

My Best Friends Husband

By

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Chapter 1

The sound of thunder pierced through the tranquillity of my normally peaceful bedroom.

I loved rainy weather but I did not necessarily appreciate it when I had to brave it out alone. Knowing that my man had to go to work just dampened my mood.

He was in the shower and I was lying in bed trying to figure out how many pairs of shoes I had to package for delivery that afternoon.

That was just one of the businesses I juggled amongst a few. I also owned a recruitment agency and I sold designer handbags. With no formal education I had learnt to hustle through life so I could make a decent living. I had actually done well for myself. I managed to buy a moderately sized house in a place just outside of Boksburg called Dawn Park. I drove a small car but I paid my own bills and that made me very proud of my achievements. The money I received from Sizwe was used to spoil myself. He was quite well off so he could afford to splurge on me now and then.

“Hey... you’re awake? I thought you were giving yourself a day off” – Sizwe

“That’s exactly what I am planning to do but I was woken up by thunder besides I have a shoe order to deliver a bit later so I must slowly start preparing boxes” – Me

“Your day off is never completely without activity, is it?” he asks as he puts on his shoes.

“Not really. I can’t remember when last I just stayed in my p-jamas and lazed around all day” – Me

“You should do that some time Andiswa. I am really proud of you for being such a hard-worker but you should also make time for rebooting, you know what I mean?” – Sizwe

“I know what you mean... it’s just that I always feel guilty if I spend the day doing nothing at all” – Me

He gave me a kiss on the forehead.

“You have me now so you don’t need to panic all the time about money issues besides your business will not crumble in one day. Relax, take the day off. Forget about the deliveries... Is it urgent or can you postpone it for tomorrow?” – Sizwe

“Well actually you’re right. I will do just that. I have until the end of the week to make the delivery” – Me

“You see what I mean?” - Sizwe

“Okay get going before I lock you in here for another steamy session,” I say as I begin to nuzzle his neck.

“Don’t tempt me... I might just let you” – Sizwe

He stands up and moves across the room to my dresser.

I watch him put on his watch and grab his car keys.

Sizwe took good care of himself but he was not exactly Denzel Washington.

He has charm and style to make up for the lack in the looks department, I suppose that is what made him so attractive.

I was always sad when he had to leave. It would have made me feel better if he came home to me after work but I knew I would only see him in at least a week after this.

The problem was, he was married... He belonged to someone else.

I suppose that made me the mistress but I had long gotten over the guilt. It used to gnaw at my gut every time I thought about his family but I loved him too.

“Bye babe... I will call you,” he says as he kisses me on the lips and then vanishes into the passage.

“I will lock the security gate and throw the keys inside so don’t get out of bed,” he shouts from the kitchen.

“I won’t,” I shout back.

I snuggle into the blankets and grab a novel from my bedside table and just as I start reading, my phone rings.

It was my best friend, Mbali.

“Hey friend” – Me

“Friend... Are you busy. I really need to talk. I thought of calling you because I have nobody else to talk to” – Mbali

She sounds like she is crying.

“What’s wrong my friend? Talk to me” – Me

“He didn’t come home again last night... After everything he promised me. He gave me his word that it would not happen again but obviously this woman has him hooked. I don’t know what to do” – Mbali

She begins to cry again and hearing the pain in her voice just breaks my heart. I want to tell her it will be fine... I want to tell her to hold on and fight for her marriage but how do I do that when the other woman in her husband’s life is me.

Mbali

When Sizwe and I first met I had just come out of a very toxic relationship but the one good thing that came out of it was my son Thapelo.

My ex was a serial cheater and it got worse when I fell pregnant with Thapelo. The thing is I always found out when he was being unfaithful. I don’t know if it was because he was a bad liar or it was just God showing me signs that I had no business being in that relationship. We lived together for five years out of the nine that we were together but he showed no signs of ever wanting to make it official by settling down and making me his wife. He was my first for everything. He had broken my virginity and he was the first serious boyfriend I had.

I lost all self- confidence because I honestly started thinking if a man cheated so much with lots of different women when I gave him my all then that meant

my all was not good enough. I was convinced that there had to be something wrong with me. Maybe I was just not good enough.

Zaba was a hard-worker though... I will give him that. If he was not somewhere out with his whores, then he would be working tirelessly on his logistics company. The problem was, I never saw much of the money he made because apart from paying the bond on our house and the instalment on his flashy BMW, I did all the rest. I took care of all the house bills, made sure that we always had food, toiletries, clothes and even took care of Thapelo's day-care fees all on my own. I never even knew his pin for his bank account, his money was not shared. I saw nothing wrong with this. He would always preach about how important it was for me to be able to stand on my own two feet and not depend entirely on him so I took care of our living expenses with pride. I felt that I was proving myself worthy by taking the responsibility of providing for our family and still being a mother and partner that both him and my son could be proud of. I wanted to show him that I was good enough to be a wife to him but no matter what I did, the much - anticipated request never came instead he went and found pleasure elsewhere.

I got stressed and ended up frequenting the psychiatric ward at the local hospital to be treated for depression. Even then, he managed to convince me that it was just a chemical imbalance in my brain that was triggering the illness and it had absolutely nothing to do with him. He never even had time to spend with his son. Sometimes I wondered if he regretted sharing a child with me because he never showed him any love unless of course we were in public and he had to be seen as the doting father

I finally realised that I was fighting a losing battle when I caught him in bed with a woman I had hired to do our laundry. I had come home a bit earlier than I normally did because my employer had just decided to bless me with a half day. I did not expect to find what was waiting for me at home.

That was enough to send me packing. I had reached my limit and I was tired of being Zaba's doormat so I left and started a new life with my son who was three years old at the time.

Life was tough initially because unlike before, I now had the added responsibility of paying rent which did not come cheap. It created quite a dent in my income and I struggled to make it from month to month on my basic administrator's salary. I really have no idea how I pulled through for a year but I did.

Sometimes I would get dressed and go to work after Thapelo's school transport fetched him, without a cent in my pocket. I would not even have money for taxi fare but I always made it to work. I was nice to the taxi drivers and they had gotten to know me because I took the same route to work daily so they would let me travel for free when I had no money and then I would repay my debt when I got paid at the end of the month. I hardly ever had money to buy Thapelo any toys during that period but I made an effort to take him somewhere fun at least once a month. I could not deprive my son completely just because we were struggling. Zaba never contributed towards his needs and he did not even bother to make an effort to see him.

We lived this way for a year and even though I was stretched to the limit, I was happy because I finally regained my self-confidence and I got to be myself again. I did not spend my time trying to please a womaniser instead I spent time on myself and my son. I even started connecting with God again because in those difficult years I had strayed.

Despite the financial hardships, I was in a good space. I felt I was ready for a relationship again. I had begun to feel lonely and in need of love and affection. I found myself staring at couples everywhere I went, I would watch as they strolled together, holding hands or even doing something as simple as buying groceries together and I would be envious. I wanted that. I was ready for it and so I prayed to God for a man who would commit to me... not just any man but one that would love, protect and cherish me.

A few months later, I met Sizwe.

I was out buying groceries for the month and when I walked out of the store this man came up to me and offered to help me carry my groceries to the taxis. At first, I refused but he was so persistent that I eventually agreed just to shut him up. He told me he worked at the Woolworths in that centre as a store manager. He was even dressed in uniform.

I laughed in his face when he asked me for my number. He definitely was not the type of man I went for. I liked driven, ambitious and moneyed men. It might sound vain but for me that meant security. I did not want to struggle for the rest of my life.

He begged, much to my irritation, until I finally gave him the number. He was quite charming but nothing special. I forgot about him the moment he turned to go back to work, not knowing that he was the man that would take me out of my misery.

I dated during that year which turned out to not work for me. The guys I met were either just looking to have fun or had another agenda. None of them were looking for a serious relationship and I just got tired of it.

Sizwe began calling me every day to check on me and my son but he was not too pushy. After about a month I realised that he was slowly winning me over. The difference with him was, he acknowledged that I had a child and accepted that he was part of the package unlike the others that just pretended my son did not exist. He was a very nice person and he did and said all the right things but I was not sure if he could fulfil my financial expectations.

He was not quite what I had prayed for.

He was not the man I had in mind because of that one thing.

Chapter 2

Andiswa

Mbali and I met through a mutual friend eight years ago and we have been inseparable since then.

From the first day I met her at the bridal shower we just clicked. We liked the same things, had a similar dress sense and even drank the same brand of wine. The only difference was that she was more of a weave and wig person but I always kept it natural. I played around with different styles but I was always in short, natural hair.

We spent the evening of the bridal shower chatting away like we had known each other for years. We exchanged numbers and a whole lot more.

We told each other about our life experiences and all... But from day one I could tell that Mbali did not trust me completely.

There was just something about being a single woman amongst married or committed women that made you the villain no matter how hard you tried.

That did not bother me at first because I really liked Mbali and I felt that our friendship had potential to blossom into a rich sister-hood. Besides, I was used to being treated that way, it actually did not bother me much, it just boosted my self - confidence knowing that I could make a woman upgrade herself and get a little uncomfortable just to keep her position in her man's life. The way I see it, without single women, a lot of relationships and marriages would not work because we are a big part of the reason why "committed women" know the importance of looking after themselves and not neglecting their looks after marriage... Generally, just keeping their men on their toes.

I was definitely not wrong about my friendship with Mbali because it did blossom into a very special one.

We did everything together. We would shop, go out and go on vacation together. I loved her son, Thapelo. I treated him like my own since I did not have any children. The only person I had never really got to spend time with was her husband. Somehow, she never organised any activities that included him. Even when I was invited to her house, it would always be in his absence.

I ended up taking offense to this and I confronted her about it.

She assured me that it was unintentional. She claimed that she did not think I would really click with her husband because we had very different personalities which is why she did not see it appropriate to forge any type of relation between him and I. But I knew that the real reason was the advice she probably got as a new bride... Stay away from single friends and keep them away from your husband. I did not want to interfere with that so I let it go.

As the years went by and our friendship grew, she began to loosen up a bit more. I was invited to share meals with them in her husband's presence and we even went out together at times.

I got to know Sizwe and at first, I must admit, I really did not see what attracted Mbali to him. He was a suit and tie kind of guy, always serious and looking prim and proper. Even when he was home and not at work, he looked like he was in the office. He hardly ever laughed and even getting a smile from him was a bit of a mission.

They seemed to have a very strange relationship. They never touched each other, there was just no spark there. I suppose they were in a phase of their marriage where they were getting too comfortable.

That was a dangerous thing so I suggested to Mbali that she might try spicing things up a bit by getting enticing lingerie, date nights, bringing back the romance. She just laughed a bit and told me Sizwe was not into those things.

Of - course I knew that could not be true. What kind of man would not want to see his wife putting effort in the bedroom?

I could not force her into doing anything so I let her be.

In the mean time I dated a couple of men and when it seemed appropriate, I took some of them with me when we attended parties or functions together with Mbali and her husband.

Even though I was a siren in bed, (I know this because I have been told), none of my relationships seemed to last.

Mbali

Boy was I wrong about Sizwe. He was the most caring, protective and committed man I had ever met.

He started visiting my place frequently and whenever he would come, he made sure that we had everything we needed. He even took over the payment of Thapelo's school fees and half of my rent. He did this to take the burden off my shoulders a bit. It is safe to say that, at this point, we were in a relationship but the most amazing thing was that he did all this without expecting anything in return. We had never even slept together and we had been at it for almost six months. He would always say that he did not want to rush into anything because he had a lot of respect for me and he wanted me to see that he was not with me for the wrong reasons. He was with me because he saw a future with me.

