They come a long way.

"Why are you being too sweet?" Njabulo asks his friend before we laugh at them. They are great friends and nothing will come between them. From varsity days to now.

One by one, everyone had

something to say to congratulate us. Even Zizipho had something to say. It still shocks me that our friends organised the dinner in just two days, on a Monday. But only Phuti can drink as much on a Monday while everyone tried to keep it to just one glass of champagne.

"Where did you get these people?" I ask Mrs R as we take a turn to the kitchen. A group of people is cleaning the place up and turning the kitchen back to what it is.

"I know people," she giggles. "So, how are you? The pregnancy and all?" I am still in shock though.

This whole falling pregnant when I didn't plan is kind-of messing with my head but Njabulo's assurance means everything.

Looking back, it could have been the week I took antibiotics and medication while on birth control.

That is the only thing that makes sense because I honestly didn't want to fall pregnant.

"I am fine. Njabulo told me not to worry myself. At first I was scared that he might feel trapped but he doesn't feel any of that."

"I told that he has your back."

"He does."

I pick a bottle of juice from the fridge and watch our guests. Njabulo's cousins are the loudest. Jeez, they have turned the place upside down but it is so fun to watch him with them. I also noticed him with his sister who disappeared earlier. I wonder if she has left for Mpumalanga or if she is still around. I am yet to sit down with her.

Thuli walks to where I am standing.

"So, you just couldn't hint me about the surprise bash?" I ask as she stands beside me.

Thandeka winks at me and leave.

"What's the fun in that. Phuti begged me to mention anything."

"So, you and Phuti?"

"What about us? Nothing is going on. He annoys the hell out me hey," she whispers the last part while scanning the room for him.

"Is he always jumpy like that?"

"Always."

"Then I don't want him near me. I don't. He is creepy and all he does is drink."

"I know."

"Anyway, I take it you won't be coming home tonight so maybe we could talk."

"Yeah?"

"I need to leave before Thursday. I am not getting any job. The money I made on Saturday will help me relocate. But thank you so much for having me in your space. You survived my awkwardness," she laughs but her smile doesn't reach her eyes.

"But please invite me to the wedding, I'll come."

"Would you like to stay for another month? Maybe something will show up," I say.

"Yes please." She doesn't even think about it. "I'll pay double rent next month."

"Just focus on getting a job and

we will sort out rent afterwards," I say and she is widely smiling like I helped her escape something. I don't mention that she can stay for as long as she wants. I wouldn't want her to be comfortable.

"Thank you. I appreciate. You have no idea," she says. "Thank you."

"Looks like someone is looking for you," I giggle when I notice Phuti walking towards the kitchen.

"Here you are," he says - his eyes on Thuli.

"I told you to stop following me. You freak me out, dude," Thuli

says and marches out of the room.

"She hates me, huh?" He asks and I shrug.

"I told you she isn't as easy as all these girls you tag along to everywhere."

"I get that. The more she wants to play hard to get, the more she turns me on."

"Sies Phuti."

"What is wrong with the little truth." He stares at Thuli wandering around the living room.

"Mr Buthelezi is looking for you."

When the last person leaves, Njabulo locks the door while I watch from the living room. Phuti had lied to Njabulo about his eviction - he just needed the key to the house for the dinner preparations. Smart one. The house is back to normal. The caterers made sure. I wasn't going to wash those dishes the whole night so I am glad they took away everything with them before they left.

"Ready for bed?" Njabulo asks while taking my hand.

"Oh, please," I mumble as I follow him to his - our - bedroom.

Zizipho's door is slightly open so I tell Njabulo to go ahead as I would like to have a chat with his sister. He shuts the bedroom door while I knock on Zizipho's door.

"Come in," she says. I peek in before walking into the room. The boy is sleeping soundly.

"Hey, do you have a minute?" I ask.

"How can I help?"

"Can we be sisters? For Njabulo's sake?" I ask. We cannot both hide the fact that there is a bad vibe between us even though we try to cover it up. Tonight - it was too evident.

"Of course," she says.

"I am going to KZN with your brother this coming weekend, I cannot wait to meet everyone," I say. A girl can just try to be peaceful. I don't have a problem with her but she has one with me. As long as I don't stoop to her level, thank you very much.

"Sleep well. If I leave for work before you wake up, I'll see you around."

She nods at me from where she standing. I turn back to the door.

"Maria," she says before I could walk out of the room.

"He is happy. You make him

happy," she says.

"He makes me happy too."

"Take care of him," she says and I nod - even though I know that he is the one that takes the cup in that activity.

"I will." A sweet smile grace my face. She doesn't have to say much. This is enough. "Good night."

When I get into the bedroom, Njabulo is standing by the window. When he notices me, he turns to face me but turns his hands to hide something.

"What is that?" I ask. His face is stiff, so whatever he has in his

hand mustn't be anything I should see. He stares at me before he brings his hands and say, "The old ring."

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't want you to see it."

"Why not?"

"My memory attached to it has you gone. I don't want to see it and think of that time. This is the first time I am taking it out since we were back together. I want to sell it and get something more beautiful. I should have done it a while ago."

"I am fine without a ring Njabulo."

Your sweet words are enough," I say while walking towards him. I rest my arms on his shoulder and kiss him. "I don't need a ring."

"But I cannot keep it anymore."

"I love you," I say instead. We don't have to think about the past now when we can just celebrate our engagement.

My hands are shaking as I place my cup of tea on the table so that I could call my mother. I had a long day at work today but I still agreed for Njabulo to pick me up from work. I can't avoid this call. Yesterday Njabulo asked

me to go to KZN with him but I cannot go there without my mother knowing. Imagine if anything happens to me there? And, I decided to tell her the truth about the pregnancy. She knows that Njabulo asked to marry me but I didn't tell her about the baby. I don't even know what I am going to say to her. She is going to be disappointed in me.

"Maria, how are you?" Mom says when she answers the call I wished she had missed. "Thabelo come and talk to your mother."

"What is she doing?"

"Throwing my oranges around," she responds and I hear Thabelo yelling on the background. She is probably fighting her grandmother for the oranges. She calms when I spoke to her like a big girl. My baby girl. When Njabulo walks into the kitchen, I put the phone on speaker so he could hear Thabelo bubbling. She is so sure that she is making so much sense. I put my finger for Njabulo not to say anything - I don't want my mother to know that I am here at this time of the night. I just don't want her not to judge me.

"Mma, I called because I wanted to tell you something," I say. Njabulo walks out of the room, leaving me to deal with the harder part alone.

"Is everything alright?" She asks. I am certain she has let Thabelo back to her oranges.

"Yes. Njabulo is taking me to KZN to meet his family. Also, he wants to organise his family to come speak to you."

"Okay. That is good."

"But...there is something else."

"What?" She asks before she yells on the phone for Thabelo to leave the water; then her

granddaughter starts crying.
Chaos. I wait, panicking as she
tries to control the situation.

"Sorry, this girl has become a
handful when she wants. What
were you saying?"

"I am pregnant," I say and close
my eyes. Silence! Silence! - it even
sounds like Thabelo got the memo
because she is also quiet and I
cannot tell my mother's mood
right at this second.

Oh, my God.

"Oh...well...isn't that good news?"
She finally says but her voice is
not as joyful.

"Are you dissapointed in me?" I

ask because it matter how she feels.

"Inwi Maria...you are an adult. Do I know what you are busy with when you are there in Joburg?"

She asks.

"Mma..."

"It is a good thing that boy is doing the right thing." It is weird when she calls Njabulo that - a boy.

"Yes Ma," I respond and we are disturbed by Thabelo who has my mother running after her.

Minutes later she asks to be excused. Only when I place the phone down on the table, does

Njabulo walk into the room.

"What did she say?"

"I am adult and she doesn't know what I am busy with when I am here in Joburg," I say blankly before Njabulo laughs.

"Good she doesn't know that your fantasy is making love in the office." I freeze at his words. My mom would drop dead if she finds out. "But I know she is glad, I know. She won't tell you now."

Just when I was getting too excited for the trip, Njabulo walks home and tells me we need to postpone the trip to the following

week. The reason almost make me choke: his trip was not approved. He is still on restriction due to his attempted murder case. He is tense about it and doesn't want to discuss it much.

"Babe, next week isn't far," I assure him. We have nothing to stress about. This is not a vacation where we would be losing money.

"Of course," he responds while taking off his suit. He had a meeting with his lawyer earlier. I cannot wait for this whole thing to be behind him. My past keeps creeping back into our lives.

"I am going to make dumpling and beef stew," I call out when I leave the bedroom for the kitchen. He looked like he needs sometime to breath.

As I walk around the kitchen, my mind drifts to Luzuko. I don't ask about the case so that his name mustn't come up but I need to let everything go. I shake off the feeling and put the beef on the stove before kneading the dough for the dumplings. Minutes later, when everything is on the stove, Njabulo walks to the kitchen and grabs a chair.

"Should I get you a glass of

wine?" I ask.

"Do we even have a bottle?" He asks as he makes the way to the drink cabinet. He returns with a bottle of JC le Roux - I take it non-alcoholic because he has two glasses on the table.

"Are we celebrating anything?"

"Life?" He asks while filling two glasses.

"Perfect."

He helps me around the kitchen but he hasn't relaxed. He is still offish and still stiff. I am tempted to ask what the lawyer said earlier but maybe that can wait until we are dining.

"So, after the wedding, is your mother going to allow Thabelo to move in with us? Maybe we can get a helper," Njabulo says while standing next to me. He is done with his chopping task.

The new baby and the wedding are changing everything.

"I'll discuss with my mom so that she doesn't feel like I don't appreciate her assistance. But I would love to have my family in one house. She will understand."

"I cannot wait," he says and his lips land on mine. The kiss is long and sweet and lovely, making me feel like a crazy horny pregnant

woman. Njabulo groans in my mouth but pulls away before we both get heated. "I love you so much."

"I love you too," I mumble back. "Are you going to tell me what is happening?"

"My meeting with my lawyer," he says. I am still in his arms. "He told me Luzuko wants to drop the charges but on one condition." I freeze but Njabulo tightly holds me.

"What condition?" I whisper.

"That he have a word with you," he says while staring in my eyes.

"What?"

"I don't want you to go see him. He doesn't have to drop the charges. My lawyer is doing everything to try to make everything disappear but whenever we get a date for the court hearing the fucker gets sick or something...and I am starting to think that he is doing this intentional to drag everything forever and ever." He makes me stare at him since I was starting to drop my eyes to the floor.

"Look at me. He is never ever going to come between us. Never. They have him locked away and when he is out, he is not going to

try to do anything stupid, I'll make sure of that."

"I'll see him. I'll go and have a word with him."

"No...no....that is not happening."

"I want him to drop the charges."

"He is sick in the head." Njabulo slightly shakes me. "I am not going to go to jail...he knows that...that's why they keep pulling his stunts for the postponement of the ..."

"I'll go and see him."

"You are not going anywhere. You are not going to see him."

"Njabulo...please. I want to do

this for us," I beg while staring at him. I don't want Luzuko to have a hold on Njabulo's life like this. I cannot just sit and watch. "I'll go with you. If not; then you are not going anywhere."

EPISODE 59

NJABULO

I hardly watch television but I know there is that series: How to get away with murder! Did I get the name right? I haven't watched it but does it teach one how to commit murder and get away with it? If the answer is

yes, then I regret not watching it. I would have gotten a better plan to finish him off when I had that chance and get away with it.

Dammit!

Maria has been tossing and turning the whole day since she got to bed. I know it has everything to do with what I told her about that bastard Luzuko. How do I keep her away from the nightmares than to shake her away from tossing and turning in the middle of the night? I didn't sleep a flipping wink, ready to fight the demons

threatening her.

It is my fault. I should have
manned up enough to hide it from
her.

Her alarm goes off before I could
even think of switching her phone
off. She didn't sleep much and I
should have switched the phone
off so that she oversleeps and
thereafter chooses to stay home.
She wiggles out of my embrace
and reach for the phone on the
side table.