I can honestly say that my prince charming did not come in the package that I had expected but he blew me away and swept me off my feet. Sizwe was not into other women unlike Zaba, I was the only woman in his life and I was sure of it because he did everything differently. There was no secrecy. Everything was out in the open, he would even let me carry and answer his phone. That was definitely something I was not used to.

He was so patient and loving with Thapelo you would swear he was his biological son. As a result, Thapelo fell in love with him just as much as I did. They became inseparable. It was not easy in the beginning because Thapelo always had me to himself, he never had to share my affection with anybody... Not even when I was still with his father, so this made him see Sizwe as a threat but Sizwe knew just how to handle it and soon they got on like a house on fire.

It was difficult not to fall for Sizwe, he grew on me and I got attached to the point that I did not see myself without him.

He was genuine, honest and he provided for us. He supported me financially much more than all the moneyed guys I had ever been with. He did all of this with his low income and managed. I also came to find that he was studying. He was studying towards a law degree so he was a man with goals and ambition after all.

I decided to stick with him. He was just what I needed even though I did not know it in the beginning. God had answered my prayers and given me more than I expected.

Chapter 3

Mbali

Our first night together was magical. After eight months of being together we finally did the deed. It was romantic and everything I have ever thought it would be. It sealed the deal and three months later while we were out, shopping, he suddenly popped out a ring while we were going up the escalator and asked me to marry him. It was not the most romantic of proposals but I was absolutely delighted. Finally, I had my own little family.

Not long after that, he paid lobola and we had our umembeso and traditional wedding a few weeks later.

My family was surprised that I married Sizwe. I suppose they had always thought that I would settle with a rich man who had a flashy lifestyle, considering my track record but at the time Sizwe did not even own a car.

Some had very snide remarks about this and I quickly called them to order but most were on our side. That though is another story for another day.

I officially became Mrs Ngwenya and I was the happiest woman on earth. Sizwe was not perfect though, as charming and smart as he was he could be a bit too possessive. It was cute in the beginning but over time it started to become problematic. He would even be jealous of my female friends even though there weren't so many of them. He preferred my married friends because he felt that single women mostly had a lifestyle that was not appropriate for a woman who had a husband and a child. I disagreed because I knew many single women who were more stable than I was.

When I met Andiswa, we immediately hit it off and she became a sister to me more than anything else. Sizwe, of course, did not approve of our friendship because Andiswa was a single woman. I had to fight to keep her because I felt that he was being unfair towards both of us. Andiswa was an independent

woman with lots of ambition and drive. She reminded me so much of myself before I met Sizwe, she was a fighter.

When Sizwe saw that I was not letting go of her, he was forced to accept her as a part of my life so he started making an effort to welcome her into our home.

Andiswa was not a stupid woman so she could tell that she was not always welcome and she felt offended by this. I was not completely honest with her about my reasons for separating the two of them but I was glad it finally worked out. They actually got along very well once they got to spend time in each other's presence and that made my life a lot simpler. I no longer had to lie about where I was going or fight just to have Andiswa over. Sizwe really warmed up to her. She became a part of our family.

We even vacationed together and sometimes she would bring a man she was dating. I really wished she could find a man like Sizwe, who would commit to her and start a family. I knew she was lonely because she did not even have a good relationship with her family so I felt she needed that.

Andiswa became my confidant, my best friend, my sister and even my mentor because she was a successful entrepreneur and I was also looking into going that route. I was tired of working for someone else and not having much to show for it.

Sizwe's career on the other hand was looking very bright. He had finally finished his LLB and he was doing his articles. He had to quit his job to do that so I was forced to carry on working because we no longer had a double income. We found ourselves having to tighten our belts and counting every cent.

We lived on his savings and my salary but I knew it would all be worth it when he became a lawyer and eventually he did. I was so proud of him. He even managed to buy a family car within the first six months of his appointment.

We had to have a thanksgiving party so I arranged it. Unlike me, Sizwe was a very traditional man... very cultured. He believed that we should always

honour our traditions of ancestral communication so our beliefs were not quite the same but as my husband, I had to compromise and let him be.

We slaughtered a goat that day and invited friends and family. It was a beautiful occasion and everything seemed to be going according to plan until I went to the boot of his car to get some of the groceries he had forgotten to off load. At the corner of the boot lay an old phone that I did not even know about. I took it with the intention of finding out whose phone it was because I knew for a fact that it was not Sizwe's. Someone could have left it there by mistake.

As soon as I was back in the house, I switched it on and went through the phone book. There were no saved numbers there which was strange so I went to the messages and one of them read;

"Hey sexy... I'm done working... you know where to find me when you knock off xoxoxo"

That was in the inbox.

Another one that had been sent, read;

"I will be a little late, still need to figure out an excuse to leave the house because Mbali came home earlier than expected but don't worry I will be there... your Sizwe"

I could not believe what I was seeing!

Five years into my marriage, I never thought that something like this would happen. Sizwe had been nothing but good to me and I never even once suspected he would be cheating on me. I thought my days of dealing with infidelity were over. I always praised him for being so faithful and now this.

I felt my hands begin to tremble as tears stung my eyes and my knees went weak from shock.

That is when he appeared and saw me carrying the evidence of his deceit.

Andiswa

I was out in Sun City for the weekend with Mbali, Sizwe and Thapelo.

Sizwe had just been appointed at a law firm and we were celebrating the good news. Mbali deserved the break. She had worked so hard while Sizwe finished off his studies. I was proud of both of them. Their story was very inspiring. They were building each other from strength to strength which is what marriage should be all about.

The mood was jolly and everybody was excited, even Sizwe seemed to be loosening up and having a good time. He actually turned out to be a very fun person to be around once you knew him better. He would crack jokes every few minutes and have everybody rolling on the floor with laughter, everybody except him that is. I was always amazed at people who could do this because I am the type of person who will still crack out laughing thirty minutes after the joke was told.

It was already eleven in the morning and Mbali had taken Thapelo to 'the valley of the waves'. I was resting in my room at the Cabana's after a hectic night of partying. The body did not respond to alcohol the same way it did in my twenties now that I was in my thirties, it took much longer to recover.

I was feeling very tired but luckily that was it... I did not have the rest of the symptoms of a hangover. I had not seen Sizwe, he was probably also still sleeping, he knocked down quite a few himself the previous night.

I finally decided to take a shower and make my way up to the restaurant and get something to eat since I had missed breakfast.

I was tired of the leftover biltong I had been chewing on all morning, in fact it was just making me thirsty and even more hungry.

I took a shower and put on a light, floral dress and sandals before I took a walk up to the restaurant.

When I got there, I spotted Sizwe having a beer at a table on the balcony so I walked up to him and joined him. We were on holiday after all.

“I’m so glad you are here. I hate eating alone” – Me

“I had to get something for the hangover” – Sizwe

“Mbali and Thapelo are still not back?” – Me

“No, I don’t think they will be back anytime soon. Apparently Thapelo is having the time of his life by the fake sea” – Sizwe

“Oh well... I might as well have a beer too in that case” – Me

We sat and chatted for more than hour.

I had never sat and had such interesting conversation with Sizwe alone and we were both so relaxed.

I realised how wrong I was about him all these years. I always thought he was a stiff, controlling man but he was actually very easy to talk to and he was a good listener.

“You are a very interesting person Andiswa. You have such a bright outlook on life” – Sizwe

“Thank you Sizwe” – Me

I found myself thinking if he was not married to my best friend, I could have easily gone for him. Maybe it was just the alcohol kicking in all over again but I had the feeling he was thinking the same.

Chapter 4

Mbali

“What are you doing here? I have been looking all over for you,” he said trying to sound jolly but I could see his eyes scanning the object on my hand.

I was so angry I could not even talk. Instead I shot him a look that said everything and then threw the phone at his chest as I left him standing there.

I tried my best to not cause a scene but there might have been a few people who witnessed the little tiff.

I had been in this type of situation countless times with my ex, Zaba, but never with Sizwe. One would think I could have been able to master a good response and pretend as though I never saw anything just until people left but with every experience comes fresh emotions. In Zaba’s case it hurt but not nearly as much because it was always expected. With Sizwe though, the betrayal felt like a huge slap in the face. It broke my heart and shredded it to pieces. How could he do this to me after everything I had done to ensure that he realises his dreams? I used to lay in his arms telling him about the trauma I went through in my previous relationship and he would always assure me that he would never put me through that.

I felt so foolish for believing him. I mean, I was not exactly a naïve little girl.

I’ve always known that it is what men do, no matter how good they have it they always begin to have a roving eye. Did innocent ones even exist?

Of course the questions started buzzing in my head much to my irritation;

Was he unhappy?

Was I not satisfying him in bed?

Did he love this other woman?

Was there a strong emotional attachment between them?

Most importantly, who was she?

Who was this woman attractive enough to make my Sizwe stray?

I walked on and he did not even try to stop me. The worst thing I could have done was to attract even more attention to our marital conflict so I had to be brave and put on a show. Is that not what a married woman is expected to do? Even when she feels her whole body failing her.

All I wanted to do was close myself in my bedroom and bawl my eyes out but that was out of the question so I plastered a smile on my face and carried on with the activities of the day.

“Mbali can I have a word with you?” – Andiswa

She startled me, I had been checking on my brew of tradition beer. Something I was quickly taught how to do by my aunt just after my wedding day.

“Hey friend... Are you still okay out there in the tent? Sorry, I know I have been neglecting you but there is just so much to do” – Me

Andiswa was never very domesticated. She was that girl that arrived in high heels looking all glamorous to enjoy the party at a table somewhere no matter what. Even if it was her best friend’s party she was not willing to get her hands dirty but I understood that. I was also just like her before I became someone’s wife.

“No my friend, Sizwe asked me to check on you. Apparently you are not okay”
– Andiswa

That was all it took for me to burst into tears.

“Andiswa he is cheating. He is seeing another woman,” I managed to say while sobbing.

“Come here” – Andiswa

She pulled me into a hug and the comfort of her arms and chest just made me let go and cry even more.

“Mbali listen to me, you will get pass this... You are a strong beautiful woman and no home wrecker will take your husband away from you” – Andiswa

Luckily I was not wearing any make up otherwise Andiswa’s white shirt would have been terribly stained.

“How could he do this though? How could he do this to me Andiswa?” – Me

“Sssshhhh, calm down. Don’t let people see you like this. Listen, let’s go to my place just for a little while. It’s still early anyway and most people haven’t arrived. I’m sure the other ladies will manage until you come back” – Andiswa

“Maybe you are right. I cannot be here right now. The sight of him makes me sick” – Me

“Here take my car keys and wait for me in the car. I will grab your outfit and you can use my make- up” – Andiswa

“No my make - up bag is in my handbag and my outfit is laid out on my bed” – Me

I was so glad to have Andiswa in my life. She always knew what to do.

I went out the small gate at the back avoiding bumping into people and having to explain why I was crying.

Andiswa came back with everything. She had even packed underwear and toiletries for me.

We drove straight to her house and I cried all the way there.

“I know just what you need,” she said as she opened her kitchen cupboard grabbing a glass of wine.

“I don’t know if that’s such a good idea. Sizwe’s family is there” – Me

“Oh please... They are there and we are here besides you need this. It’s not as though they are saints themselves. Did you see that aunt of his with the orange shirt? She has been at it since last night and she is drinking “black label” beer... So my friend, you have nothing to worry about” – Andiswa

She was right. I needed something to calm my nerves so I took the glass of white wine she had poured and handed to me. She poured herself one too and we made our way into the lounge.