Five o'clock! - her alarm always
goes off at five o'clock.

"Are you awake?" She asks when
she turns to face me. Of course,

I have been up the whole night. Her smile doesn't show that she was tormented. Only I know the truth.

"How did you sleep?" I ask.

"Fine. I think I slept well," she says. It is either she is pulling a brave face or she really doesn't remember. She jumps out of bed, leaving me longing for her touch. We would have been leaving for KZN this evening after work but, of course, change of plans.

I drag my feet out of bed so I could get ready for work. I could choose to sleep but I have to drop Maria off at work. I can

just go to work until lunch time
when we go see the bastard.

While making the bed, I try to
put up what to wear today.

A jean and a casual shirt.

No meetings today - I am just
going to lock myself with a pot of
coffee until I can leave.

An hour and a half later, we are
driving out of the house to
Masango Logistics. Maria hasn't
spoken. We are playing more radio
than having a chat.

"Babe, you don't have to see him."

"I want to."

"I don't want you to get
stressed."

"I am not stressed. I just want to move on from this whole situation."

"He can upset you...and..."

"I know that but let me do this."

"Fine."

"Do you know where he is?" She asks. I hardly speak about Luzuko so she doesn't know where the hell he is.

"Yeah, somewhere here in Joburg."

She drops a kiss on my tight lips before jumping out of the car.

Since I got to the office, I haven't logged on my laptop or open a file. My mind is lingering on

what might be going on in Maria's head. If there was anything that bothers me is Maria stressing over Luzuko and what he did to her.

My desire - to move from this ordeal. I want to move on. But how do we do so when he keeps crawling into our lives?

A knock interrupts me. Phuti walks in with a file in his hands. How he looks fresh right at this minute is a mystery. I saw his Instagram posts somewhere last night.

"Do you have a minute?" He asks with one hand in his pocket and

the other holding an opened file.

"How do you do it?" I ask.

"How do I do what?"

"Party and drink all night and still look that fresh?" I ask. I expected him to be crawling into my room.

"I have my days," he responds with a smile. "You look like hell."

"I didn't sleep much."

"Ain't you supposed to be driving to KZN?"

"Not anymore?"

"Is everything alright?" He asks.

"Luzuko wants to see Maria," I say and he closes the file and stares at me. "He wants to drop

the charges but wants to talk to Maria first." Phuti knows the Luzuko story - he and Gundo had to do the run arounds for me.

"What are you going to do?"

"I am taking her there this afternoon." I sigh deeply. I still think it is not a great idea. "I hate this."

"Maybe it isn't a big deal." He shrugs. "Maybe the dude wants to kill himself and wants to apologise first."

I cannot help but laugh at Phuti's theory. How I wish it to be true. After I solve Phuti's questions regarding a client, he

leaves me alone to continue stressing.

I have been scrolling my phone the entire time, trying to check what could have invited the dude back into our lives. Both Maria and I are no longer active on social media. Our close friends, who are always in our lives, know not to share our pictures anywhere on social media.

Oh, fuck!

I don't know how much Maria has let Thuli into her private life. Did she mention anything to her? Did Maria tell her not to mention her whereabouts?

Without wasting time, I call Thuli - her number is still on my phone from the time I was paying her for the waitressing job. I could only breathe when she mentions that she is not on social media. When I interrogate her about it, I ended up believing her.

What do you want Luzuko??

Maria walks beside me as we head down the corridor to where the visiting room is at. This place is creepy and I don't think is a right place to keep people with mental illnesses. It could worsen their state. I don't care if it

treated as jail or whatever recovery centre - I don't think things are done right here. The security guard opens the door for us and we walk into a white room with just one table and two chairs. Luzuko lifts his head to welcome us with a wide smile.

"Three is a crowd," he says as I stand beside Maria.

"Three is a crowd for shit. I am going to stand here until you are done saying whatever important nonsense you want to say."

He stares at me like we are on the staring competition. I don't care about my charges been

dropped. Attempting to kill him was not a mistake. It was a decision I took and I'll pay hundred folds for it if need be - I don't mind.

"We can allow your puppy to stay," he says. Maria squeeze my hand tightly before I could spit some fire on his face.

We come in one fucking peace!

"How are you doing Luzuko?"

Maria asks. She still hasn't taken a seat.

"I miss you so much Maria," he responds. I laugh - oh, sorry... I just couldn't help myself. He misses her - that's nonsense.

"It has been a while," she responds. "Can I take a seat?" "Please," he shows her the chair. He doesn't look sick at all. There isn't even a hint. I let Maria settle down while I move to the door where the security guy stands - watching and uninterested. He nods at me when I stand next to him.

"How is he doing?" I ask, pointing to Luzuko with my head.

"He is fine, according to me. But you know how these things are. The doctors know better."

"Does he have access to a computer or any other devices?"

"Whenever his lawyer comes by which is often."

I see. I stare at him while he smiles at my woman - I feel sick.

"How is the baby? What did you name her? I wish you named her after me? Oh, she is a girl. I don't know a girl by the name Luzuko," he says and laughs loudly, alone.

"Her name is Thabelo."

"What does it mean?"

"Prayer."

"Oh...that is the best name ever."

"What do you want from her?" I ask from where I am standing.

We are not here to toast to life.
We can just go straight to the
point.

"Remind me why you love that
moron?" He asks. "Why do you love
him?"

"Because..."

"Because God gave him to me,"
Maria says quickly before I could
finish my response which would
anger him. I don't have any
patience left in me.

"Don't you believe God wanted me
with you? He asks politely.

"No Luzuko, I would have felt it
in my heart. I might be wrong
but it felt right to be with him,"

she says. Okay, I feel good about this. He stares at her blankly without a word. "How have you been? Tell me all about it?"

"I have been great. I am forced to be fine because they shove them pills down my throat even when I don't want," he says and laughs.

"That is good. They are helping."

"I am no longer sick, you must know. I am not sick anymore.

They are just keeping me here until they are sure...and because I don't want to go to the real jail," he says and laughs. I don't know how the security guy is taking

this. The man is confessing to act so that they keep him safe here. But, what am I saying, he is manipulative.

"Are you planning to kill yourself?" I ask.

"What? No? Why would I take my precious life?" he asks with his hands clenching his chest.

"What a disappointment," I say. Maria stares at me with begging eyes. Okay, I'll shut up now but he is waisting my time with the formalities.

"I was told you wanted to have a word with me," Maria says. He takes his hands in his. It takes

everything in me not to jump to the table to snatch the hands off.

"Yes. I wanted to apologise for the pain that I inflicted you. I am sorry," he starts, "Sometimes I regret ever hurting you so much because I loved you so much with all my heart. It was never easy to watch you love another man."

Shut up Njabulo, I remind myself. "Tell me he makes you happy and he loves you," he asks. This is quite weird to watch.

"He makes me so happy...and he does love me. I feel it everyday."

"Does he hurt you?"

"Not at all. He doesn't. He has never hurt me."

"Even when he doubted the paternity of the baby?"

Dammit!

"He didn't hurt me. I understood where he was coming from. He didn't hurt me."

I still hate myself for that act.

"Does he take care of you?"

"He does."

What fuckery is this? A love interview? I want to disturb them but I should just relax and have this guy get done with his bull-ish.

"How do you know he loves you?"

He asks. I roll my eyes.

"We are getting married and God has blessed us with another baby. God wouldn't have blessed us if it wasn't meant to be, don't you think?" He flinches and slightly shakes his head at the revelation. He stares at her like he was torn apart. He doesn't say anything for so long that I am tempted to say that the conversation is over.

"I am going to drop the charges. I thought after the last ordeal and all, you would have moved on without him. But I was wrong.

You love him despite everything.
And...just when I thought that
wasn't enough, here you are
facing the man who took your life
away...to save him." He shrugs.

"He won. He did."

"It wasn't a competition Luzuko.
But I forgave you the day you let
me and my daughter walk into
that hospital to get help. I
forgave you."

"That is what I wanted to hear.
That you forgave me."

Now, you can kill yourself.

"Invite God back into your life.
You know he listen Luzuko; He is
going to give the peace you need.

Remember?"

"Of course!"

"That wasn't bad, was it?" Maria asks as we walk into a restaurant. She isn't going back to work so we have time to just sit and relax. I feel like a stiff drink.

"I was ready to jump on his face."

"I am happy we spoke. His intention weren't bad but wrong. We spoke when he released me. But this last conversation was just a nail on the head."

"Right."

"Did you notice something?"

"What?" I ask. My mind was all over the room during that meeting.

"That he didn't know about the proposal? With the party and the chats and the phone calls about it, he would have picked it up if he was still snooping into our lives. He wasn't aware."

"Right!" I mumble. He did seem like someone who was clueless.

Maybe my refusal for my trip was a coincidence. He wanted to have a word with Maria and nothing else. His lawyer is his eyes and ears and I bet the laptop is used for payments and all other things.

I would like to think that.

For the first time since last night, do I breathe.

"Table for two?" The waiter asks.

"Please!"

Maria refused to come to the Car Wash with me. She is aware that if we want, we can turn a normal car wash chillas into a party. She needs to rest and I agree. I am chilling with the guys and of course Phuti, the organisers of all parties, has turned the place upside down. He came with the girl he brought the last time we

had a chillas.

It has been two weeks since our chat with Luzuko. Since then, I feel a little light. Maria hasn't been having nightmares. I can easily say, she is at peace. We went to KZN last weekend. I am a proud man - my family welcomed my wife-to-be with warm hearts. When we mention the marriage, they were totally delighted. My granny raised Zizipho and I but my extended family is as united. "What happened to Thuli?" I ask Phuti as he drops on the seat next to me. The girl he brought is smoking at the corner.

"She told me to fuck off."

"Tough cookie," I respond. He thought Maria was just joking when she mentioned it.

"Life is too short to let a minute slide away," he says.

"I agree."

"Looks like you have a visitor," Phuti says, pointing at Lawrence. He is looking around the place, looking lost. I get on my feet and stride to where he is.

"Want to have your car washed?" I ask as I get to where he is standing.

"That queue? No, thank you."

"My treat. We can hang around,"

I convince him.

"Next time. Now, I came here to drop this," he says. "It was delivered yesterday and I only got to notice it today after reading the email. Did you get my email this morning?"

"Dude, from Friday nights until Sunday afternoon, I am not so productive. I don't check my email," I confess. I only burry myself on my laptop when I am chasing deadlines. I don't have any deadline this coming week.

"He dropped the charges,"

Lawrence says. I shake my head because I don't think I heard

correctly. "I know, shocking. But his lawyer sent me an email. He dropped the charges against you. And this was delivered to my office." He passes a small white envelope.

"He is sending me love letters now?" I chuckle while getting the letter from him. "What does it say?"

"I didn't open it," he says.

"Let's see," I say while opening the letter. I pick a R100 note and a white written note. Just a few sentences jotted on the paper. I show Lawrence who shakes his head and grin. "I am

out of here. I'll keep in touch."

"Thank you man. For everything."

"I was doing my job man."

"I can confidently recommend you,"

I call out as he walks to his car.

A R100 note?? This bastard! I laugh as I read the note.

"Congrats! She loves you. You can keep her. Ohh, and here is some money; get a life, you moron. You need to learn to smile a little more."

Bastard!