“So what exactly happened?” – Andiswa

“I found a secret phone that he was obviously using to communicate with this woman in the boot of his car” – Me

“What? Are you serious? What made you think it’s his though? There could be a logical explanation for all this. Sizwe does not strike me as the kind of man that would play such games” – Andiswa

I told her about the messages.

“Do you know who this woman is? Did you recognise her number?” – Andiswa

“No, it was not even saved by name and in my fury, I was too hasty to give the phone back to him” – Me

“I see... it would have been nice if you kept the number then we would have found out who it was and go to break the slut’s neck” – Andiswa

She managed to make me laugh a bit and the wine was also kicking in.

“The worst thing you can do is to let this woman shake you up like this because you will be playing right into her hands. I would say, ask Sizwe nothing because anyway he will deny it and find some weird explanation that will probably annoy you even more. Just carry on as usual and be extra nice to him, that will do the trick. He will feel so guilty and that will push him to see his mistake and hopefully end it with this other woman” – Andiswa

“I guess that makes sense but how do I pretend as though everything is okay when I just want to strangle him with my bare hands?” – Me

“Suck it up friend... You can do it as difficult as it may seem” – Andiswa

I trusted Andiswa and I felt that what she was suggesting was the right way to go about it.

“I need to go to the loo... will be right back” – Andiswa

“Go ahead” – Me

I went into the kitchen to pour myself another glass of wine while she was in the toilet and that is when I heard a phone ring.

It was on top of the fridge but it was strange because I had never seen her carry it before. I grabbed it and thought I would hand it to her but then as I looked at the screen, I saw my husband’s number. I would recognise Sizwe’s number even in my sleep.

Why was Sizwe calling Andiswa on some unknown phone and how did he get the number when even I did not have it?

Chapter 5

Andiswa

The rest of the trip at Sun City was great. I steered clear of Sizwe because I somehow felt that something had happened between us when we had drinks together the other day. There was definitely some chemistry there even though both of us did not say anything. I felt the best way to deal with it was to keep my distance until the whole thing blew over.

I always saw my friends' partners as brothers and never had something like this happen to me. How could I be attracted to my best friend's husband? How? The scariest part was that I could see he also felt drawn to me.

The last thing I wanted to do was hurt Mbali, she had been nothing but good to me. She was the only person in my life who was there in good or bad times without fail. We shared our most intimate feelings and thoughts with each other. The bond was very strong so staying away was the only thing that would work. At least until whatever was developing between me and Sizwe faded away.

For the next few weeks after our trip, I kept myself busy with work. My recruitment business needed a bit more attention than the others because it required constant interaction with my clients.

Honestly though, I was not enjoying it anymore but it contributed towards paying my bills. I preferred selling shoes and handbags which I was bloody good at doing. I have always been naturally great at sales. I could sell ice to an eskimo that is just how good I was so it was expected that I would enjoy doing that more. Besides, that business had gotten me out of a slump.

I had gone through a lot in my life and at some point, I ended up squatting at people's houses because I could not afford to have my own place. Going home with my tail between my legs was not an option so I did not give up. I sold everything from Tupperware to make – up and even alcohol but nothing seemed to work. Not until a lady I met at a braai somewhere in Randburg,

introduced me to the business of custom making shoes and then selling them. That is when my perseverance started paying off. That business gave birth to the handbag selling business and a few years later, I was completely independent.

I completed sending off the shortlisted CV's to my client and decided to reward myself with a glass of wine as I was done for the day.

I played some music while going through a magazine I had bought two days prior. I never actually got time to just kick back and relax but when I did, it was total bliss. I enjoyed my own company in fact I really did not know how married women coped with having someone in their space all the time.

I think that is one of the things that put me off marriage.

It did get lonely at times, being single, but most times I loved it.

As I refilled my wine glass yet again, there was a knock on the door.

I wondered who it was because it was quite late.

I slipped on my silk dressing gown and went to check.

I was shocked to see Sizwe standing on the other side when I opened my door.

"Hi, I did not expect to see you here" – Me

"Your facial expression said it all. May I come in?" - Sizwe

"Sure," I said as I unlocked the security gate.

"What brings you here at this time of the night?" – Me

“You” – Sizwe

“That really does not answer my question” – Me

Sizwe just continued staring into my eyes with a smile on his face making me blush.

He then leaned forward and pressed his lips against mine. I could smell the faint smell of whisky on his breath. Before I knew it, we were kissing passionately, it all happened so fast.

We kissed for what seemed like ages until I stopped him.

“Wait Sizwe, what is going on here? We can’t do this and you know it,” I said firmly.

“I know Andiswa but I will not mince my words... Do you know how much torture it has been trying to stay away from you these last few weeks? It took a lot of courage from my side to come here but I just could not help it any longer. I have developed these strong feelings for you and it all started when you first came to visit Mbali at my house and grew stronger in Sun City. You are a beautiful woman, not only that, but you are intelligent and can hold down an interesting conversation. I need that in my life. I want you and I know you feel the same” – Sizwe

I walked back to the lounge and he followed me. I needed a sip of my wine after what had just happened.

“Sizwe, you are married to my best friend” – Me

“If you want me to leave, I will... just say the word” – Sizwe

I wanted to tell him to go then we could both pretend this had never happened and we would just carry on with our lives but I couldn't say it. I could not tell him to leave because I wanted him to stay.

"Look, we can just chat a bit then I will leave. And don't think that I do not have respect for you because I have a whole lot of it but I just cannot resist being with you any longer... Even if it's just for a little conversation" – Sizwe

"Fine, you can stay for a chat," I said as I picked up my glass of wine.

"Can I offer you a glass as well?" – Me

"Sure, that would be lovely" – Sizwe

I went to the kitchen to fetch an empty glass and when I came back to the lounge, Sizwe had taken off his jacket and he was leaning over my cd collection.

"You have very good taste in music Andiswa" – Sizwe

"I know... I grew up listening to this type of music at home so it kind of became a part of me," I said as I handed him a glass of wine.

We ended up chatting and laughing for hours. I got a little tipsy and so did he.

He asked me to dance and we slow danced to a Luther Vandross song but then we were interrupted by his phone ringing.

"Sorry, I have to take this. I'm sure it's Mbali" – Sizwe

I turned down the volume and he answered his phone.

“Hello?”

“Yes I know it’s almost midnight but I told you I would be going out for a drink with my colleague. It took a bit longer than I anticipated.”

“That’s fine. I should be home in the next hour or so...”

“Love you too”

He then hung up. I felt a twinge of jealousy but what right did I have to feel that way. It suddenly dawned on me what I was doing.

“Look Sizwe, it’s been great but I think you need to get going” – Me

“Don’t worry about the call... I will sort this out at home” – Sizwe

“No, Sizwe... You need to go home now. I’m serious” – Me

“Okay then... I guess you are right,” he said as he stood up and grabbed his jacket.

“Thank you for a great evening though” – Me

“It was only my pleasure... And I hope there will be more” – Sizwe

He gave me a hug and held on a bit longer... long enough for me to feel his erection. I pulled away before I got tempted to take things any further. It was bad enough that we had kissed and flirted all night.

He left.

I stood in my kitchen trying to make sense of what had happened but none of it made any sense.

Chapter 6

Mbali

I held on to the phone until Andiswa came back to the kitchen. I had questions... so many questions but I just prayed that I was wrong.

My hands were shaking at the possibility of finding out that both my husband and my best friend were deceiving me. I could not digest this.

“Friend... What CD would you like me to play for you?” she shouted from the lounge.

“Before you play any music... Could you come here for a second?” I said.

Within seconds she appeared from the passage. Her eyes immediately landed on my hand which carried her blackberry that I had never seen before that day.

I checked her for signs of panic but I could not read her. There was absolutely no expression on her face. No look of surprise or discomfort.

“I did not know you carried two phones” – Me

“If you are referring to that phone, I use it for business... mainly for posts that I advertise” – Andiswa

She was very quick in her response. She did not stutter or hesitate.

“So why is my husband calling you on this phone?” – Me

“Because I gave him that number before we left your place since he wanted me to update him on how you were. I know I should have told you. My other phone has water damage and sometimes it does not receive signal very well, that’s why I gave him the number to this phone” – Andiswa

It was either Andiswa had missed her calling for acting or she was really telling the truth because I saw no signs of a lie coming from her lips.

I was observing her reaction because when people told lies their bodies defied them and gave it away but that was not the case with Andiswa. She kept eye contact and she did not fidget or hesitate when she responded.

“I see” – Me

“What is this Mbali? Are you accusing me of something?” – Andiswa

“Look Andiswa, I happened to see this phone when you were in the bathroom and at that same moment Sizwe called. My imagination ran wild and it was so wrong of me. Please accept my apology. I’m not my normal self at the moment” – Me

She looked to the ceiling with a smile of disbelief on her face.

“I really find it so hard to understand that you would think I could do something like that? What the hell do you take me for Mbali? I thought you knew me better than that” – Andiswa

“Andiswa, I’m sorry but please try to understand... You’ve always been such a good friend to me, more of a sister and I don’t know why I let my thoughts go in that direction. I’m just not in a good space right now. What Sizwe did has left me with deep trust issues again. Please accept my apology and let’s pretend this never happened” – Me

“My friend, you know I love you and I understand. You are forgiven but please... Never ever let your mind deceive you like that” – Andiswa

That was Andiswa for you. Never holding grudges.

“Thank you friend... Now, what were you saying about the music?” – Me

“How about we play some nice upbeat music to cheer you up... House?” – Andiswa

“Bring it on... and while you are at it. I need a refill of my wine” – Me

We laughed and hugged each other.

“At the pace you are going, we will not make it back to your husband’s thanksgiving party” – Andiswa

“We will definitely make it but only later... they will just have to be strong because I need to gather my strength” – Me

She held her hand up for a “high five” and poured more wine for me.

In true Andiswa style, she then ran to the lounge, inserted a house music CD and turned up the volume to full blast.

At that moment, it was just what I needed.

We danced and laughed like nothing had happened.

Later on when I was nice and tipsy, I took a shower, got dressed and put on my make-up.

“Let’s go and have fun” – Me

“YES girl!” – Andiswa

We arrived back at my house when the party was in full swing. Everybody was excited to see us except the ladies that I was initially cooking with in the kitchen and of course, my in laws. “You were not supposed to leave the house” ... blah, blah, blah!

I have always behaved like the perfect daughter in law but that evening, I did not care much what they thought. I was done being the door mat. I had given my everything to the marriage and yet again I was left feeling short changed.

From that point onwards, I was putting Mbali first.

A month later...

I chose to pretend as though the cheating incident with Sizwe had never happened. I did not question him or even demand any explanations. I simply carried on as though nothing had happened. Yes, I took Andiswa’s advise and it turned out to be the best thing I could have done for myself and my family. Sizwe was as straight as a ruler although it was not an easy thing to do initially. It killed me not knowing what exactly was going on but then I knew that even if I did ask him, chances are, he would have lied to me anyway.

I guess the saying, “Silence is golden” proved to be correct in this instance. Sizwe was a doting husband. I was treated like a queen and Thapelo was a

prince for that whole month. Then the request for another prince or princess came. Sizwe wanted another child.

I did not mind, honestly. I was also feeling a bit broody and believed that a new life in the house would help to mend things for us.

Babies always had the power to do that. They brought people together, at least people who wanted to be together.

I stopped all my birth control pills and we started trying for another little one.