EPISODE 60

MARIA

4 MONTHS LATER

Life has automatically changed since the Buthelezi knocked on my mother's door and asked for my hand in marriage. A month after the negotiating, I was delighted when they showed up to finish the lobola they promised my mother. My family also made him pay for eating from cookie before paying for the bride's price - as if I had just laid on the bed and let him give me babies. It really was the best time of my life when the Buthelezis came to Venda and over crowded our small village. It was the first time we had Zulus

in our street and it was so funny to watch. The language barrier was the funniest during the celebration. We had three interpreters on the day. One was for my language, the other was for the Buthelezis and the other one was in English for all our other friends and colleagues. It was just crazy and fun. Before the Buthelezi left, my mother made sure to tell them that she doesn't recognise any other wedding than the one done in church. So, what she means is that they wasted their time by bringing a bus to Venda. Njabulo

agreed. He adores my mother so much. First, for welcoming him into my family when I wasn't ready to let him back into my life after the kidnapping incident. Secondly because she is my mother. Thirdly, she took care of our daughter since I returned home with her. She jumped into my shoes so much that I even fell pregnant with a second born - that is how Njabulo explains it. So, when my mother announced that there isn't a wedding until I am blessed by a Pastor, in front of the witnesses, and in church - Njabulo told her that he will make

it happen and will exceed her expectation.

With my pregnancy - which Njabulo is over sensitive about - we decided to do the wedding after the baby is born. I want to be part of everything and I want to plan my own wedding without any stress in the world. Also, it made sense that we take some time for Njabulo to make more money so that we don't find ourselves in debt. The lobola and its celebration kind-of emptied his pockets a bit. My job pays me just enough to help in the family - not in paying invoices for a dream

wedding.

Njabulo came up with a great idea which I like so much. We are going to twist my Mom's arm into allowing us to skip the church and do the wedding at the spot where we first met. Zola owns the plot and we can have our wedding there. I like it. That day was magical when we slept in each other's arms, under the stars and share a kiss. We will do the blessing aka my mom's wedding ceremony on a Saturday and thereafter Umabo on a Sunday. Njabulo did say that it is very important that we seal our

marriage with Umabo. Only then will I be considered a 'zulu' makoti.

"You can move into my bedroom. It has more space," I say to Thuli who is helping me pack my shoes into the boxes.

"Won't you want to make more money from renting it out? I am lazy to move my life into just another room," she says.

"So you are basically refusing to move into a bigger room," I say and she smiles at me, "You amaze me, do you know that?"

"I am special," she says. She picks an old pair of boot and

inspect it.

"You can keep them if you like," I say. I bought them a few weeks ago and haven't worn them.

"This I can keep," she responds and place the box of boots on the table. I am grateful that this apartment is fully furnished and the only things I am packing away is just a few bags of clothes and boxes of personal belongings. I am moving into Njabulo's house. It feels so surreal but I am taking the bold step. It is funny how I could spend weeks in his house but now I feel so nervous about the permanent move. My

apartment is still available for me but I gave Thuli just six months notice. I don't want to rent it out for people to only vandalise it. It belongs to Masango Logistics. It can only be wise to do so after the wedding.

"So, is Phuti still bothering you?" I ask.

"He showed up at my work and took my table so I could serve him," she says, her voice slightly high.

"Did you serve him?" I ask.

"Hell no," she says. "I am desperate for tips but not that desperate. I acted sick and asked

to be excused for a few minutes. I left the restaurant and went to do a little window shopping; when I returned, he was gone."

"Oh, my God..." I laugh. "But why?"

"I don't like him."

"I truly understand. Is your heart with someone else?" I ask.

"My Lecture," she says.

"That is a NO go area," I call out.

"Why do you think I am this depressed in life?" She asks. "I can't have him because every girl likes him. He is weirdly the only guy I fancy. Isn't that weird?"

"Quite weird."

"Maybe I like them old."

"Phuti is old."

"Phuti is a boy. If he isn't with friends, he would probably die.

Ohhh...and he is pedi. Probably a Mama's boy. No thank you."

"Oh, my God. I am going to tell him."

"Maybe he will leave me alone," she responds with a roll of her eyes. I laugh at how she has kept the man begging. Some weeks Phuti would give-up on her and tag along one of the girls he usually brings to places and the next weekend, he'll be begging for

me to twist Thuli's arm. Thuli's isn't the type. Worse now when Phuti doesn't fall under her definition of an ideal man.

"Do you want to keep the plates?"

"Not that I need them."

"Right?" I say. I don't need them too. Njabulo has an over packed kitchen. The more I spent time in his house, the more I forced him into buying everything. Taking these items with me, I'll have them packed in boxes, in the garage.

My phone vibrates in my back-pocket. Njabulo is coming up to

get my boxes. In a minute, there is a knock on the door before he walks in - followed by Phuti.

"Is this all?" Phuti asks when he notices just a few boxes and bags.

"This is it."

"How are you Thuli?" He humbly asks.

"I am fine. How are you Phuti?" She sounds nice.

"I will be fine when you agree to go on a date with me," he says.

"Jeeez!" She mumbles. She ignores Phuti and turns towards me and says, "Don't be a stranger. You are allowed to make surprise visits. You know, just to

make sure that the apartment is still in one piece." She reaches to give him a hug and thereafter turns to her room. She slams the door.

"What is her problem?" Phuti asks. I shrug.

"She likes you," Njabulo says.

"That's what they do when they like you."

"Where did you get that conclusion, Sir," I ask.

"I have lived Mrs Buthelezi."

"I forgot...you are the least perfect man," I mumble as I pick my bag.

"Don't tell me you are mad at

me."

"For having experience with girls? No brother. I'll show you flames when you start to think that you can revisit those experiences."

"Haibo! What the hell did I do?" Njabulo asks while picking the boxes.

Njabulo and I got a perfect creche for Thabelo, just outside the estate. We are to leave her at creche until the we get a nanny. Even when the nanny is here, I think she will be used to creche and will manage to continue.

Njabulo and I picked her from my mother two weeks ago. My mother had a hard time letting her grand-daughter go but she understood that we had to do this for our little family's sake. She is allowed to visit or even stay here if she wants. But knowing my mother, she would never.

Njabulo parks just outside the day-care and hurry inside to pick our daughter. He is great with her and it didn't take Thabelo too long to adjust and connect with us in her new home. I was worried that she might be depressed and

failed to reconnect with us.

Njabulo buckles her up and drive us home where we are starting to make memories.

I feel happy.

When we get to the house,

Njabulo gets the dinner ready

while I give her a bath. When he

is with other men - I bet they

believe he cannot even lift a

finger in the kitchen. Instead, he

is the best when he wants to.

Sometimes he adds on Thabelo's

mess and watch me clean after

the both of them. But, I am

grateful for my family.

"She sleeps like you," Njabulo says.

He is standing just behind me as I put Thabelo to sleep. She fell asleep in my arms when we were watching television after supper. It feels good to have her here and I spend most of my time with her, making up for the time lost when she was with my mom. I cover her with the blanket before we both quietly walk out of the room.

"Would you like to watch a movie?" I ask when we return back to the living room.

"I need coffee so that I can finish off these reports."

"You know you have been working

til late for the past three weeks?" I ask. We never go to bed on the same hour and I am starting to feel like I am avoided here. "Are you avoiding me?"

"No, babe. I'll make it up to you. We have three new clients and you know how it gets. Next week Wednesday, I'll be done and we will be back to normal."

"I guess," I mumble while getting on the couch. He makes himself a cup of coffee and disappears.

Good thing I can pick a romcom. My phone vibrates as I swipe through the list for a perfect

movie.

"Hey friend," I answer.

"Tell me you are free next weekend?" Dikeledi asks.

"Uhm...well...you wanna hook up? We can grab lunch on Saturday."

"Are you not up for a weekend away? Bae is away - work...and I need my friend."

"Didn't I tell you Thabelo is here? We don't have a nanny yet."

"Why didn't I know adulting will be this boring?" She groans on the phone. "Okay, I'll settle for lunch. Can we meet?"

"You can come visit me. Or I can come to you. Or we can go to

Spur," I say, laughing at the last suggestion because that is the only child-friendly restaurant I can think of. When we went to dine at Kream with Thabelo last, Njabulo ate while on his feet because someone didn't want to sit down - not even on anyone's lap. I thought it was a tale until I experienced it.

"Spur will do. I need a breather nyana from the house."

"Saturday it is," I agree.

As promised, after Njabulo's deadline on Wednesday, he had more time to cuddle with me in

bed after putting Thabelo to bed. I wish I could give him a mind-blowing sex last night but I have been feeling a little off. Maybe I just have a lot going on in my head or I am just a little tired trying to juggle running my small family now, work and taking care of myself. Even tonight, I had promised to watch a movie with bae, but I am already getting ready to sleep.

"Tomorrow, I am not going to the carwash. I just want to spend time with my girls," Njabulo says as he gets in bed next to me. "I thought you were going to car

wash. I agreed to do lunch with Dikeledi," I respond.

"Then it will be Thabelo and I," he says.

"Are you sure?" I ask.

"Yes. I'll see you when you return. Maybe we can watch a movie this time," he says.

"I promise we will."

In the morning, like he promised last night, Njabulo woke up to spoil me. He let me sleep while he runs around with his daughter. He changes completely when he is around Thabelo. I can only wonder how he would be with his son. That will be a mystery. He

doesn't even want us bring up Tinyiko's name. I decided to let it go.

By late noon, Dikeledi picks me up to Tashas. I excitedly told her that Thabelo won't be joining us, so we can go all fancy we want - I am even dressed up for the date. I am wearing a red dress. Since Njabulo said red looks good on me, I think I have more red in my closet. If you didn't know me, you'd think I am skipping sit-ups for a perfect body; the bump is so small.

"I am so sad I didn't see her," Dikeledi says as we take our

seats. Njabulo took Thabelo to the car wash. I knew he was going to make a turn there, even if it just for an hour.

"And, by the time we go home, it'll be past her bed time," I say.

Dikeledi postponed our lunch date to an early supper. She had other commitments first.

"How is it? Everything," she asks while sipping her wine.

"Everything is great," I say with a smile after dropping my glass of water on the table.

"You and your perfect family. Did you ever imagine?" She asks. I shake my head. But the God I

serve is full of grace. It is not a shock that I am here now. His timing is always perfect.

"How are you and adulating?" I laugh. Marriage changed her. It changed everything. The Dikeledi I know would be laughing like a maniac and she would have been on shortest shorts you can think of.

"My mother in law is visiting us. She is sweet but I need my space."

I am glad to know that this date was not to solve any issues. It was to just catch up because we hardly do. I had a few hours to

myself, which I hardly get these days with Thabelo around. I am not in a hurry to get a nanny. I think I'll get one just a month before I get pregnant or if things become difficult when I grow big.

This pregnancy which I once thought will be the hardest - because I wasn't ready - is the easiest. No cravings yet. No moods. No sulking. No nothing. A part of me thinks that it is because of my past experience. When I was in captive, I had no time to sulk around like a baby. I didn't have anyone to do things

for me. I had to toughen up - even now, with this pregnancy, I am toughening up.

Just before eight, Dikeledi drops me home. If it wasn't that she is trying not to disrespect her mother-in-law, she was going to come in for drinks. Njabulo has a bar and she would have gotten something to drink. She left without coming in.

The house is dark but the music is playing softly in the background when I open the door. I close and lock the door behind me and make my way to the plugs. Switching on the light, Njabulo jerks his head

up from the couch where he was lying down.

Is that lust I see in his eyes? He stares at me with a smirk.

"Look at you," he says. I forgot I'm in red and his kind-of dresses that he likes.

"You were not home when I left," I say while supporting myself on the wall so that I can take off my shoes.

"Don't!" He says while getting up and walking toward me. "Can I have a dance first? You look perfect."

I smile while taking his hand.

"Is she sleeping?" I ask when I

rest my arms around his shoulders. His hand on my hips. We move slowly to the soulful music. "She slept a few minutes ago," he says. If she is asleep now, she will probably wake up just after four. A peaceful sleeper that girl.

"Did you have a good day?" I ask. "If changing nappies is deemed good...then yes," he says. I laugh. He is the one who insisted on spending the Saturday with her. I never suggested or expected him to but I guess he is modern father. Fathers are even better parents these days.

"It makes you a perfect father."

"So, what did you guys talk about?"

"Men!"

"Oh! I get it. I always talk about women when I am with my boys," he says. We are moving swiftly around the living room. We haven't been this peaceful in a long while. We are trying to make adjustments to our new life. As we move, we turning each other on. Njabulo drops kisses on my kisses and his hands has caressed me everywhere.

He spins me so my back is on him. A twitch of his penis on my butt and the man is reaching for my

zipper.

"Red looks good on you," he whispers as the dress drops on the floor. It was once a debate which I lost. I step out of the dress before he slowly leads me to couch. When I am sitting on the edge of the arm-rest, he assist me to take my shoes off. When that is done, Njabulo kneels in front of me and tug my leg on his shoulder.

"Oooh..." I whisper when he moves my panty with his finger before dipping it in. He removes it and all I see is glitter on his finger.

I am more than ready.

I grip on the couch with both my hands. The feeling is too much.

"Daaammnnnn..." I call out when his tongue flips on my clit. I never thought I was ever going to get head - I am pregnant. He rolls his tongue, forcing me to cry out.

Without a warning, my one hand lands on his head so he could deep his tongue further in. I didn't know I needed this. I needed this so badly.

"Yes!" I whisper when his finger joins the tongue.

"Are you ready for me?" He asks as I pant.

"Please," I say. He laughs at me and I realise I just begged.

EPISODE 61 (Unedited)

THULISILE

I swear he looks just like Thapelo Mokwena. I swear. Grey beard and clean-shaven head. It is a style with him. He isn't old yet to have grey hair; so he dyes his hair. He is young and everything that Thapelo is. He has been standing in the front, giving out a lecture and I am out here staring at how his lips move. How his biceps flex when he writes on the

board. Oh...and how he smiles as he interact with the students. I swear if I didn't study more than I do, I wouldn't pass his subject. He clears his throat and stares towards me.

Oh God. Oh, God. Did he ask a question? Why is he staring at my side? I move my eyes around the lecture room and back to him...and slightly shake my head.

"Miss Lerobane?" Mr Ngwenya asks from the front. I blink a few times and swallow hard, trying to make up what he might be looking for from me. I wasn't

paying attention. I was paying any attention at all.

"Sir?" I whisper.

"I am waiting," he says. I swear I feel like giving him an attitude like how I normally pull myself out of any situation. But, he is the only guy - in the whole wide world - that I respect. For a moment, I wish he is just some boy I could tease and get away with it.

"He asked if he could put you on the tutor list," Grace asks. She isn't my friend but she always follows me around school. I can tolerate her because she keeps

her mouth shut most of the time and unlike others, she catches fast whenever I help her with school work. I can tolerate her.

"Is it a paying job? How much per hour?" I ask, loudly. The whole lecture room laughs at me as if I am the only one who loves money. We all need money but I think I need it more.

"I take it you were not paying attention Miss Lerobane," Mr Ngwenya says.

"My name is Thuli," I whisper to myself, so low that I bet Grace didn't hear a thing. I hate it

when he calls me Miss Lerobane like I am my mother. He calls everybody by their surname. I take it to play safe. He is the hottest lecturer but there aint no rumours about him. "Sorry Sir. What did you say? I was...." I let my voice trail so that he could move the attention away from me. Every head is on me and I hate it when it happens.

"I said, I am looking for tutor to assist struggling learners. There is no budget but you will earn credits on your the subjects you tutor."

Not happening.

Credits won't pay rent and there is no way I am moving back home. I need to make as much money as I can and save a lot so that I can afford rent. My current tenant, Maria, gave me six months before I could move out of her apartment. I am only left with three months for me to save as much money as I can so that I get another apartment. I don't need credits.

"Oh Sir, I can't," I say. A few ladies gasps, including Grace who has her mouth wide open. What did I do?

"It is a pity. A lot of learners were going to learn a thing or two from you," he says and stares at me. Oh, no, I won't change my mind. "Okay, I guess you guys are stuck with me on weekends. I will communicate the times for our first extra class. Jennifer, please give out the scripts."

Jennifer calls out our names. A few students are complaining at the back.

"This is not fair," Grace says when she notices my marks. "This was the most difficult test ever."

"I disagree," I say while shoving my script into my bag. "I need to go. I'll see you on Monday."

"Are you seriously not going to tutor? You know you get to be close to Mr Ngwenya?" Grace says while following me out of the class. I have no idea why she is saying what she is saying, I tutor her every week for free.

Well, I forgive her. I would never choose a man over money. Men are trash. I am wise enough to use my head. The man looks a mini god but there isn't anything special he can offer me.

"I have a job. And if I am late, my boss is going to make noise to me. I'll see you on Monday. I am out of here," I say before matching towards the taxi rank. I need to get a few jackets from home. Winter is almost upon us and I am close to freezing to death whenever we knock off from work at 23h00. Luckily the taxi to Bara is almost full, so I jump in and wait for the last two passengers. It is always a trip to Naledi but I need to do this.

Tomorrow I have an double shift. Unless I want to wake up in the

morning, I won't be able to make it home and back to work on time. The two passengers jumps in, and the driver doesn't waste time.

Orlando East is where I grew up. I don't like it here because of my mother. If she was a decent human being, things would have been better.

The taxi stops just before Baragwanath and I jump off. I put my school bag tightly on my bag and hurry down the street. I could get a local taxi but what is a twenty minutes walk? I hurry down to the busy streets where

kids are running around carelessly.
I never wish to be there age.
There is nothing great about
being that young and helpless.
This is South Africa - shit
happens to the most kids,
unfortunately. Kids like me and
Dineo when we were young.

Sush! Why am I even thinking
about that? I don't like thinking
about the past. I don't want to
open that chapter. I am old now
and can take care of myself.

I turn towards my street. Just
how much I hate it, my
neighbours are sitting outside,
watching Zuma wash his old

Mercedes Benz. It was fancy then when I didn't know better things. I stay in Rosebank, I see fancy.

"Hey sweetie, you are scarce, babes," Zuma calls out. If it wasn't that Zuma and his family has helped Dineo and I so much when growing up, I would have given him a middle finger for calling me with a petname. No one calls me babes, or sweetie, or love or whatever pet name.

"Hey Zuma. Hey guys," I wave at them as I walk past. Before they could ask more questions, I

am already opening the small gate to my house.

"Oh, shit," I whisper as I try to make a turn towards the backroom but Mom notices me.

"Thuli," she calls out as she stumbles with a bottle of Black Label. I don't even want to see who she is sitting with because it is obviously a man.

"Ma!"

"Did you bring me some money?" She asks as I struggle to unlock the backroom where my clothes are at.

"I am at school Ma. I don't have any money."

"But...your scholarship is paying for you. Godfrey told me." Godfrey is my uncle who knows that my scholarship is covering my tuition fees. I asked him to help me with Res money, but he couldn't help so I lied about where I stay. As long as I pay my own rent and stay out of trouble, I'll survive.

"They don't give us money," I say while walking around the room, packing a few jackets into my bag. I pick one trench coat and put it on. I might look funny walking in this, but I don't

enough space for it and I need it for the evenings when I knock off from work.

"When are you coming to visit me? You and Dineo never come to see me."

"I'll come after my exams," I make my empty promise.

"You always say that," she says and stumbles out of the house. I hear laughter at the back of the house - she has visitors, of course. After packing a few jerseys, I push the luggage bag out of the room and lock the door.

"Thuli, come and greet my visitors," Mom calls out from the back as I march to the gate.

PHUTI

"I am going to organise the biggest bachelor's party. A mother of all bachelor parties."

"Dude, I am still preparing for my baby's arrival and you are already thinking about a bachelor's party? We still have how many months to go before the wedding."

"Didn't you hear me? I am organising a mother of all

bachelor's parties," I repeat, because this man didn't hear me. The elevator stops at the fifth floor and I follow Njabulo to his office.

"What does a mother of all bachelor party looks like?"

"A boys' weekend away."

"Forget it."

"Why not?"

"My wife will not agree to that. I am technically not a bachelor anymore."

"Are you serious?" I ask.

"Yes. I joined Mr R in getting a VISA before I do any shit. You

wouldn't know anything; you are single and mingling. Things are different when you have your wife in your house."

"Don't tell me you are cancelling tonight?" I take a seat at the end of the office while Njabulo gets on his seat. He pulls a few files I had submitted yesterday. He didn't even check them. I can tell by how they are still where I left them. "Don't tell me you didn't look at those last night."

"I didn't," he whispers and sighs deeply. I stare at him as if he has lost his mind. "I promised Maria not to bring work home. I

tend to bury myself in my work while she is waiting for me. So, I promised her that I won't bring work until next week."

"Can you at least look at them before you leave? I need to implement the changes on Monday."

"Of course."

"So, are you coming tonight?" His presence is highly appreciated.

"Since when would you allow me to miss your birthday celebration," he says. I grin at him, He wasn't going to hear the end of me. "I just don't understand why we

have to dine at Sky Vibes. Since when are you a sissy?"

I laugh. I agree; this is unlike me. But, let us just say I gave out a tip to get a table there and I am a man on the mission.

"Since you impregnated your woman again. She can't keep up at the club, can she?" I ask. He looks at me and then back to the papers that he is scanning. His wife is six months pregnant now and he is a scarce man. Let us say, since she moved in with him, he has become a saint.

"Is Thuli invited?" Njabulo asks.

Well, lets just say, Thuli is the reason we are going to Sky Vibes tonight. My friend here would have hosted us at his Chisanyama but well, Sky Vibes it is.

"She is forced."

"In that case, we will see you tonight. I need to get this done before I leave," Njabulo says.

Our table has been ready since seven thirty. I am just a few minutes late because, the birthday boy has to make an entrance.

"Look at you," Mrs Buthelezi, Maria, says when I walk to a table at ten set at the quiet side of the restaurant. She was the first one to see me.

"Don't you look perfect?" Marcus says. I give them a spin, because I am the main man tonight and I am looking the party.

"Hey sweetie," Lebo gives me a brief hug. I didn't invite her this one, but I can see she came with my cousin. She is a slay queen just like my cousin. "Happy birthday." My cousin hugs me afterwards. Mr R and his wife lift their glasses to me.

Maria shifts from her chair and make her way to where I am standing with Marcus. I dismiss him because Mrs Buthelezi here looks serious.

"You don't look happy at me," I say when she drops a hug and happy birthday.

"She is pissed."

"Who? Why?" Thuli is pissed.

"Come on. She is never going to forgive you."

"Why?" I shrug. I know why. I pay off her manager to have her and other two waiters serving our table so that I could ask her

to join us. She gets joins my party and get her tips without working the evening. It is a win-win situation.

"She told her her manager that he moves her to another table or she quits."

"Are you serious?" I ask and walk towards the table where I could talk to the manager. Just before I could even talk to the receptionist, I hear Thuli's voice at the back. I turn to where the two doors separate the room.

"I am your manager Thulisile. If you don't want to take my orders,

then we are going to have you go. It takes me an hour to hire a new person. Get that to your thick head."

"Fine, by me Sir,," she says as she takes her apron off. Oh, dammit, this is not how I planned it to be.

"You can pay me for this past week and I'll never bother you."

"Get out of my restaurant. I'll ewallet you tomorrow," he says and turn to leave the room. Thuli stands there, staring at the ceiling before throwing the apron on the table.

"Thuli," I mumble. She gives me one look and turn to the other direction. I rush towards her but stop when she turns to the women change room.

Shit!

Minutes later, she marches out of the changing room with her handbag in her hands. This woman has anger issues. No matter how childish she is, there is something that draws me to her. I mean, it isn't hard to get any woman - that's what I do all the time....but there is something that draws me to this child looking and angry woman.

"Don't follow me," she says as she walks out of the restaurant.

"Thulisile."

"You don't get to call my name," she says. "You don't get to call my name."

I raise both my hands. This woman can kill with her stare.

"Thuli, there you are," Maria comes to my rescue. "Are you leaving already?"

"Yes."

"Njabulo and I will drop you in just an hour. I need to talk to you about the baby shower and the wedding," Maria says. I see Thuli

melting just a bit. She smiles at her friend.