Chapter 7

ANDISWA

I spent the next week unable to stop thinking about Sizwe. Everything that was happening was just too confusing. He had not called nor showed up after the other night. It did make me feel a bit disappointed but perhaps he had come to his senses and realised how wrong this whole thing was. I had been ditching Mbali because I just could not face her knowing that I was pining over her husband. What kind of friend does that to someone they call a sister? And Thapelo... I would be robbing him of the only person he had ever known as a father. He did not deserve that, not after that idiot Zaba discarded him and acted like he did not exist. I never got the chance to meet that man and I'm glad I did not because I would spit in his face. The stories that Mbali had told me about him left me shaking with anger every time. But was I seriously any different from Zaba now that I had developed feelings for Sizwe? I really needed to pull myself together and let go of this sick fantasy of mine.

It was business as usual for me. My car was giving me problems so I had called to book it in for a check- up which meant I would be without a car for a few days. It was not ideal because that meant I could not make any deliveries which would leave me with a shit load of catching up to do once I was mobile again.

I took out the trash and tidied up a bit. My place never really got messy because it was mostly just me in the house and I am a very organized person.

I then took a shower and started preparing to go to the garage to make the drop off.

I had about three hours to kill before then, I had woken up very early. I was an early riser but five o'clock on a Saturday was just a bit too early.

I put on my matching set of undies and proceeded to prepare some breakfast.

I loved waking around semi naked. I admired my curves and small waist. I could never get enough of my flawless skin and hour glass shape. I always did some exercise at home just to keep firm but I never had the desire to lose weight because I was happy with my size thirty- six figure. Unlike Mbali, I had never been thin and I don't think I ever would be because most women on my mother's side of the family had the same body type as me. I must have inherited it from there.

I actually never had body issues even as a teenager when this type of shape was not seen as ideal. My mother always rocked her curvaceous body and she knew how to dress it so that gave me the confidence to know that I was beautiful just the way I am and it has been that way ever since I could remember. I was gifted on the backside but it just accentuated my small waist and I flaunted it big time.

I moved around the kitchen humming along to a Dionne Warwick song that was playing on the radio. I was in a good mood but then again I almost always was. Life was too short to spend it moping around and entertaining negativity.

As I turned to switch off the stove, I got the fright of my life.

There was someone standing in my kitchen right next to the door.

It was Sizwe. He was in shorts and a red t-shirt.

"What the hell are you doing here? You almost gave me a heart attack!" I shouted feeling extremely annoyed.

"I didn't mean to scare you. I did knock but the door was open so I let myself in" – Sizwe

“I must have left it open when I took out the trash” – Me

“You must be careful... especially if you are going to walk around looking so sexy” – Sizwe

I suddenly realised I was not dressed and the only thing protecting my dignity was my black and gold underwear so I immediately went to grab a bathrobe so I could cover myself. Irritation was an understatement. I was furious at Sizwe for invading my privacy like that and what the hell was he doing in my house this early? It was only six thirty. Did Mbali not give him a reason to stay in bed and enjoy Saturday morning?

I made a mental note to have my gate lock fixed. The idea of Sizwe just coming in and out of my house like he owned it was starting to freak me out. Did he not even think that I could have had company?

I walked back to the kitchen and found him making a cup of tea.

He was really making himself feel comfortable.

“I thought I should help myself since you did not offer” – Sizwe

“Listen here Sizwe, this stops right now. You cannot come and go as you please here. This is my house and I do not appreciate you just sneaking up on me like this” – Me

“I’m sorry. I just couldn’t call you because I do not have your number and I did not want to make Mbali suspicious by asking for it” – Sizwe

“Suspicious of what? Just learn to stay home with your wife then you will not have to sneak around other people’s homes at six thirty in the morning like a little creep!” – Me

“Ok, I guess I deserved that” – Sizwe

The little smirk on his face just told me he was not bothered by my lashing.

“What the hell are you doing here anyway?” – Me

“I came because I really needed to see you but I got more than what I had bargained for. Did anyone ever tell you what an amazingly gorgeous body you have?” – Sizwe

He took a sip of his tea.

“I will smack that smile of your face... Pervert” – Me

I must admit I was a little flattered by the compliment even though I had been told the same thing countless times but coming from Sizwe, it held some weight.

“Okay... I’m sorry Andiswa for catching you by surprise like this. Can we at least sit down and talk?” - Sizwe

“Fine... I made more than enough, would you like to join me for breakfast?” – Me

“I will just have some toast... I’m not really big on breakfast” – Sizwe

I made him some toast and then we sat at the kitchen counter and ate.

He told me about his new job and we chatted a bit about my business. When we were done eating, he helped me wash the dishes which I thought was quite sweet.

We stood side by side at the sink and I could smell his cologne... I had such a weakness for a man that smelled good. The chemistry between us was just so unbearably strong even though we were both trying so hard to ignore it.

I stole a glimpse but he caught me looking at him. His eyes just looked so sexy and full of lust at that moment.

I felt my body reacting to this. We did not speak...

I had no doubt he felt the same thing I was feeling because he leaned over and kissed me.

I felt myself getting so aroused, it was unbelievable. This time I had no strength to resist.

We continued to kiss and I started pulling his shirt off.

He let me and even assisted by lifting his arms.

I then went on to undoing his belt as he undid the tight knot on my bathrobe.

As his shorts fell off, so did my bathrobe leaving us both exposed but not completely. With only a single attempt, he managed to unhook my bra. That showed me he had a lot of experience which was sexy.

He took a moment to take in the sight of my breast. They were a C- cup and quite perky.

I suppose that was enough to drive him to the brink of insanity because he suddenly lifted me up and placed me on top of the kitchen counter, he pulled

my panties to the side and pulled out his manhood. It was thick, long and erect. I felt myself getting drunk with anticipation.

He looked me straight in the eye as he gently penetrated me, I let out a loud moan and so did he. I was wet and ready and he just filled me up perfectly before he started thrusting in and out.

It had been a while since I had sex and it felt so good. I played with my clitoris as he carried on thrusting. It was not long before I came but he did not.

“Let’s take this to the bedroom,” he said.

We did just that and in the bedroom, I went on top of him and as he was about to come, we exchanged positions... He started humping and pumping violently until he finally got his release.

A few minutes later, he rolled to the side... looking spent.

He then covered his face with his left hand and the ring on his finger glistened in the morning light reminding me of what had really just happened.

Mbali

For the first three months we had sex regularly. It actually started feeling like a chore but knowing what the reward was made it worthwhile.

I read all about the best ways to fall pregnant. One publication stated that doing it around six in the morning was the best time as the body is still relaxed

and the best position was the missionary because it made the pathway to the cervix much closer and, and, and... We did all that and I timed myself, fourteen days after my last period started was supposed to be the best time because that is when most women ovulate. I would make sure that we tried harder along those times. I was so sure that it would work because we did everything we could, I even bought folic acid supplements and stopped drinking any alcohol.

Andiswa was not very pleased about the alcohol part even though she did not know why I had stopped drinking. We always enjoyed sharing a bottle of wine or two especially when we met over the weekend. Sizwe suggested that we keep this information to ourselves so we did not have to deal with the added pressure of people wanting to know how our baby making project was going. I agreed with him so I did not tell a soul, not even Andiswa. It took a lot out of me to keep this a secret because Andiswa and I shared everything. I really wanted to tell her about our plans but I did not want to jinx it either.

After the third month of trying, I started to experience some symptoms of pregnancy... nausea, frequent urination, fatigue and the occasional headache.

I was really excited and I just could not wait for the date of my expected menstrual period so I could confirm my suspicions. I knew if I did not get my period then chances are that I was pregnant.

On this particular day, Sizwe and I were just lazing around since it was a Saturday and we had not made any plans. Thapelo had left the previous day for a school camp of seven days. Since I had finally stopped working and become a house wife, I really enjoyed having Sizwe and Thapelo around because it got boring during the day when I was alone so any time spent with Sizwe was treasured. I must say, he was back to his normal self. There were no more late - night meetings and early morning golf sessions. I was very happy.

I finally had the life I wanted minus the job I loathed. What more could a girl want?

Sizwe was doing well at work and he earned quite a substantial amount, which meant we could finally afford to buy a house in the suburbs and we were looking. Everything was going so well.

“My love, you are getting a little wide on the hips, did you notice?” – Sizwe

“Yes, actually I thought I was seeing things. I’m glad you see it too” – Me

“Maybe we already have a little bun in the oven” – Sizwe

Normally I would not be so happy to gain weight but if it meant that it was because of pregnancy then I welcomed it with open arms. I had never been a big girl. All my life, I had always been a size thirty or thirty – two but I did notice my clothes were becoming a little tight and a lot harder to fit into.

“It could take a while for that to happen you know” – Me

I just did not want him to get his hopes high and then get disappointed.

“Maybe we are both quite fertile and we have already hit the target” – Sizwe

“I hope that’s the case,” I said laughing.

“You know what my love, I hope it’s another boy so that Thapelo can have a brother to help him build the family name and they can also protect each other in future”- Sizwe

It was amazing how Sizwe had accepted Thapelo as his own, he even legally adopted him.

“I’m already out numbered so I would be very happy with a girl to balance things out. I need someone to inherit all these shoes and handbags you spoil me with” – Me

“Well may the best man win” – Sizwe

We both giggled as he tickled my tummy.

“On a serious note though. I don’t care what gender this baby is. As long as it is healthy, I am happy” – Sizwe

“You talk as though, there’s already a baby to speak of” – Me

“Why wouldn’t there be? I mean I have been pumping it in! Have some faith” – Sizwe

“Don’t make it sound so technical,” I say slapping his thigh.

“It’s so wonderful to see you smile again. I was really an idiot to do what I did by letting my eye wander. I really don’t know what got into me. You are a really special person Mbali and I know we have never addressed this issue but I just want you to know that she meant nothing to me. It was just lust that got the best of me. Please forgive me for hurting you like that, I promise it will never happen again” – Sizwe

The mood suddenly changed.

“Sizwe, there is a reason why I never brought this up. I want to forget it ever happened and focus on the present but since you brought it up. Who was she? Please be honest with me” – Me

He looked very uncomfortable but just as he was about to start talking, the buzzer at the gate went off. Some people just don't have timing.

“It's okay, I will get it” – Me

I stood up to check who it was through the window.

“It looks like Andiswa's car” – Me

“What is she doing here? Did you make an appointment with her?” – Sizwe

“No, it's very strange that she would show up unannounced like this, she usually calls,” I said as I pressed the button that opened the gate.

“It's also quite rude. You should call her to order. I was hoping to spend a quiet afternoon with my wife” – Sizwe

“I know my love... But it's not like she does this all the time, there must be a reason why she didn't call... Ssshhh... she's here” – Me

There was a single knock on the door and then Andiswa let herself in.

She looked quite disturbed as though something horrible had happened.

“Hey friend! Are you okay?” I said as I gave her a hug as soon as she came in.

“I’m good friend. Hello Sizwe... Sorry to just budge in on you like this but I really need to talk to you!” – Andiswa

She looked quite serious, very sad actually as though she was about to burst into tears.

“Take a seat,” – Me

I pulled up a chair for her at the dining table.

“Sizwe could you please excuse us. I think Andiswa might need some privacy” – Me

Sizwe shifted on the couch preparing to leave.

“No, he can stay. What I have to say concerns him too”

Chapter 8

Andiswa

I had betrayed Mbali in the most horrible way possible. What was I thinking? Truth is... I wasn't thinking. I let lust blind me completely. The sex with Sizwe was good I had to admit but was it worth losing my friendship with Mbali? Here I was in bed with her husband.