"How is the baby?" Thuli turns to Maria. "You look big. What is it?"

"I don't want to know. I want it to be a surprise," Maria says. "I need to chat to you and Thandeka about it. That's why I am here. I came because you and Thandeka are here. Please stay."

Thuli coldly turns to me and then back at Maria and gives her a small, "Okay, I'll go freshen up. I'll meet you at the table."

She turns back to the restaurant.

"She knows you are making an excuse for me, doesn't she?"

"Of course she does." Maria crosses her arms.

"How can I win her heart?" I ask. I have been trying for months, I am about to let it go.

"She hates being pushed," Maria says while leading the way to the restaurant, "Ohhh..and she hates men."

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Yay or Nay, to the New Journey?

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EPISODE 62

MARIA

Unbelievable!

Thuli's anger is unbelievable. Now I have an idea why Phuti gives up and then again changes his mind. Some times she is the sweetest girl ever, laughing at every joke and making fun of other people but somethings triggers and she completely changes to a stranger. She is overly sensitive and it would take a person who understands her to get her. I have no idea how she is. Before we left that evening, at the party, Phuti went and spoke to the restaurant manager and begged for Thuli's job back.

Everything was just a misunderstanding and Thuli hates to be forced into doing something she doesn't want. There is more to it but it isn't my business to snoop into her life. The best moment of the night for Thuli was when Phuti said he has tickets for the upcoming gala dinner hosted by the firm that she wants to work in - in the future. It was the first time seeing her so happy when he offered her tickets for her and a friend. I forgot how we got to that gala dinner chat but that was the only thing that got Phuti and Thuli smiling at each

other about. I am still to ask Phuti if he really has the tickets for the gala or if he is going to pull all stops to get two tickets for Thuli and her friend.

I think I already know the answer.

"What are you thinking about?" Njabulo asks before hugging me from the back. "What are you looking at?"

"Ideas for the baby room. We have three months to have everything ready," I respond. Njabulo promised me a baby shopping a month before the baby is born. I think it would be

beautiful to have a baby room. We have already flipped an entire room for Thabelo. She literally has a unicorn room and she seems to be in love with it. I want to do the same for the baby room.

It is funny I thought I wasn't going to be this happy with the pregnancy. Njabulo doesn't give me a chance. If I don't have a smile on my face - even though the reason is that I am not feeling the morning - Njabulo drops everything and call the office to excuse us for the day. Even when I hate Monday, I am forced to dance around and put a

biggest smile as I get ready for work unless I want to skip work. Am I not blessed?

"Are you sure you don't want to know the sex of the baby?" he asks.

"No." I give him a smile. I want it to stay a mystery.

"Then how are you going to decorate the room?" he asks while rounding the table to the fridge. He pulls a jug of juice and set it on the table before getting two glasses from the cupboard.

"We can keep it at grey and white and we will add more colours after the baby shower," I say. My best

friend already told me I am having a big shower, it isn't a surprise. A surprise will be the order of the day. All I know is that it will be the biggest day of my life - she promised.

"When is the doctor's appointment?" He places a glass of juice in front of me.

"On Thursday," I respond while closing the book. I stare at him for a little while as if he is in his world. "You look like you cannot wait."

"I can't wait to find out. I want to work with what I know. I want to get myself ready."

"What are praying for?" I ask.
"I don't know." She shrugs. "I just want to know. That's all."

"Oh, yes?"

"Why would I give myself expectation when God already has his own plans for me?"

"Listen to your brother Njabulo Buthelezi," I laugh at him.

"Your mother taught me well."

She did. I smile at him and remind him that we need to find a church for our little family. I'll never set my foot on the one I used to go with Luzuko. He is out of our lives, but I do not want him near us in any way. Not in memory. Not

in thoughts. Not in anything.

"We can go to the one you were visiting these past weeks." He laughs when I mention it. He laughs at the uniform the pastor and his wife wears but it isn't bad. The preachings are perfect. The Pastor just chooses to wear this ugly white gown that Njabulo laughs at whenever we find ourselves there.

"But you make fun of the Pastor." Thabelo calls for her father. She is up for the day and chooses to call her father over me - how perfect.

"I promise to be serious the next

time we go," Njabulo calls out as he strides to get to Thabelo before she loses it. If she doesn't find any of us in our room, she could turn the house upside down. Now, our Saturday can begin. Njabulo and Thabelo have a play date with Njabulo's friends and his three children. I have a feeling that Njabulo shouldn't have opened a Chisanyama but an event center of some sort. He uses that place for parties other than its initial purpose. This time, he wants to turn the place around for a boy's eight years birthday party. Apparently, this

is the first birthday since the boy's mother passed away earlier this year. If it was up to me, I would have come up with something else for the birthday but they guys decided on a party at Njabulo's joint and they have everything figured out. I tapped out when Njabulo told me about getting racing cars and games and all those boyish stuff. So, I trust them to turn that place into anything. I mean anything at all.

So, the playdate is to get Njabulo and his friend - slash the client - to discuss all they need to get

ready in three weeks.

Since I am home alone until the evening, I call my girls for lunch. It has been a while since we had time together. Dikeledi is the first to arrive, with a bottle of wine as if it is a gift for me. She helps me to set the table by the pool just before Thuli arrives. She was writing this morning and I got her at the right time when she needed something to make her forget about the books. Mrs R is the busy one. She is too busy with life you need to make appointments with her.

"How was the test?" I ask as

Thuli drops her school bag on the couch. She makes me laugh at times. Mostly when I remember Phuti's comment about the black skinny jeans and sneakers that she wears all the time. The only I have seen in something too short was on our girls' party - the party where I found out I am pregnant. That party. Thank God Dikeledi and Thuli get along from the second I introduce them. I was worried at first. Mrs R is always the neutral one; these two are totally different.

"I don't know why they make us cross night studying and give us a

test as simple as ABC?" she remarks and sighs deeply.

"Is it easy for everyone?" I ask.

"Not really...apparently," she responds.

"Maybe you just too bright for the course you are doing."

"Our lecture offered me a tutoring job. First, it was for credits but now, when I dropped my script after the test, he offered to pay me whatever I amount I want."

"That is good news, right?"

Dikeledi says with a shrug.

"Oh...well...I think so."

"You don't have to waiter tables

anymore. You hate it so much," I say and laugh. She used to complain all the time; she still complains about the uniform or something odd her managers would make her do for clients and all. The worst is singing at the tables and dressing up in costumes for kiddies theme parties. And on that list, there is Phuti who annoys her by calling for her to wait his table.

"The lecturer smiled at me...weirdly," she responds and hugs herself.

"The lecturer?" Dikeledi asks.

"Maybe he likes you."

"Is it the same lecturer you have hots for?" I ask.

"Ooohh...you have hots for a lecturer. Don't remind me of the sin I almost committed."

"Shut up Dikeledi," I laugh. For some reason, I find lecturer and students relationship so weird and gross.

The conversation moves from the lecturer to Phuti and Dikeledi gave Thuli a lecture. lol. Just like what I told her, she must enjoy her days as a young girl that she is. If she likes Phuti or the lecturer and he is not in a committed relationship, she must

go for it because we only live once and life is not best when one has regrets. When I ask her about her regrets, Dikeledi tells me she has none other than that she should have waited for her husband to be settled before getting married. He is up and down trying his best to build a legacy and she misses him sometimes. It is a good problem but Dikeledi has been lonely since her marriage.

"Get a hobby, my friend. Take photography. Design clothes. Something that would keep you sane and happy," I say. It cannot

be great to wait for her husband to be home.

"My hobbies include dressing up and going partying until the club closes," she says and sticks her tongue out. I smile at her for consolation. She reminds of myself when I took modeling, thinking of how much I should have a purpose in life. Things didn't turn out the way I thought they would. I still ask myself what would have happened if things didn't turn out the way they did. I wouldn't be sitting here, pregnant, and waiting for my husband and daughter to come

home for sure. Life would have taken another turn but I am grateful that I am happy with my life.

"Have you sit him down?"

"He doesn't get it. Maybe I should cheat on him...just to spice things up."

"Don't you dare." I lift a finger at her.

"I am just kidding," she sips her drink. "Let's talk about the wedding."

The wedding is coming soon.

Njabulo is playing with Thabelo at the corner of the room where the

toys are. We are waiting for our turn for our doctor's appointment. Between the two of us, Njabulo cannot wait to find out what we are carrying. I cannot even tell what I am carrying. I haven't changed but just gained a little weight. I didn't go through any sickness since day one. My emotions are intact. My mood are.... well...maybe Njabulo can explain that part. But there isn't thing that points out a sex of the baby. I am not eager for to find out. If it wasn't for the baby shower, I would have waited til I give birth. I survived nine

months carrying Thabelo and meeting her was the best feeling ever. Best.

The receptionist lifts an eyebrow at me and then smile. It is our turn.

"It's our turn," I call out to my team building blocks at the corner of the room. Because Thabelo can turn this place upside down if she doesn't get what she wants, Njabulo carry her with a huge house they were building.

I always say, she takes after him. He doesn't have any other evidence to win the case - Thabelo takes after him.

The doctor is actually confirming things I already know - the baby and I perfectly fine. My mother prays for me almost everyday. Njabulo would laugh when she tells me to put the phone on loud speaker for all of us to pray. She did the day I was spending a day with Njabulo for the first time - Mr Buthelezi here doesn't forget about it. Never. She still demand to be put on loud speaker so that she couldn't pray for all of us. This time, Njabulo is part of the prayer because there is nothing he cannot do for my mother. "Do you want me to tell you the

sex of the baby?" Our gyne asks as he does the scan.

"No. You can tell it to him while I change. I want it to be a surprise."

"Got it," the doctor says as he continues his job. "it means you are not going to take a look at these scan print-outs?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is nothing to worry about. Everything is perfectly fine. The baby is at a perfect size and the estimated date of delivery is still the same." I knew everything was fine with the baby. I am perfectly fine. He goes

on and on searching for the sex. He repeats and repeats as Njabulo watches. I am watching Njabulo so that I don't see the screen. He is not giving anything away. All he is focusing on is play with Thabelo while his eyes are on the screen.

"Got it," the doctor says. The screens are hard to tell unless the doctor shows you the baby parts, so I bet Njabulo has no idea what sex. If he does then he is great at numbing his face. "You can go change and meet us in the front." The doctor and my family disappear to the front.

Njabulo's face. Why am I starting to worry? Njabulo seemed too quiet. Oh - I am wrong. He just laughed out loud from the other room.

Wow! He sounds....happy.

I hurriedly change into my clothes and make my way to the front.

Njabulo is shaking hands with the doctor by the door.

"Thank you, doc," I bid my farewell as I hurry behind

Njabulo. I wave at the

receptionist as I follow behind.

"Get me the sweet," he says,

eyeing Thabelo's bag. I pull the

sweet from the side and let

Thabelo in my arms to get the sweet. I walk past the toy corner while Njabulo drops the building blocks they had. This is the only trick we have.

"So....?" I ask as we walk to the car. Njabulo is smiling and shaking his head randomly.

"So what?" he asks.

"You look happy."

"Do you want to know what we are carrying?" He asks as he opens the back door to strap Thabelo in her seat.

"Well..." I am getting tempted to know.

"I am not telling you because

tomorrow you are going to say I shouldn't have," he says and takes Thabelo from my arms and place her in her car seat. He opens my door and then hurry to his.

"No, I won't say anything. I am just curious why you are on cloud nine. You look so delighted."

"Haw, Maria... I am just shocked and blown away. Am I allowed to be...shocked?" He asks.

"No, you don't look shocked. You look happy."

"Haibo!"

"You don't look shocked at all."

"I am shocked. Believe me," he

says and focus on the road ahead of us.

He drives past Debonairs for a triple decker. I don't have cravings but I love pizza so much I never say 'no' to it. He gets us one and drive us home.

"I'll get Thabelo's bath ready.

You get yourself supper," he says.