"Oooohhh gosh Sizwe! What have we done?" – Me

He looked at me from the sides of his eyes and then back up again.

"Look Andiswa, Mbali does not have to find out about this if we are careful" – Sizwe

"How is that even possible. You must admit we are playing with fire here and this thing you do by just turning up here unannounced must stop, it's becoming a habit" – Me

"I already explained why I did that but look... I will get an extra phone where I can call you and only you will have the number. I suggest you do the same so that we have some form of communication without being caught out" – Sizwe

"So you actually plan to continue with this?" – Me

“It’s already done so does it matter if we do it once or ten times?” – Sizwe

“Why would we even risk doing it again?” – Me

“Because we are attracted to each other and we are two adults who want to keep each other happy and explore. Who knows what could happen in future?” – Sizwe

“At what expense though Sizwe?” – Me

“Andiswa, do you want to do this or not? I know my wife and I know how to keep her from finding out. If we are careful then you and I can have our fun on the side. I know you get lonely and I’m here babe...” - Sizwe

He was certainly very persuasive... He is a lawyer after all but it’s not like I needed much persuasion anyway. I was already taken. I had developed feelings for Sizwe and sleeping with him had just strengthened what I felt for him.

“Let me think about this” – Me

He sat up and started making his way to the shower.

“I hope it’s okay if I use your bathroom” – Sizwe

“Go ahead” – Me

I lay in bed with butterflies in my stomach. I could not help but smile as I thought about the sex we had just had.

I knew I had to have it again even though I did not want to admit it to Sizwe or to myself.

It was not long before Sizwe strutted back into the bedroom. He picked up his underwear and made his way back to the kitchen where the rest of his clothes were probably scattered on the floor.

I was too tired to stand up so I just lay on the bed.

He came back in, all dressed up, looking as though nothing had happened.

“I have to go. I told Mbali that I was going to play soccer with the guys, she will start wondering where I am. I left some money for you on the kitchen counter so you can get yourself an extra phone and maybe go out for lunch or something. Send me your new number once you have it. I will also get one and send you mine” – Sizwe

“Okay” – Me

He gave me a kiss on the forehead.

“Don’t spend the day feeling guilty now. Call me later okay?” – Sizwe

That empty feeling as he left was indescribable. Is that what women who dated married men had to go through every time or does there come a time when they become immune to it?

Eventually I dragged myself out of bed because I had to take my car to the garage. I took a shower, got dressed and on my way out saw the money Sizwe had left on the counter. It seemed like a lot for just a phone.

I counted it and it added up to four thousand rand.

'I could surely get used to this,' I thought to myself.

I actually felt entitled to it. I gave him a good time too after all.

Needless to say, we continued with the affair and it got very steamy. Sizwe was gentle, charming, funny and protective. He made me feel like no man ever has. I started falling madly in love with him and I just could not get enough. He also made sure that I had everything I needed, not that I could not afford to do that myself but having someone else take care of my needs for a change felt good. I saved and had enough to spoil myself. Sizwe was so loving and attentive I even started feeling as though I was winning him over. I could feel that he started preferring my company over Mbali's. I mean, he was always with me even though he made sure that he always slept at home with her no matter how late he left.

We were very careful and Mbali did not suspect anything. I got over the guilt. It took time but eventually I did not feel as bad as I initially did. Sizwe and I trusted each other, in fact we had not even used protection from day one. I was on birth control but we were still not protected from disease. I was just so intoxicated by him so much so that I did not even think about that, besides Mbali would have told me if there was anything to worry about. She told me everything.

Sizwe would come and see me after work and even over the weekend. We would both enquire about Mbali's whereabouts just to make sure that we were not caught. The weekend was too risky so we normally met at a hotel but during the week we met at my place. We did not go out in public, that was just too risky. We had everything under control or so we thought...

It was Sizwe's thanksgiving party when shit almost hit the fan. He left his phone in his boot and Mbali found it. Luckily, she did not know the number I had used to send Sizwe the messages she saw on his phone.

When he realised that Mbali had seen the messages, Sizwe sent me a message tipping me off so I knew immediately that I had to find out how much she knows but it turned out she did not know that the other woman was me. I ended up being the one who had to console her which also almost landed me in trouble. She found the secret phone at my place just as Sizwe was calling me.

I had to put my acting skills to the test and it worked. I gave her lots of wine and she forgot about it. It definitely was not something she expected to find anyway. The risk of her finding out was just too big. I loved her too much to hurt her like that yet I had begun to love her husband even more.

We got out of that one luckily, but then the trouble started when Sizwe dumped me as a result of almost being caught. He told me he wanted to work things out with Mbali and he could not do that if we continued the affair. At first, I backed off even though I was hurt. I kept thinking he would come back when things had calmed down but as the months went by and I still did not hear from him, I got angry. How could he treat me like a princess, promise me the world and at the slightest sight of trouble discard me like old news? How could he make me fall in love with him and then just leave me like nothing had ever happened? That meant I never meant anything to him. I was just a distraction.

He had messed with the wrong woman this time. I was not going to deal with this pain alone while he carried on playing happy family. I wanted him to feel what I was feeling even if it meant that I lost Mbali as a friend. That was how far I was willing to go!

I took a shower and went straight to Sizwe and Mbali's house before I changed my mind, I did not even call because I wanted to catch him by surprise. I was determined to spill the beans.

He definitely would not see this one coming.

Mbali

Andiswa looked at me straight in the eye. Even though she asked for Sizwe to stay, never once did she look his way, she kept eye contact with him. I was very concerned about her because I could see that whatever was bothering her was something big. Tear drops escaped her eyes and she just burst out crying.

I held her in my arms, wondering what could have her so shaken.

“My friend, what is going on... talk to me” – Me

At this stage she was just weeping on my shoulder.

“Sizwe please get her a glass of water from the kitchen,” I said turning to face him.

It was the weirdest thing... he looked as though he had just seen a ghost, but then again men always acted in a strange way at the sight of a woman crying.

He stood up to get the water very hesitantly as though he did not really want to leave the room.

Andiswa finally let go and I took her hand, it was shaking.

“I’m so sorry my friend... I did not mean to ruin your afternoon getting cosy with your husband. It’s just that, I really needed to talk to you” – Andiswa

“You know that I’m always here for you. Sizwe is not going anywhere, there will be more afternoons spent with him. This is more important now” - Me

Sizwe came back into the room holding a glass of water in his hand which he handed to Andiswa. I felt some tension between the two of them. Come to think of it, it had been a while since Andiswa spent time with me in his presence. It almost seemed like Sizwe was avoiding her for some reason.

“Is everything okay Sizwe?” – Me

“Yes... Sure my love. Why do you ask?” – Sizwe

“I don’t know, maybe it’s my imagination” – Me

I was going to ask Sizwe about his strange behaviour towards Andiswa when she left. I thought we were over his insecurity about single women.

“Look Sizwe, you can go. I’m sorry for forcing you to witness this teary session. I will speak to Mbali alone and she can fill you in later. I don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable” – Andiswa

“It’s really not a problem for me to stay maybe I can put in my two cents worth and help you resolve whatever problem you seem to have” – Sizwe

“No really, it’s fine. Now that I have thought about it I think I will feel more comfortable speaking to Mbali alone” – Andiswa

I shot Sizwe an eye.

“It’s fine Sizwe, I think you should go. Isn’t there a soccer match or something you can watch in the TV room on the other side?” – Me

“I will just go check what the guys are up to... Call me if you need anything” – Sizwe

He took his wallet and car keys from the coffee table and left.

Finally, Andiswa and I were alone and she could tell me what was bothering her.

“So my friend... Are you ready to tell me what is going on with you?” – Me

“I feel so dumb now. I think I’m going through early menopause or something. I have been so emotional lately and just reflecting on my life. Mbali, I have nothing, no child, no husband and I’m already in my mid – thirties. Does that mean I will grow old alone? Hell, I don’t even own a dog at least. What kind of life is that? I always thought I was fine being by myself but these days, I’m honestly not. I don’t want to be alone anymore,” she said as she burst into tears all over again.

“Andiswa... Friend... Look at me” – Me

She wiped her eyes with the tissue she was holding.

“You know that Sizwe, Thapelo and I will always be here for you. How can you even think that you are alone? You are part of our family now and you will not grow old alone because you have us. We will build you a cottage at the back of our new house if we have to and then you can sell your house,” I said light-heartedly, trying to cheer her up.

It worked because I saw a smile begin to form on her lips.

“Careful! I might just take you up on that offer” – Andiswa

“Why not? It’s actually not a bad idea at all. We can even legally adopt you and you can also take our surname,” I added laughing.

“Trust you to say something like that” – Andiswa

She was smiling brightly at this stage and I was so glad. Andiswa had been through so much in her life and I really felt bad for her but I never thought that it affected her this much now that she had grown. She always put on a brave face and she never let on that she was feeling anxious about not having a family of her own.

It was understandable that she would feel this way though because she had faced rejection at an early age. You see, Andiswa never knew her father and her mother never had much time for her. She was raised by helpers mostly while her mother lived a party life. Looking at her now, the apple did not fall very far from the tree because Andiswa herself was a bit of a party animal but I know that she would never have neglected her child if she had one. I’ve seen how she is with Thapelo. She loves children and they love her too.

Anyway, she had been forced to leave home at a very young age and her relationship with her mother never recovered.

“Andiswa, on a serious note though. You are a beautiful successful woman with a lot to be proud of. You have achieved a lot at your age and you managed to do all of that on your own with no help from anybody. There is absolutely no reason for you to ever feel like a failure. I really wish that you could find love and have plenty of children but honestly I do not see you going in that direction and it is not a bad thing either. We all have different destinations and not all of us are going to end up in marriage. It is overrated anyway if you ask me... just don’t tell Sizwe I said that” – Me

We both laughed.

“You always know just what to say! Thank you for making me feel better friend” – Andiswa

“So how about a glass of wine while I play Dr Phil?” – Me

“I thought you were not drinking anymore” – Andiswa

“Just one won’t hurt... or maybe two” – Me

“Then bring it on” – Andiswa

I really did not want to drink but I wanted Andiswa to feel better and what harm could a glass of wine do?

I got us a bottle of chardonnay and some snacks to nibble on.

We then sat on the couch and played some music like we always did when we were home on a weekend.

“So my friend... Enough about me. How are things between you and Sizwe? Is he still acting funny?” – Andiswa

“Things have never been better! He’s been behaving so well after I found that secret phone so I think he ditched the whore. Your advice worked like a charm!” – Me

“That sounds great friend... Cheers to that!” she said as she held up her glass.

“In fact... we are working on something and it’s huge” – Me

“Are you going to say it already? Don’t keep me in suspense,” She asked as she leaned toward me in exaggeration.

“Please promise not to mention anything to Sizwe because it’s supposed to be a secret” – Me

“Have I ever shared any of our conversations with your hubby? Come on now!”
– Andiswa

“Okay fine... Sizwe and I are trying for a baby. In fact, I could already be pregnant”

I knew I was not supposed to tell her about our plans but come on, I have told her a lot of things she was not supposed to know before so it would not be the first time. I just could not keep this to myself anymore but to my amazement Andiswa did not respond the way I was expecting her to. She shifted her gaze and looked straight across the room as though it was the worst thing she could have heard.

What the hell?

Chapter 9

Andiswa

When I went to their house, the intention was to spill the beans on my affair with Sizwe but when I looked into Mbali's eyes and saw the genuine concern, I just couldn't do it. I immediately sobered up from the anger I was feeling. Seeing Mbali and Sizwe together in the same room reminded me of the magnitude of my actions and what I was about to do. I realised what a difficult position Sizwe had put himself in and how he was trying to rectify it. I also realised why Sizwe loved Mbali so much, who wouldn't? She was such a loving and caring person who always put others ahead of herself... She was truly selfless. My plot to hurt Sizwe with my confession would have hurt her much more than it would hurt Sizwe. I would have turned all our lives upside down and it wasn't worth it. Mbali was the innocent one in all of this.

It came as a shock to me when she told me that they were trying for a baby and she might even be pregnant. I could not even hide the disappointment I felt. But what was I expecting? Sizwe and Mbali are married and that was inevitable. I was just a secret lover who was stabbing her own best friend in the back. Still, I could not help but feel hurt.

This whole thing with Sizwe had gone too far and I had to restrain myself and try to move on from it for everybody's sake. I could not rob Thapelo of a father and to make matters worse there was a new baby that might have been coming.

The information that Mbali had just divulged shocked me back to reality. It was time to let Sizwe go and let him be where he wanted to be. It was the price I had to pay for betraying my friend.

“I thought you would be happy for us Andiswa but why does it look like you don’t like what I just told you?” – Mbali

I was jolted back to my conversation with Mbali after I got lost in thought. My reaction certainly did not look right.

“I am so sorry my friend. Of course I am happy for you guys, in fact I’m delighted to be an aunty yet again. It’s just that what you just told me just made me think about my own sorry state of affairs. That was completely selfish and unfair of me” – Me

“No, no... I understand. My timing was very bad. I should be apologising to you. I mean you just came in here distraught and confused about not having a family of your own and here I am gloating about my plans to grow mine. That was a bit tactless” – Mbali

“Let’s just drink to this and forget about my pity party” – Me

“Okay...” she said as she smiled.

She was glowing and the happiness she felt inside just radiated on the outside.

I became very envious of her life. She had it all, everything I ever wanted and there was not a damn thing I could do about it.

I downed what was left of the wine from my glass and poured myself some more.

Mbali was taking it easy, her first glass was still full, she had just a few sips of it. It started to make sense why she had quit drinking.

“You know what my friend. You should not be drinking so I will not be a bad influence. I have taken so much of your time anyway today. Let me go and

leave you to enjoy the rest of the afternoon with your hubby. I will call you later” – Me

“Oh come on, it’s not like it’s confirmed that I’m pregnant and anyway Sizwe’s gone to see his buddies... Relax” – Mbali

The real reason why I was leaving was because I could not bear to look at her knowing that she was carrying Sizwe’s child anymore. I was beginning to get jealous and I hated it.

“Call him and tell him to come back. I can’t drink so much anyway because I’m driving and did not take an Uber like we normally do when we plan to get drunk” – Me

“Well, I wouldn’t want you to get in trouble with the cops or even worse get involved in an accident so maybe you’re right. I will call him now” – Mbali

She picked up her phone and dialled Sizwe’s number.

“Hey love, where are you?” ...

“You can come home now, Andiswa has to go” ...

“See you just now”

She hung up and turned to face me, “He decided to go to Mike’s house just down the road so he’s on his way back now.”

I stood up not wasting any time. I did not want to be there when he got back home.

“Well friend, I will see you soon. Let me go... thank you for everything hey” – Me

“You know that my door is always open Andiswa” – Mbali

“I know,” I said as I gave her a hug.

“I love you and please take care of yourself. Stop overthinking” – Mbali

“I will try. I love you too” – Me

She walked me out and as I reversed out the gate, I spotted Sizwe walking up the road so I turned and drove in the opposite direction.

At that moment my phone started ringing. It was him... I ignored the call.

He was probably trying to find out what I had said to Mbali. What a mess!!!

I needed to just unwind and have fun so I drove to a hangout spot in Vosloorus that was always chilled and filled with interesting people. I knew most people who frequented the place so I was sure that I would have company. It was a classy, little jazz lounge which had been operating for the past three years or so.

I managed to find a safe parking spot just outside the yard. There were a lot of cars outside which meant it was quite packed inside and that was just what I needed. I wanted to get lost in the music, dance and have fun so I did not have to think about the mess that was my life.

I grabbed my make - up bag and applied a bit of make – up, lots of mascara and bright purple lipstick. I did not want my appearance to give away my inner turmoil.

When I was satisfied, I grabbed my phone and handbag, locked the car and walked in.

I scanned the room for familiar faces but just as I was doing that, I heard someone call out my name.

It was Aubrey... He was a regular at this jazz lounge. He always came alone but he would end up being surrounded by all sorts of characters. He was rich and money was like a magnet at these places. Normally, the moneyed guy would get tipsy and generous then drinks would start flowing, on him of course, so everybody wanted to be around ‘that guy’.

I never wanted to be seen as a groupie so I avoided that type of company but on this particular day, it did not seem like I had a choice because I could not see anybody else that I recognised.

What the heck! He was fun anyway.

I joined him and he immediately called the waiter for my order.

“I will have a double vodka and lemonade please” – Me

“That’s my girl... In fact, bring her the whole bottle of vodka and a couple of lemonade cans” – Aubrey

The waiter nodded.

“I still need to drive home Aubrey,” I said laughing.

“We will worry about that when the time comes but rest assured, you will get home safely. Let’s just drink and enjoy ourselves for now” – Aubrey

I was happy with that. There was just something about a wealthy man that made one feel safe around them. I suppose it was the fact that they could afford to make things happen no matter how ridiculous the request was. So I knew that I was safe with Aubrey. He would make sure that I got home safely.

There were about three other guys and one lady at our table so there was conversation all around. I was really enjoying myself and I was quite amazed by how fun and easy-going Aubrey was. He seemed like the type of guy one had to have as a friend, nothing more. I was not necessarily looking for the type of relationship where I had to fend off girls at every corner because they swarmed around him like bees to honey and which man would not enjoy that kind of attention?

We laughed, chatted, danced and drank for a few hours with Aubrey casually trying his luck on me. Going there was probably the best decision I had made all day. All my problems seemed to be far removed from me and I was in the moment.

As though I had jinxed it... In came Sizwe with tumbler in hand.

What the hell was he doing there? I did not even know that Sizwe went to places like this. He had changed from what he was wearing earlier. He looked more smart in a pair of blue jeans and a casual grey shirt.

My stomach just knotted at the sight of him. He was completely oblivious of my presence there. It looked like he was with some other people because he was talking to two guys while they settled into a table on the other side of the room but then a very tall, slender woman in a very short white skirt came through the door and sat right next to Sizwe and he put his arm around her... She was very light in complexion with legs that looked like they went on forever but she looked very classy, certainly not the type that hung around for free drinks. The two of them looked very cosy... a bit too cosy.

I could not believe what was happening right before my eyes.

Mbali

Sizwe came in right after Andiswa left.

“Hey, I didn’t think your friend would leave so soon,” he said looking a bit uneasy.

“I also thought she would stay a bit longer but she decided to go earlier” – Me

I did not mention the fact that she was avoiding getting drunk because Sizwe was always complaining about women who drank too much. I did not want him to classify Andiswa as a drunkard because he could get a bit judgmental.

“Okay, I had started having drinks with the guys but it’s cool... I would rather spend time with you” – Sizwe

“Ncoooh... that is so sweet but you can still have a drink here at home” – Me

“It’s not so fun when you drink alone and I don’t want to tempt you... you know you are carrying precious cargo” – Sizwe

“Don’t get ahead of yourself now... it’s not confirmed” – Me

“I can feel it in my core. You are pregnant” – Sizwe

I laughed, wishing that what Sizwe was saying really was the case.

“Why don’t you go back to your friends and hang out with them. I could do with some “me” time anyway since Thapelo is also not here” – Me

“No, it’s okay. The guys are going to a party in Vosloorus shortly anyway” – Sizwe

“Well, why don’t you join them then?” – Me

He looked surprised because I had never encouraged him to hang out with his buddies at night. The reason I wanted him out of the house though was because I had bought some home pregnancy tests and I wanted to be alone when I found out if I was pregnant or not so I could internalise it alone first before I told him. I was so sure that the results would be positive though, all the signs were there.

“Babe, this party could go on until very late” – Sizwe

“So what? Go and have fun with your friends for a change. You hardly ever go out these days anyway” – Me

“Are you sure?” – Sizwe

“Yes, just go before I change my mind” – Me

He looked a bit hesitant but I knew he would not let the chance to go out freely with his friends pass him by.

“I will go and change then but before I go, what was up with your friend? She looked very disturbed” – Sizwe

“Oh... yes. She is just feeling emotional about being alone. I think the fact that she is not getting any younger and she still does not have anyone has started getting to her. She was very upset” – Me

“I always told you that she was just pretending to be okay with this but deep inside she couldn't be happy” – Sizwe

“No, I think you are wrong. She enjoys being single but I suppose at times it does get a bit overwhelming” – Me

“Mbali, everybody needs somebody. Andiswa has nobody but she fills that hole in her life with work and parties... it's not healthy” – Sizwe

“Well, not everybody wants to get married Sizwe” – Me

“I'm not talking about marriage. Maybe we can hook her up with Mike, she needs to get a man” – Sizwe

“Mike? Hell no... that guy does not even know if it's Monday or Friday. He's just drowning in booze half the time” – Me

“He's not that bad... come on,” he says laughing.

“No, bad idea” – Me

“Anyway, let me go and get dressed then. Hope she will be fine” -Sizwe

He came back from the bedroom dressed in jeans and a grey shirt.

“You look smart...” – Me

“Thanks, babe. Do you need anything from me before I go?” -Sizwe

“No... just behave yourself and call me when you get there” – Me

“I will call you,” he kissed me on the forehead.

“And don’t worry about me behaving... I have been blessed with the most beautiful woman on earth, what more could I ask for?” – Sizwe

“As long as you don’t forget it,” I said laughing.

“Not a chance!” He shouts as he shuts the door behind him.

I feel a sense of peace as I watch him drive off from the window. I had never been so content in my life. Everything seemed to be going so well for us.

I just knew that this baby would bring even more joy to us, especially Sizwe.

Even though he has always considered Thapelo as his own son, I knew he still wanted a child. It would be the biggest gift I could ever give to him.

I got excited just thinking about it so I went straight to the bedroom and took out the three pregnancy test kits that I had hidden under my clothing in the closet.

I had not used these since finding out I was pregnant with Thapelo.

Even though I knew the best way would have been to wait for a missed period and to do the test in the morning, I was just too impatient. I needed to know so I bought the very sensitive testing kits. They were apparently able to detect pregnancy within the first two weeks of conception.

I tore open the first test and went into the bathroom. I urinated in a disposable, plastic cup and dipped the first test in the urine for a few seconds as it stated and then I waited for a couple of minutes before reading the results.

It seemed like the longest few minutes of my life. I tried to distract myself by watching some TV in the lounge while I waited but all I could think about was the result.

Eventually, I went back into the bathroom, said a short prayer and picked up the test to look at the result.

My heart just sank to the floor. There was only one bright red line on the stick which meant the result was negative, I was not pregnant.

I did not want to believe that because I knew my body very well and I had all the symptoms of pregnancy so how was it possible?

I dipped another stick into the urine and waited again for the result. It still came back negative.

I was shattered.

I could not help but let the tears trickle down my cheeks. We had tried so hard and Sizwe was so convinced I was pregnant. Honestly, so was I.

He would be so disappointed.