"Can you tell me what we are carrying?" I nag. Like I thought I could let him keep a secret until the baby shower.

"What about the baby shower?"

"I'll act shocked," I respond while laughing. "I change my mind about the secret."

"Okay. Let me give Thabelo a bath while you eat and think about this. Sit down alone, eat your pizza and be sure about your decision. If you are sure, after Thabelo's bath...then I'll tell you."

"I am sure," I call out as he takes Thabelo with him. He stops and turns to me.

"Ah, ah. Eat first. You might be just hungry," he says while laughing at me.

I might be just hungry? Lol.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" I call out but I am ignored.

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EPISODE 63 (Unedited)

NJABULO

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Maria's voice echoes around the house as I proceed to Thabelo's room.

Doesn't this woman know that I am trying to digest this? Doesn't she? Thabelo wiggles in my arms when we enter her bedroom. She loves it in here and I am pleased that my princess loves her space. I drop her on the floor and get her pyjamas from the drawer. I have done so many times I can do in my sleep.

"Princess, don't you dare splash me with the water," I warn her

as I settle her in the bath-tub. Does she listen? She does the opposite of what I tell her. She splashes me with water like I didn't dare her not so.

This is crazy! How am I going to manage this? How? Another splash from Thabelo pulls me from my thoughts. I shake off my thoughts and give her a quick bath before she could get cold.

Wrapping her in a towel, I carry her to her room for a change.

This room is pink and blinding but cute in its own way.

Who would have ever thought?

Njabulo Buthelezi enjoying

fatherhood and looking forward to a growing family? It doesn't matter how much I think about this, I still do not believe it.

"It gets lonely when you guys are having fun around here without me," Maria says from the door. I cannot bath Thabelo and dress her up as quick as her mother does it, but I always try my best.

"You allowed to say you cannot leave without us," I say while finishing up the nappy up before the little legging she puts on for bed. I pull the shirt from the drawer and put it on. Maria picks a pink gown from behind the door

and lay it next to Thabelo.

"Are you alright?" she asks. I might have been deep in thoughts. I tend to not smile when I am in a middle of a task.

"Yeah, yeah," I say.

"So, I am done with supper. I am not hungry and I still want to know the sex of the baby," she says. Curiosity kills a cat, doesn't it? I smile at her as I place Thabelo in her crib.

"We are having another girl," I say before shaking my head.

"A girl?" She asks. To my surprise, she frowns at me as if I am wrong. She laughs thereafter and

waits for me to correct myself.

"Yes, a girl."

"Why were you..." She stops because she can tell that I am wondering what she is trying to say.

"What? Where you looking for a boy?"

"Not really. It is just that I was sure that we were having a boy."

"Why? Because only a boy can make me happy?"

"No."

"Then why?"

"Well..." She shrugs. "I am sorry. I just thought your laughter in the doctor's office was based on

the news about a boy."

"He was just telling me how much crewed I was, surrounded by girls only."

"Oh..."

"You look distrubed," I say. She shakes her head. "I told you I was looking for God to bless us. It doesn't matter what we have."

"Yeah!"

"I grew up with a little sister. Believe me, I can be sweet when I want to." She stares at me and I crack a loud laughter. "How am I going to manage two girls that are exactly like me? Can the other

one be as sweet as you? Thabelo is already going to give me grey hair."

Maria laughs at me and turns to Thabelo who is throwing toys from the bed to the floor.

"You are doing just fine with Thabelo. And the other is already the sweetest ever. She doesn't bother me a bit."

"I pray," I respond while collecting the same toys and placing them back on the bed.

"I'll feed this one. Go take a bath and join us for a Cinderella movie," Maria says with a laugh. Cinderella and Barbie cartoons

movies are my favourite.
While Maria takes Thabelo to the kitchen, I turn to our bedroom. 'We are having a girl' - I send a text to Thandeka who has to finalise the baby shower and reveal party that is to take place in a two months. I throw my phone on the bed after she has sent me a thousand dancing emojis.

On Saturday morning, I am woken up by Maria walking into the room. The curtains are still closed but I can tell the sun already up. I worked the whole evening

trying to chase a deadline. It is difficult to bring work home when I am trying to give my girls undivided attention, so I only start working when they fall asleep. It was after night, last night, when they both fell asleep on the couch.

"Good morning," Maria greets while taking off her gown.

"Where were you?" I ask as she gets back to the bed. She turns away from me so that I can spoon her.

"Your princess was up," she responds. "She fell asleep again."

"Can I sleep a little? I'll take

the afternoon shift when I take a ride to the carwash."

"What? Come on, you don't have to take her. I don't have much to do this afternoon."

"I insist," I say. She must not know that I am trying to make things easier for her. I don't want her to stress about herself, the baby she is carrying and then Thabelo on the side who is always running around the house, throwing toys everywhere. I want her pregnancy to be as smooth as possible.

"If you insist," she says.

"Now, can we sleep just a bit?"

The next time I open my eyes, Maria is gone. It must be before ten because for whatever reason, I am unable to sleep after ten in the morning. Doesn't matter what time I slept.

I jump into a quick shower before dragging my feet downstairs.

Maria is sorting laundry at the porch. Thabelo is helping.

"Is there breakfast?" I ask while picking Thabelo from the floor.

"Pancakes and bacon," Maria responds without lifting her head from her task. See, she has been running around the house the

whole morning and she will never tell me when she is tired.

"Thank you," I head to the kitchen for a full plate of bacon and pancakes. I warm my plate up and have it while catching up on the news.

"Are you still going out with Thabelo?" Maria calls out from where she is still sorting out laundry.

"Yes. The girl and I are going to have a drive."

"I'll get her ready before I start washing this in the bathroom." I stare at her. Maria looks exhausted but trying her best not

to show it. She looks like a very pregnant woman. And come to think of it, our life revolves around Thabelo. I like that. I like how we are growing but I don't want to miss my girl. I don't want to miss my wife. Maybe it is about time that nanny stays in full-time.

"Babe, do you want us to do something fun today? Maybe we can drop Thabelo at..."

"No, I wouldn't want to intrude. We can have a date night next week when the nanny is here."

"Alright."

Forty minutes later, Thabelo and I are parking behind the last car at the car wash. Just three cars in front of us, so we won't be staying for long.

"Look, who is here," Grace calls out for Thabelo. She is one of the ladies that works around the car wash. I know this isn't a safe place for a child but I enjoy having her here. Only when she is here can she get her legging dirty and we can both get away with it when we get home.

"Are you busy? Can you have her for a minute. Just want to check something in the office," I say

while giving her away to Grace. I hurry to the office to check if there is anything for me to check and sign. None. I open the supplies room and notice the stock is still available. Unless there is someone we are hosting, there isn't much to do here.

'Just getting the car washed and we will be home. Do you need anything from the shops?' - I text Maria.

'Pineapples and sausages.'

'Got it.'

I put my phone back in my back pocket and head back to the car wash area. Grace is polishing the

tyres and Thabelo's is in a stranger's arms. If it wasn't that Thabelo is giggling as if she is home, I would be giving Grace a tough time. Had she told me she has work to do, I wouldn't have left her with my daughter. The voice of the woman carrying Thabelo is very familiar - I can recall it from anywhere.

"Sorry...I'll have her back," I say to Amanda who is tickling Thabelo with her finger. Her smile falls when she lifts her eyes to me.

"Njabulo Buthelezi," Amanda says before plastering a wide smile on her face. She still looks as pretty

as before - weight or no weight gain - she looks like that girl I used to fuck.

"The baby," I say before taking Thabelo from her arms. Thabelo's hands lands on my face as Amanda watches. All I can do is try to fight Thabelo's little hands from my face but that fascinates her even more. Her bubbly laugh fills the place.

"You two look alike," Amanda says while crossing her arms to her chest.

"That is what happens when you have good genes," I say, still trying to fight Thabelo's hands

away from my face.

"You are good with her."

"Thank you," I respond.

We stand in silence. There are two more cars behind mine, so there isn't running away from her. Not that I need to run away from her.

"How have you been?" she asks.

"I have been great. How have you been?"

"Great," she says. Her response is not convincing but I am not a therapist who would be interested to know much. "I am divorced."

"Is it a good thing or bad?" I

ask. I want to know if I should congratulate her or sympathise with her.

"What do you mean? Of course, it is a bad thing."

"You didn't love him. So, I thought a divorce would be a great thing."

"What do you know about love?"

"I know if you love someone, you wouldn't go around fucking other people. That's how I know."

"I never thought you would be capable of that."

"I surprised myself too," I say with a smile. Thabelo won the fight and I let her down so she

could play with the sand.

Amanda's eyes follow Thabelo around.

"Where is her mother?" She asks.

"At home." I don't need to elaborate, do I.

"Njabulo can I ask you something?" She asks.

"Yes."

"Did you ever forgive me?"

"Believe me, I wouldn't be standing here and not feeling an edge to spit on the ground if I hadn't. I moved on. I am happier. So, you can forgive yourself too."

"What about you using you?"

"We were using each other. Your

man wasn't fucking you right, I was there to scratch the itch. I didn't use you."

"At varsity..."

"Don't go there. I am over that. Believe me," I say while walking to where Thabelo is walking towards. "By the way, thank you."

"For?"

"For choosing him," I respond and take Thabelo's hand so we could take a walk while we wait for the car to be done.

What I wanted to say was:

Thank you for fucking my life over because I got the best at the end.

TWO MONTHS LATER

Of course the baby shower isn't a surprise but Maria doesn't know where it is taking place. She is sitting beside me as I drive to the venue. I still wonder how she is going to act during the reveal part. She didn't want to hurt her friends for organising a reveal party by telling them she knows the sex of the baby.

"I can't wait for them to reveal the sex of the baby. I want to see your face," I say as I turn towards a boutique hotel.

"I feel so so bad," she says and

covers her face with her hands.

"Just clap your hands and open your mouth wide."

"You are not helping," she says.

"Wow, this place is beautiful."

"I paid a good fortune, you better have the best time of your life,"

I respond as I put the car on Park.

"Thank you for doing this with my friends," she says and turn towards me for a kiss. "I am going to enjoy all of it."

Dikeledi rushes to us when she notices the car. I help Maria out of the car. She looks so beautiful in a grey dress.

"We are ready for you," Dikeledi says as she takes Maria's hand.

"Sir, the guys are in the bar, over there. We will call you during the reveal."

I turn towards the bar where my friends await me. Some of the guys I don't know.

"The man of the moment,"

Marcus class out. I give him a nod before taking a seat next to Gundo and Phuti. I wonder what they have in mind because I am not going to sit here and listen to these men tell me about parenthood. Thabelo is already showing me flames and I am

mentally ready for the new born. I roll my eyes when they insist we are doing a shower and all of its protocol. So, I take in all the advise about new borns and how my wife might be off limits for half of year. I want to swear at the nonsense they are dishing me but Thabelo has already softens my heart. She has succeeded in making me feel like a normal human being.

"We don't know what you need...and what the ladies are giving you guys...so we decided to collect some money for a mall voucher," Phuti says while

handing me an envelope.

"You know what, I'll give this to my wife so that I don't see the pennies you guys collected," I say while getting on my feet. Your sense of humour needs to be at a peak if you want to be friends with me. I can see the other guys are looking at me as if I said the most inhuman thing ever. "Thank you guys, for this. You know I appreciate."

"No need to cry," Gundo says. The bastard.

"Okay, guys...we are about to reveal the sex of the baby," Dikeledi. Each of us, have our

drinks in our hands as we follow her to the garden where the baby shower is at. I am impressed. My money didn't go to waste.

"Can we have the father right this way?" One lady calls out from the front. Maria is getting on her feet so we could pop the balloons. I take my hand and stand next to a million balloons.

"Are you ready to act surprised?" I mumble at her.

"We are going to count from five and then you guys can pop this huge balloon here," the lady says while giving us two long pins.

Five. Four. Three. Two. One.

A loud pop and pink feathers flies all over the place.