Chapter 10

Andiswa

I was confused as to how to react but I was furious. I obviously could not go and confront Sizwe, it was not my place to do so. I was his wife's best friend but I was just as guilty of betraying Mbali as he was.

So I was not his only mistress, he was juggling three women, if not more, at the same time.

I could deal with him being married but being played like this was definitely not on. I had to teach Sizwe a lesson he would never forget. Who would have guessed that the principled and dignified Sizwe was actually an undercover womanizer? I felt my stomach turn and I started to get sick so I quickly ran to the bathroom and threw up. It was not only the alcohol that had made me feel sick but Sizwe's sick games.

I immediately sobered up and my evening was ruined. But as I was washing my hands, I made a decision. Mbali had to see this! That was the only way to make Sizwe pay so I took my phone, sent her the location on whatsapp and then I sent a message.

"Mbali, I'm so sorry to do this to you at this hour but could you please come and fetch me at the location I just sent you. I came here after leaving your house and now I'm too drunk to drive"

Not even a minute later, there was a response.

"Ok friend, I will be there shortly"

Just like that, it was done. I was just hoping that Mbali got there before Sizwe and his whore left.

He still had no idea that I was there and I had seen him.

When I came out of the bathroom I was relieved to see them still ordering drinks which meant they planned to stay longer. The lady in the white mini skirt was leaning over Sizwe's shoulder and he still had his arm around her. It made me want to puke all over again as I watched.

"Are you okay sweetheart?" – Aubrey

"I'm cool Aubrey, I think I should slow down on the booze now" – Me

"But your bottle of Vodka is not even half empty" – Aubrey

"That would be way too much for me. I will have just water for now" – Me

"Suit yourself! Just don't bore us by judging us now that you want to be sober"
– Aubrey

I brushed him off with a small chuckle as I took one of the small bottles of sparkling water that was on the table.

I was nervous knowing that at any moment Mbali would arrive and drama could unfold but I still smiled and continued conversing with everybody at the table.

A message came through... it was Mbali.

"I'm outside friend, please come"

I responded.

"Please come in, the people I'm hanging with think I'm lying about you fetching me and they do not want to let me go"

I lied because the plan was for her to come in and discover her husband's promiscuity.

I started saying goodbye to everybody and walked in the direction of Sizwe's table. He was facing the other way so he did not see me.

As I reached the middle of the room, Mbali walked in and she began scanning the room until her eyes landed on Sizwe. Bingo!

The lady was still draped on his shoulder and he was laughing and having a good time. Little did he know that all of that was about to change.

I could see the horrified look on Mbali's face and at that moment one of the guys that were at the table with Sizwe spotted her. He looked just as horrified which alerted Sizwe to the looming danger because he also turned and saw Mbali standing there.

I felt as though I was watching a scene from a movie.

Sizwe quickly stood up, almost knocking the slender beauty queen off her chair. She did not look very happy because she was not aware of what was happening. Mbali just stood there looking shocked.

Sizwe then walked over to Mbali and said something then he led her out of the room. The beauty queen saw all of this and she stood up and followed behind them.

It was about to go down. I knew Mbali too well. She was very sweet but she could be very short tempered.

I wondered if I should follow them but I did not want any part of it because my own skeletons might just be revealed if Sizwe saw me. He had been drinking and people do strange things when they are drunk. I was not about to risk a confession from a drunk man so I turned around and went back to Aubrey's table.

"I thought you had left" – Aubrey

"That was the plan but then my friend, who was here to fetch me, just caught her husband with another woman" – Me

"What? Shit!" – Aubrey

"I know!" – Me

"Where is she now?" – Aubrey

"They went outside with the mistress at their heels" – Me

"This is a mess"- Aubrey

“judging by the mistress’s reaction, I don’t think she knew that the guy is married” – Me

He just shook his head and stood up to dance.

Not knowing what was happening outside was killing me but I stayed put.

I changed my mind and mixed myself another drink. I needed something stronger to calm down.

It was as though I had thrown a match to a petrol drenched house because I got drunk all over again.

As I began to relax, I felt a tap on my shoulder and so I turned around to see who it was.

It was Mbali and she did not look happy at all. In fact, that was an understatement... she was spitting fire.

“How could you Andiswa? How could you do something so cruel?” she shouted.

Everybody at the table went silent.

Mbali

I went to bed with a broken heart. I normally said my prayers but that night I couldn't. I did not know how it was possible for me to feel like I was pregnant and even get symptoms when it was all just a figment of my imagination.

Sizwe was still not back so I read a book to calm myself down and try to fall asleep but I just tossed and turned until a message came through on my phone. It was Andiswa asking me to fetch her from some place in Vosloorus.

I was very annoyed. She had left my place saying she could not hang out because she was scared of driving drunk and yet she went and did just that elsewhere without a back - up plan and I had to rescue the situation.

I got dressed but I did not put on any make up. I just pulled my weave into a ponytail, got in the car and let the GPS on my phone direct me to the location she had sent. It did not take me long to get there but I spent quite a lot of time looking for parking as it was packed. I could not believe how many people actually spent their Saturday nights at these joints.

Why would someone want to subject themselves to such when they could have drinks in the comfort of their own homes and not have to worry about driving drunk? I did not understand why people would prefer to struggle for parking just to sit in a crowded, smoke filled room with so much noise one could not even hear themselves think, never mind hearing what the person next person was saying. Maybe it was the ambience... but it still did not make much sense to me especially because I liked to have a good conversation when I was drinking. I had never been a night life person anyway.

I walked out and went pass a group of young women dressed in provocative outfits, puffing away at cigarettes. One of them looked as though she was about to pass out but she still had a full bottle of savannah - dry in her hand.

I shook my head and carried on walking. I walked pass security at the gate and entered the dimly lit place where people were seated in groups and some were

on the dance floor. There was so much noise, I even felt a little bit disorientated but I had to admit that the music was good. They played old school jams.

I scanned the room looking for Andiswa because she had insisted I come in.

There was no sign of her so I moved in a bit more and that is when I almost fell on the floor from shock.

There was my husband seated next to a woman who was all over him and he seemed to be basking in the attention. She had her head on his shoulder and one of her legs was in between his.

I felt my knees going weak and my palms begin to sweat. I just froze but then before I could turn and leave, his friend Jabu saw me then Sizwe also looked back and saw me. It was written all over his face... He was guilty as charged.

I will never forget the look on his face. He looked like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

As expected, he jumped up and came in my direction.

“Mbali, it’s really not what it looks like. That girl is just a friend of mine. Can we please go and talk outside?” – Sizwe

I just let him lead me out but I did not say anything.

Could my evening get any worse?

I could smell the alcohol on Sizwe’s breath and he looked quite drunk.

For a moment it felt like I was looking into, my ex, Zaba’s face. This was exactly what I dealt with during the years that I was with him but I never thought I would see myself in the same position with Sizwe.

He could not even look at me in the eye.

“I don’t want to talk to you right now so please go back in there and carry on with what you were doing. I will talk to you when you have sobered up” – Me

“My love, at least hear me out first” – Sizwe

“No Sizwe! I do not want to hear it. You want to spin me some lie that I am supposed to believe and pretend as though I am not bothered. Not tonight” – Me

Just as he was about to say something, a high pitched voice sounded behind him.

“Sizwe who is this woman and what is going on here?” – Lady

It was the woman he was entertaining.

“Please just go back inside” – Sizwe

“I am not going anywhere till you tell me what the hell is going on” – Lady

“What is happening here is called a husband having a conversation with his wife and you are just a tramp that is rudely interrupting” – Me

“What? Sizwe you are married?” -Lady

“Could you please just go back inside and stop following me” – Sizwe

I checked Sizwe's ring finger because the woman seemed to be surprised that he was in fact a married man.

"Wow Sizwe... You even took off your wedding band" – Me

"What are you doing here anyway Mbali?" – Sizwe

"I came here to pick up Andiswa but obviously God wanted me to see exactly how idiotic my husband was" – Me

"Now I have seen it all," exclaimed the pretty fool.

"Andiswa? Where is she? She is the one that set this up!" – Sizwe

"Excuse me? Did she place that bimbo on your lap? Grow up Sizwe," I said as I left the two of them standing there.

"Mbali! Mbali come on!" he continued shouting behind me as I walked away.

I was furious! Where was Andiswa anyway? Why would she drag me all the way so that I could be embarrassed like this? She could have just told me or taken photos for proof.

I walked back into the club and walked around looking for her then I spotted her looking like she was having fun. She was still drinking.

What I did not understand was why Andiswa would want me to see this and then disappear? She deliberately tried to hurt me so I was going to confront her.

I walked up to the table where she was seated and tapped her on the shoulder.

“How could you Andiswa? How could you do something so cruel?” I shouted.

“Mbali, it was Sizwe that started all this. I really tried to resist but he was persistent...” - Andiswa

What? What did she mean by that?

Chapter 11

Andiswa

“What exactly do you mean Andiswa?” - Mbali

She looked very confused and my head started spinning from all the alcohol, the noise and the pending interrogation from Mbali.

I also wished that all these people at the table would mind their own damn business because they were staring at us as though they were waiting for a war. There was surely going to be one but I was not giving them the satisfaction of watching it unfold.

“Mbali, can we get out of here so that we can at least hear each other speak?”
– Me

She started heading towards the door so I reluctantly followed.

“Are you sure you won’t be needing my help getting home Andiswa? Your friend does not look too happy with you,” Aubrey shouted from behind me.

“Aubrey, I’m okay... Have fun and don’t worry about me. I will get home safely”
– Me

At this point, I could not even walk straight because of being drunk and nervous. Luckily I was in flat shoes otherwise it would have been disastrous. I was just going to have to take the risk of driving myself home though because by the look of things, Mbali would not be taking me anywhere.

As soon as we exited the building, things got worse. There was Sizwe standing outside engaged in what looked like a heated fight with his mistress but as soon as he saw Mbali, he pushed her aside and tried to get Mbali's attention.

At this point I felt like ditching them would be the best option because I was really drunk and everything just seemed to be getting out of control.

How was I to face Mbali? On top of everything, I was extremely intoxicated.

It was my only opportunity to get away and luckily Sizwe had not seen me.

I slowly started walking around them, trying my utmost best to keep my balance as I headed towards the gate but just as I went pass them Mbali stopped me.

"Andiswa where are you going? We still need to talk" – Mbali

"Can we do this tomorrow please Mbali. I really don't feel too well," I slurred.

Sizwe saw me for the first time.

"I still need to drive you home so we can talk in the car" – Mbali

"Sizwe can tell you everything... It's all his doing... Just let me go home" – Me

Sizwe looked shocked. I thought it was because he realised that Mbali might know about us.

"Look Mbali, why don't you go home and let me take Andiswa home because it is not safe for you to drive all the way there and back to our house in the state you are in either" – Sizwe

It was either he was just as drunk as I was or he was out of his mind for even suggesting this.

“You mean the state you put me in? All three of you actually... she said looking at Sizwe, me and the mistress in disgust.

And just like that, she left.

“Andiswa, let’s go” – Sizwe

“What about my car?” – Me

“What were you going to do with your car if Mbali was going to take you home?” – Sizwe

I honestly did not even think about that because my main goal when I called Mbali was for her to catch Sizwe out and I forgot about the finer details. The whole thing just seemed to have blown up in my face.

I looked at him angrily.

“Look here Sizwe, you can make a plan now that you have taken over. I was going to ask another friend of mine in there to take care of it,” I said defensively.