In a second, our friends are clapping their hands and laughing and others are rushing to give us hugs. I turn towards Maria and tears are streaming down her cheeks as she laughs while hugging her friends who seem too excited.

Haibo! Mrs Buthelezi - such an ACT!

"Haibo Maria, are you crying for real?"

LOVE TANGLE

MARIA

I don't know why my nerves are all over the place. Phew!!! I try to breathe as my mother fixes her hat. We are seated in the car parked outside the gate to Zola's property. I am so grateful that he allowed Njabulo and I to get married here, where we first made out. I remember that day like it was yesterday. I felt his love. I felt his passion and today we are about to seal our agreement for good. For life.

My mother didn't understand the venue wedding but when I sent her the pictures of the place and

how we could set up a matrimonial service outside in the manicured loans, she told me that it looks promising. Now, she looks pleased. We can see people seated already and I can just imagine how Njabulo is feeling.

Njabulo! Lol, he sneaked to the hotel where I was booked in. He booked me there so that I could spend some time with my girls and also so that we don't both leave from the house - also because the groom mustn't see the bride before the ceremony. Trust Njabulo to show up in the morning and ask me to join him for

breakfast. Me, being me, I went ahead and meet him for breakfast. The funny part was him pretending in a few hours we have a wedding to go to. He was his normal self that if we weren't already married I'd think he was there to bid me farewell before he runs away. I am confident about my relationship with him. If he didn't want us to do this, he would have stopped it way before now.

We have been at our happiest since the birth of our little angel - I'll tell you all about it, but it was the sweetest thing ever. We

have been at our happiest point ever, and now, six months later, we are still at the peak of my love.

"Are you ready?" I ask my mother who is seated quietly beside me.

"I am."

"Are you okay?"

"I am fine. I have been praying for this day from the day you were born," she says. I know she wanted me to get married and according to her, as a woman who beliefs in her bible and church, she had an idea of how my life would have been but she never pressurized me to live up to it. I

lived my life scared that I might hurt her with my life choices. I was wrong. She was the first person to pick me up and let me get back to my feet without telling me how disappointed she is. She kept my baby so that I can continue my life with the man who made me happy. She is here now, happy for me - I hear it from her prayers.

Luambo, my cousin, opens the driver's seat and settles in.

"They are going to call you in a minute," she says. She had walked in to make sure that everything is ready and they are ready for

me. My bridesmaid and groomsmen are getting themselves ready to walk in. Luambo tells me Njabulo is seated with Gundo is the car as well, waiting to walk in.

"How is everything? Does it look exactly the way we planned?" I ask. My cousins and my friends helped me on this one.

"Everyone is getting seated. Everything is perfect...but..." she says. My heart drums in my chest.

"...who came up with the idea for the shot at the drinks' station?"

Phew! I thought it was worse than I thought.

"Njabulo's friend. I trusted

Njabulo to handle the drinks and then he went on to delegate his friend. He said he wants people to be free and dance. That is why we are having an evening wedding."

"This is new to me," she says.

"Believe me, people are already having the time of their lives."

"Only if they don't get drunk and not do what they are invited here to do...to witness the miracle of God."

"Yes, Ma. Everything is under control. Shots aren't bad," I say while hiding a giggle. One shot is fine, two shots are also alright

but three shots might be a problem.

"Can someone keep an eye on khotsi munene Ngobela? I don't trust him with alcohol," she says. "I'll watch out for Uncle Ngobela," Luambo says.

"Where is Thabelo and Khanyisile?" I ask. I haven't seen my babies since last night. Mom and my aunt chose to kick me out of the house and keep the babies from me. All they needed was for me to express milk enough for a day.

"They are with Shonisani and the nanny. They look so cute," Luambo

says with a sweetest smile. "Oh, we are starting."

Let's do this.

I think I should have taken one shot from the welcome drinks.

Thandeka knocks on my window.

"Are you ready?" she asks.

"Yes. Yes."

"You look so beautiful. I am going to see you at the end of the aisle. Njabulo sent me to give you this," she says while handing me a gift box.

"Thank you," I beam at her before she runs back. I take my time to open the gift - I didn't think of giving him something

before the wedding. First I get a letter when I open.

Dear Maria

This is to bribe you so that you don't run away from me today.

Just a little reminder that I love you and that you are so lucky to be married to a handsome man like me. Men are scarce.

Love, Njabulo

I laugh. Men are scarce? I pull the rosegold bracelet from the jewelry box. Oh, my God. It is so beautiful. So, so beautiful that I am tempted to cry.

"Please help me with this," I pass

it to my mom. My manicure won't allow me.

I know we both don't have our phones, so I'll thank him when I see him, in a minute.

"Don't look. He is walking in," Luambo says. I drop my eyes to my hands, I want to see him when I walk down the aisle. I can easily hear the ululations and the song as he walks in. When he was settled at the altar, Luambo drives the car further in so that it can be at the beginning of the white carpet spread on the lawns. Zola will have to forgive us for driving on his perfect lawn.

Luambo passes me my beautiful bouquet. It is white with a charming rose gold ribbons. I went for a neutral colour kind of a wedding. I wanted it to be a soft and muted marriage, yet extremely beautiful. Njabulo was clueless so he let me go all out on today's wedding. Tomorrow's celebration is his to organize. Luambo jumps out to help my mother out first. When Mom is out, Luambo runs to the other side of the car to help me with my dress. I knew what I was getting myself into when I chose a dress with a longest trail, it

isn't easy logistic though. Luckily the trail is detachable for the reception. When I am on my feet, Mom takes my hand and walks with me to the aisle.

You are not going to cry, I urge myself because I feel like crying right now. I am not a crier but I am overwhelmed right now. Oh my God, I saw the decor demonstration but tonight everything looks perfect. The fairy lights glow from the aisle, all the way to where Njabulo is standing. He has both his hands on his side and staring right at me. His white tuxedo makes him

look so handsome and sexy. He doesn't move his eyes from mine when I stroll slowly on the carpet. His smile assures me of the love he promises to give me. His smile wipes all the pain away - all the pain I ever had in my life. When I get closer, his friend taps his shoulder and Njabulo lets out a giggle before setting his eyes back at me. He was nervous - I'll surely remind him on good days. He licks his lips and winks at me, only melting my heart. My mother is doing a little wave to the guests. I am glad that I made her proud - she looks like a woman so proud.

My babies are seated on the first row and Thabelo fights to get on her feet to get to me. Njabulo reaches to take her hand. He knows the trouble she might create if anybody tries to fight her. Now, Njabulo is standing with our girl beside him, her tiny hands on him. When we reach the front, Mom positions me next to him and takes her seat.

Thabelo cries to get into Njabulo's arms.

"Someone is jealous," Njabulo says and I giggle. Thabelo seems to be fighting for my husband's attention.

"She doesn't like to share," I respond while my mother walks back to where we are to take her granddaughter. I drop a kiss on Thabelo's cheek before she allows her granny to go seat with her.

"Can we do this now?"

"Of course," I respond with a smile.

The pastor pages through his bible before he starts with the blessing. He reads a few passages from the bible while Njabulo and I make love with our eyes. He knows he is making me blush when he licks his lips and drops his gaze on my lips. Before tonight, I

used to think because people are happy. No, it is because they are seducing each other, and it is what Njabulo is doing right now. I swear I am going to need to watch the video after the wedding.

"Stop it," I whisper. He doesn't stop until the pastor poses a question to us.

"Do you want to say your own vows?" he asks. We both nod. Njabulo's reason was that he didn't want to fumble with his words like how other people would do when he watches Our Perfect wedding. He says he nerves might

embarrass him so he would rather say his own vows. Trust Njabulo to exaggerate.

"Please bring the rings," the Pastor asks. Nkosinathi, Njabulo's nephew brings one to Njabulo.

Njabulo picks the ring from the basket and takes my hand. He positions the ring on the right finger.

"I love you," he starts. I brace myself. "You look so beautiful."

"Thank you."

"Did you like your bracelets?" he asks.

"Yes. Thank you."

He clears his throat and stares

into my eyes, "With this ring, I promise to stay faithful to you. I promise to love you even there is nothing to love, I promise to love you. If you accept this ring, you'll be confirming that you are going to allow me to love you forever. You accept that I am the only man allowed to put a smile on your face. I promise to take care of you and my children. I promise to make love to you whenever you want me to, even when I am exhausted." Oh, my God. I cover my eyes while our guests laugh at me. Is he telling people that I want him to make love to me

even when he is exhausted? He clears his throat before he continues, "I promise to be the best father to our children. You can count on me any day, any second, and any hour of the day. I am going to make you a happy woman. I promise to be the best man that you deserve. I promise to walk on fire for you." My eyes become watery when I think of the things he did for me when I was lost. I was just a girlfriend then, what more would he put himself through for his wife?

"Maria, I loved you from the day you prayed for me. That second, I

knew you were the person for me even when I thought you deserved a better man than I can ever be. You drove me crazy from that day in Gundo's office when you wanted me to kiss you so bad." I laugh so hard because he is right. Gundo disturbed us that day. "I love you."

He puts a ring on my finger.

Everything is a blur as I speak my vows in tears.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife," the Pastor says after my vows.

NJABULO

We are at the reception and my wife looks so elegant. Her chocolate skin is glowing under these lights. Her smile is wide. Her eyes are glowing with love. I love this woman. Even if God decides to take away everything and start all over again, I would search for her. She completes me. She makes me happy. She changed my world around, she did. "May God bless you in abundance my children. Prayer, prayer, prayer," Maria's mother emphasises. "Prayer can take you places. May you continue to love each other in riches and in poorer.

I dont wish you to be poor but if you ever find yourselves there, pull each other out and come out stronger. Maria, you made me a proud mother...because you are now grown and can take care of your wedding. This is beautiful my child. May you and your family live happily ever after."

Maria gets on her feet so she could hug her mother after this long speech which started thirty minutes ago. I also get on my feet to hug her.

"Thank you."

"If you hurt her, i am going to come to your house and take her

home with me," Maria's mother says. I nod because I know she means business and she isn't joking with me.

"I'll keep all the promises I made," I say before letting her go.

Maria is cleaning her eyes with a tissue. All these speeches are emotional.

"Can we please have Njabulo's friends representative," the MC calls out. I didn't put the name so that my friends could choose themselves. Zola gets on his feet and makes his way to the stage. The smug he has on tells me he is

about to expose me. I give him an eye.

He surprises me with a very neat speech wishing nothing but great things in life. He started making a flop when he says, "Mrs Buthelezi, thank you for loving my friend right. When he loves, he does it with his heart and his head and every sense. Once upon a time, we once had to save him from himself because he loved wrong. We had to nurse him back to life." Why do I have a feeling that a wedding day is where your friends try to embarrass you because you scored the most

beautiful woman? Maria is smiling at him because she knows the story and whenever Gundo narrated it, he always held my hand and told me I am cute. "Mrs Buthelezi, you are blessed to have him. You are blessed. Thank you." Maria takes my hand under the table and smiles at me.

"You won't regret loving me," she says.

"I know," I respond and drop a kiss on her lips before we return our gaze to the MC.

"Can we have the song for their first dance?" the MC asks. I have been more than ready for

this because I need to have a chat with my wife. I take her hand and lead her to the center of the room where everyone has their eyes on us.

I am too old to take dancing classes so we didn't practice anything but to dance with my wife in my arms. Her body is warm when I pull her to my chest.

'This is why I love her' is blasting on the speaker. She knows the lyrics by heart because this is one song we play over and over again after our girls to bed.

"This is your chance to run away. When we leave this place, there is

no walking away," I say and she laughs.

"I am not going anywhere."

"Even though you know I can get a little crazy when I love?"

"I get a little crazy too," she says.

"Thank you for not running away."

"You thought I was thinking of running away?"

"No. Where were you going to get another perfect man like me?" I ask. "A handsome man like me?"

"You are right," she giggles.

"Your ring looks perfect."

"I finally own one."

"Wasn't it worth the wait?"

"It was."

She rests her head on my shoulder while everyone watches two people talk in the middle of the room.

EPILOGUE

NJABULO

"We should do this often, don't you think?" I ask my wife, who has her hand on me as we wait for our ride from the airport.

"We should. I had a great time," she says with a sigh. She pouts at me and snuggles closer to me. Phuti should be here in a minute.

We just flew back from our honeymoon. It was one magical vacation I had with my wife. I am glad this was our very first international vacation with her. It wasn't my first but was the best. Maria makes a perfect traveling buddy and I should invest in this kind of quality time. We did our best to enjoy each other's company and rekindle our love that keeps burning. It was our quality time away from the reality of life. At home, our girls are waiting for us. Maria has been homesick. She can act all she wants but she used to miss her

children so much - no matter how much I tried to make her forget. It pleases me that she loves them this much.

My phone buzzes in my pocket.

'Just got here. I am behind the white Viano.' - a text from Phuti.

"He is here," I announce to my wife who straightens herself and aims to push her cart to Phuti's car. I lead the way to the car and unpack my bags first before Phuti helps me to offload Maria's cart.

"Did we disturb you?" I ask when I notice a person in the front passenger seat. I don't recognise

her. "I should have called an Uber."

"Why would you call an Uber when I am around. You didn't disturb anything because I knew you guys were landing just now," he responds.

"What happened to..." He lifts his hand before I could even finish my sentence. I know when not to dwell on something that is none of my business. I nod at him and let it slide. His life is none of my business and I am pleased to keep it that way.

Maria jumps into the back with me. After greeting Phuti's friend,

Maria rests her head on my shoulder.

"Are you tired?" I ask. Flying for the whole day plus chasing the connecting flight might have exhausted her. She couldn't sleep much on the flights.

"I am," she mumbles.

It is just after three thirty in the noon and I believe the girls will be at the peak of their energy, so chances of her resting are little to nothing.

"Please drop us at Court Yard," I say. He knows which Court Yard. It is the one not far from our home. He could drop our luggage

home while we settle there for the night. This will be the last night before we walk back to reality of chasing after a toddler and a six months old. On the side, I'll be chasing deadlines - I left a lot on my desk at work and I still have the Chisanyama waiting for me. If we don't do this, we are never going to get a chance.

"I miss them..." Maria mumbles.

"That's why I am hiding you away from them before you rest," I respond. I know for sure, the minute she walks into the house, she is going to forget that she is exhausted and will only wear

herself off. "I just need one more night before they could have you." A smile dances on her lips. "Is that a smile I see?" She pushes me with her shoulder. "What? You were exhausted before you realize what I have in store for you."

"Didn't you have enough at the honeymoon?" Phuti asks.

"Shut up!"

"I thought the whole point of a honeymoon is for all of that."

"What do you know about the honeymoon?" I ask.

"I am on a honeymoon every weekend," he responds with a giggle. The girl giggles with her.

If only he knew there is something spiritual about honeymoon, he wouldn't dare compare what he does everything with it. Maria shakes her head and rests it on my shoulder as we ride in silence.

"Maria, please ask Thuli to call me when she has decided to grow up," Phuti says out of the blue as he turns towards Rosebank.

"Why is that?"

"She blocked me."

"What did you do?"

"I talked some sense into her but because she is childish, she took it personal."

"I'll give her the message," Maria dryly says. If it wasn't for the stranger, she was going to ask what happened. In a minute, Phuti drops us the Court Yard. Maria picks her backpack which has just a few things in - there isn't a need for a change of clothes - when we check-out, we will jump into an Uber and ride straight home.

We got a perfect room to lay our heads for the night. Only when Maria jumps into bed, does she appreciate my efforts of booking this room? She needed it. She

dozed off the minute she lays her head on the pillow.

As Maria lies beside me, I am tempted to wake up. My penis is strong from witnessing her chocolate body which I love so much. It is forever smooth and carefully moisturized without fail. I drop a few kisses on her shoulder. She has been sleeping since noon and if she doesn't wake up now, she is going to spend the whole night tossing and turning. Okay, she also has to wake up for my own selfish reasons. She moans before rolling so she could

face the ceiling. My hand lands on her stomach - which is almost flat. She has worked so hard for this body - the wedding was also a good motivation.

"Can I help you?" she mumbles before opening her eyes.

"Oh yes," I say while getting on top of her. I have been lying awake, naked, waiting to strike and I am a happy man right now. I drop kisses on her shoulders before my hands rubs between her thighs. I like how her body react to mine. How it melts from a single touch. A long passionate kiss breaks all her walls - I am

her weakness, she is mine.

"I love you," I mumble when we break the kiss. I don't wait for her before I press my penis inside of her.

Ohh, shit! This is the home I want forever and ever!

It doesn't take long for her to dance with me. No matter how much we have sexed up since two weeks ago, I still want more and more and fucking more. When she is fully awake, she slightly lifts herself, supporting herself with her elbows. Without her saying a word, I roll us so that she could be on top. So that she could be

where I could see her boobs bounce carelessly for me.

"You fucking drive me crazy," I say as she positioned herself to start riding me like a horse. Shit! I taught her well.

"I know," she bites her bottom lip and starts moving her hips. Every time when she does, everything turns black. Every time she does, I fucking fall in love with her. My love for her keeps burning. I feel her soul connected to mine. When she says she loves me, she means it and I believe her single word.

"You are so beautiful," I say while

guiding her hand to her folds. If she doesn't make herself come, I'm going to live her behind because I cannot hold myself anymore. She knows what to do - she plugs her fingers on her swollen button and starts rubbing. The more she moves, up and down and rolling her hips for me, the more I know she is almost at the edge. My hands find her full breast. Since the baby, I try to squeeze her nipples hard. She gives me approval when I roll her nipples with my fingers.

"I am close," she says breathlessly, not letting go of her

busy fingers. She drops her head backward before crying her orgasm out. It doesn't take me a second to drop my hands to her hips and rolling her aggressively until my very own release.

Dammit!

I can never get enough of this!

"I hope you don't get me pregnant," Maria says while jumping to the bathroom.

Damn, I'll stop having sex if she does.

MARIA

Marriage life is beautiful, so they say. It is. Since a month ago when we arrived back from honeymoon, I have been at my happiest place. There is a shift! A good shift. I have prayed countless time for things to stay this way. I dont need more money or more of anything - I just want to stay this happy with my family. Our family routine is the same now. Monday to Friday is for work and creche for Thabelo; and Saturdays are for family time without fail unless Njabulo needs to be at the Chisanyama. Even if he does disappear for a few

hours, he is normally home before I could even ask when he will be home. I know after a few months, things might change back to our busy lives, but until then, this is our little perfect setup.

Mrs Masango waves as she crosses the reception area, leaving for the day. I am now working in the Accounting office but assist at the reception when the new receptionist lady takes time off. Apparently, there isn't anyone fit to run Masango Logistics front desk like I do. I still say, Mrs Masango was trying

to bribe me into assisting but I sometimes believe her at how easy the job is to me. I enjoy it. It is a Friday and everyone including me seems to be in a great mood. A few colleagues walk past the reception as I lock away the files I had on the counter. My cellphone rings as I throw away the almost dry flowers - Monday, we are getting a new vase.

"Hey, love," I respond while marching to the kitchenette to drop the vase.

"Pizza tonight?" Njabulo asks.

I drop the vase where the cleaning lady will easily see it. I

turn on my heels and hurry back to get ready to knock off.

"Yes. Pizza and movie."

"I'm on my way," Njabulo says.

"I'll pack up. Can I pass by the apartment to collect the key?

Thuli is moving out."

"Sure. Wait for me outside,"

Njabulo says before I hang up and get ready to pack my things.

Thuli is pushing the boxes outside when I arrive at the apartment.

If it wasn't for work, I would have helped her to move out.

"Just in time," she says. She leads the way inside. I walk around the apartment, saying my silent

goodbye to my apartment.

Masango logistics can have their apartment back.

"Did you get somewhere else to stay?" I ask.

"Not yet. I am going back home," she says. I feel sorry for her because she looks sad. I allowed her to stay for a while but she seems to be in need of money to spend her little pay on an apartment.

"I am sorry I couldn't help."

"Don't be silly. You helped me more than enough. I stayed here for so long, it is time to move on," she says.

"Don't be a stranger," I say when she hands me the key.

"I promise," she says before giving me a brief hug. "I'll lock turn the lock behind the door and lock the burglar door before I leave."

"Thank you." I smile at her. I bite my tongue when I want to give her Phuti's message. Just like Njabulo, I am choosing to stay out of their business.

I am excited to get home only to have my happiness shortlived when I notice who is standing outside our gate. My heart almost stops beating when I confirm that it is

who it is.

"This motherfucker," Njabulo hisses while putting the car on park. I quickly take off my seatbelt and jump out of the car at the same second as Njabulo.

"Hey..."

"What the hell do you want here?" Njabulo says, marching to where Luzuko is standing with a wrapped box.

"Hey...hey...." he calls out while Njabulo grabs his shirt and pull him closer to his face. "I come in peace."

"What do you want?" Njabulo hisses. I am grateful that

Thabelo didn't hear the car or else she would have been running to the driveway. I caress Njabulo's back so he could release him. The last thing I want is for the neighbors to call the estate securities for us. It could be chaotic.

"Njabulo, relax," I whisper. When he does after my millionth request, he releases Luzuko with so much force he stumbles backwards and drops the box. Whatever was in there is broken. "What is wrong with you?" Luzuko asks while sitting down. "What do you want?"

"I wasn't invited to the wedding. Both of them. I thought we agreed to be friends."

I swallow hard.

"I told you to stay away from my family, do you hear me. The next time I see you, I won't hesitate to fucking shoot your brains," Njabulo hisses.

"I'll remember to bring my gun too," Luzuko says while getting on his feet. I freeze at his response but Njabulo knocks him down again. My screams stop Njabulo from kicking him. "I'm joking. I'm joking." I stare at him as he gets on his feet. My heart almost

stops when Luzuko moves his hand to the back of his jean. When I expected him to bring a weapon, he pulls a paper, unfolds it and passes it to me. "I came to invite you guys to my birthday celebration. I am hosting a party before I relocate and I would like you guys to join me."

"The hell..."

"Thank you Luzuko. Thank you," I quickly say before Njabulo swears at him. The last thing I want is to work Luzuko up. He is harmless, he is. I know what I am talking about. Even if we don't go to the party, we don't have to

rub it in his face.

"See you then," he says before heading to the car parked not far away from our gate.

Njabulo parks into our drive way and storm to the house. Luckily the nanny is getting giving the girls an evening bath, we have a minute to breathe before our pizza and movie date. I follow Njabulo to the bedroom and close the door behind me when we are both in.

"You should just let me shoot him once. I cannot let him near my kids, do you hear me?" he says.

"And then what? And then

what?"

"And then he leaves us for ever,"
he response.

"And then you go to jail, leaving
me alone with kids, why would you
risk that?" I ask, my voice a
slightly high. "Is that what you
want?"

He stares at me.

When he doesnt respond, I turn
and drop my handbag on the kist
which is next to the dressing
table.

"Careful with the coffin," Njabulo
says with his eyes widened.

"What?"

"Your coffin. Be careful with your

coffin," he says with a straight face. I pick the bag and throw it at him before shaking my head. Ever since the day of our traditional wedding, when my family sent me here with a kist, he makes fun of what my uncle said. He said a countless time that as a zulu makoti, this kist is my coffin and it only means it stays here with me as I chose to spend the rest of my life as Mrs Njabulo Buthelezi. With a smirk on his face, he walks up to me and wraps his arms around my waist. "Okay, I promise not to do anything stupid...." he says. "I'll

just shoot him on his middle fingers..." When I want to protest, he drops his lips on me and sucks my breath away from my lungs. A moan escapes my lips - I just melted.

"Promise me."

"I promise..." he kisses me more.

"Not."

THE END!