“Then you will just have to leave it here and fetch it in the morning” – Sizwe

“It’s not safe here” – Me

“Do you have any other choice? You are definitely too drunk to drive yourself home” – Sizwe

“Fine but what about your little slut?” I asked struggling to keep my balance.

She was nowhere in sight. I was not even aware she had left until I mentioned her.

“Stay out of it,” he said in a stern tone.

“Aaaarrggghh! Can we just go... I’m starting to get a hangover already” – Me

He started walking towards a car I did not recognise so I ran until I caught up with him. I walked beside him wishing I was a little less intoxicated. I could see the look of annoyance on his face because he was frowning which was something he hardly ever did.

We got inside the car and he drove off to my relief. All I wanted to do was get some sleep, it had been a long day.

“You called Mbali so that she would catch me with that woman didn’t you?” – Sizwe

“No, I called her to take me home” – Me

“Why didn’t you book an Uber?” - Sizwe

“I did not think about it” – Me

“Andiswa what are you trying to do here? Are you trying to destroy my marriage? Earlier you were at my house intending to tell Mbali about us and now this... I thought you would be more matured about this whole situation” – Sizwe

“Oh Sizwe, since you are so much more intelligent than I am... What would have been the mature thing to do? Pretend as though I was not fucked and dumped like yesterday’s news... Pretend as though I had not been duped by my friend’s husband who happens to be nothing more than a male whore” – Me

“Watch your tongue!” – Sizwe

“Or what? What will happen Sizwe? The cat’s out the bag, Mbali knows about us because you were stupid enough to confess. I really have nothing to lose so I could not care less what you do or say,” I slurred, opening the window for some air.

He just laughed.

“What the hell are you talking about? Mbali knows nothing about us and I would like it to stay that way” – Sizwe

The relief I felt at that moment was indescribable.

“So why was she so angry with me?” – Me

“Because she probably realised that you had set her up. I know Mbali and if she knew about you and I she would not have still offered to take you home, trust me!” – Sizwe

I hiccupped... “Oh”

“I will come and talk to you tomorrow morning when you are sober. You need to get a hold of yourself” – Sizwe

“You are not exactly sober yourself Casanova” – Me

He did not reply instead he focused on the road.

I was beginning to dose off when we arrived at my place. At this point, I could not even walk on my own. It seemed I was getting more drunk instead of sobering up.

“Give me your house keys” – Sizwe

I dug into my handbag, scratching around for the keys until I found them and handed them over to Sizwe. He went to unlock and open the door then he came and helped me out of the car and into the house. I could smell his cologne as I leaned on his shoulder and it just instantly turned me on. I missed the sex with Sizwe.

He took me straight to my bedroom.

“Can you please help me out of these clothes before you leave?” - Me

I was not going to just let him leave without trying to relieve myself of the sudden lust that had encompassed my whole body.

He leaned over and I pulled him against my chest and slid my hand inside his jeans.

Yes! There was definitely a reaction there. He was horny too...

“Let’s do it one last time Sizwe” – Me

He did not ask any questions or try to resist... Instead he pushed me onto my back and started stripping me off my clothes with great urgency.

Mbali

The alarm went off and I leaned over to switch it off deciding to sleep in instead of going to church like I had planned. It had been a while and I felt as though I was bleeding spiritually. I knew I needed to hear the word to get myself back on track but after the night I had, there was no way I could drag myself out of bed. I had only managed to get two hours of sleep after waiting up for Sizwe all night, or should I say all morning.

I took a look at the other side of the bed hoping that my eyes had been deceiving me but he was not there... his side of the bed was still empty.

The pillow still untouched and the bed linen still perfectly in place.

I felt tears sting my eyes all over again. I could not believe that the woman going through all this was me... Mbali... Was this what I had become?

The nagging wife who had to be called to drinking spots to catch her husband with a mistress and as though that were not enough, the husband then decides to carry through his plans of bedding another woman regardless of being caught.

The warmth of the tears trickling down my cheeks somehow forced me up. I could not just lay in bed and feel sorry for myself. It was enough, I had to get up and do something before I fell into depression again. I could feel it setting in. Considering my history with this dreaded monster, I could not afford to let it possess me... not at this point.

I sat up, switched on my bed side lamp and checked the time. It was seven fifteen in the morning. I had tossed and turned in bed for hours after finally deciding to turn in at two o'clock that morning. Even the several shots of whisky I had downed for assistance had done nothing to calm me down.

Laying there next to the alarm clock were the pregnancy tests I took the previous night. The woman who had been disappointed by a negative result on those tests seemed foreign to me. It was as though that had happened lightyears ago.

I dragged myself to the bathroom and got under the cold shower while adjusting the temperature. I was hoping the piercingly cool stream of water would shock my body to life but it did no such thing. All I felt was an unwelcome numbness inside and out, accompanied by a dull ache in my heart.

I felt sorry for myself, at the same time I felt an unbearable anger towards myself for putting myself in a situation where yet again a man made me feel like a completely worthless and naïve idiot who was not good enough.

What did I lack? There had to be a reason why the men I loved always ended up seeking comfort in another woman's arms.

Perhaps I should have listened to Andiswa when she had advised me to spice up my sex life and loosen up a bit more but I thought Sizwe was happy with the way things were... clearly he lied. Maybe it was how I slacked off on certain days when I did not feel so good... maybe it annoyed him more than I realised.

Or could it be the fact that I was not as career driven as he would have liked me to be? Because the woman I caught him with the previous night seemed well accomplished unless I was deceived by looks.

Was I not mentally stimulating enough for him anymore?

No... that could not have been the reason. Why then would he have begged me for months to quit my job and be a stay at home parent?

I realised I had been standing in the shower, tormenting myself with questions, long enough for the skin on the tips of my palms to start wrinkling, resembling prunes.

“Why Sizwe? Why?” I screamed out loud, crying as I let the warm water wash away the tears on my face.

I cried like a baby till I decided to turn off the stream of water and leave the shower.

As I came out, there was Sizwe sitting on the bed hunched over with his hands covering his face, the pregnancy tests laying on his lap.

I just lost it.

“Get out you bastard! Get out and go back to wherever you were!” I shouted looking for something... anything I could use to inflict the same kind of pain he had made me feel.

I had never been violent and I knew that no physical pain I could inflict on him could amount to the pain I was feeling inside but I wanted him to feel even a fraction of it.

He looked at me in horror as I picked up a bottle of perfume from my dresser, throwing it at him as hard as I could. When he managed to dodge that impact, I started picking up anything and everything I could find and threw it his way.

He dodged a few but I managed to strike him a couple of times.

“Mbali! Stop... Ey Mbali... Calm down,” he shouted as he skipped around the room trying to find safety.

Eventually he leaped across the room and grabbed me from behind, paralyzing me so I could not cause any further damage.

“Let me go! Let me go!” I cried until I finally just broke down and started weeping again.

He did not let go instead he held me tighter and started crying with me.

“I am sorry Mbali... My love, look what I have done to you... Forgive me please Mbalenhle” – Sizwe

He still wreaked of alcohol.

I hated him at that moment. Just thinking about the fact that he had decided to go and have sex with another woman, after everything that had happened, hardened my heart to the point that I felt nothing for him... nothing but hatred.

Chapter 12

Andiswa

“Morning sleepy head,” I said as I shook him up a bit.

“Andiswa? What am I doing here? What time is it?” – Sizwe

“You fell asleep and you just refused to wake up. It’s six forty- five,” I replied as I handed him a cup of coffee.

I could not sleep any longer so I woke up a bit earlier, took a shower and made coffee.

“Shit! You should have woken me up. Mbali was waiting for me at home. I never sleep out and now this after what happened last night...” – Sizwe

“You passed out and no matter how hard I tried, you would not budge. Have some coffee and then go home to Mbali” – Me

He took a sip and then made his way to the bathroom to rinse himself off.

I had never seen anybody get dressed so quickly.

“I will have the coffee on my way home if you don’t mind, I need it. I have a lot of explaining to do, that’s if Mbali even wants to hear what I have to say for myself after all this” – Sizwe

“You messed up in a big way but she will be fine... she loves you and I know she won’t leave you but you have to get rid of all these whores in your life” – Me

He gave me a look that said, “you’re a fine one to talk”.

“I said whores... I’m an exception, thank you very much” – Me

“If you must know, that lady you saw me with is an ex- girlfriend of mine that I happened to bump into at a party we had attended earlier. I was drunk and got a bit carried away but I had no intentions of doing anything more with her. She just clung on because I don’t think she ever got over me and seeing that I am now a lawyer, made things worse” – Sizwe

“So she is not as classy as she looks” – Me

“Does it mean that women who fall for me are not classy?” – Sizwe

“Aaaarrgghh! You know what I mean” – Me

“Well she is quite well off if that’s what you mean... She does not need my money but the reason why we ended up breaking things off was her constant nagging about my lack of ambition. I actually have her to thank for pushing me to study further” – Sizwe

I rolled my eyes.

“Let me run Andiswa. I will call you later” – Sizwe

“You will do just that if you know what’s good for you!” – Me

He was already at the door with his cup of coffee by the time I was done talking.

“And bring back my mug the next time you come. It has sentimental value” – Me

That mug was part of a set of four. It was the very first thing I had bought when I moved into my house. Only one was broken but the rest were still intact.

Sizwe started his car and drove off.

I immediately got dressed and called an Uber so I could fetch my car from the jazz lounge in Vosloorus.

I had a hangover from hell but I also had a lot to do.

Luckily, when I arrived in Vosloorus, my car was there and unharmed... It was still parked in a deserted parking area with only empty bottles showing any signs of the night that was.

I then went straight to the store where I had my packaging done to pick it up and worked throughout the day. By six in the evening, I could hardly walk.

I had not even checked my phone because I had been so busy.

I made myself a fruit platter and a large glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. The wine bottles on the rack made me want to puke.

I breathed out in relief as I took off my shoes and bra before parking off on the couch.

I finally switched on my phone and the messages just kept coming through.

The first one was from a lady who wanted to order handbags. The next ten messages were all from Mbali and Sizwe in no particular order.

I really had no energy to deal with their drama so I did not check, instead I switched on the TV and started catching up on my favourite programs.

The next few weeks came with a lot of surprises. Sizwe was coming to my place on a regular basis... he even slept over a few times but he refused to discuss Mbali or what excuses he gave her when he was at my place.

Mbali had forgiven me for calling her to the jazz lounge the other night but she was a bit closed up. She pretended as though things were all good between her and Sizwe until one morning when she called me crying about Sizwe not sleeping at home. Of course, I knew that already because Sizwe had spent the night with me at my house. He would park the car right behind the house so that it was out of sight to anybody passing by.

I had really gotten over the feelings of guilt at this point because I had genuinely fallen in love with Sizwe and I think the feeling was mutual.

One morning right after Sizwe left my place, Mbali called me...

“Hey friend” – Me

“Friend... Are you busy. I really need to talk. I thought of calling you because I have nobody else to talk to” – Mbali

She sounded like she was crying.

“What’s wrong my friend? Talk to me” – Me

“He didn’t come home again last night... After everything he promised me. He gave me his word that it would not happen again but obviously this woman has him hooked. I don’t know what to do” – Mbali

She began to cry again and hearing the pain in her voice just broke my heart. I wanted to tell her it will be fine... I wanted to tell her to hold on and fight for her marriage but how could I do that when the other woman in her husband’s life was me?

She still thought Sizwe was seeing the woman she had caught him with at the jazz lounge. That could have saved me but...

The problem was that I had changed my tune and I wanted Sizwe to myself... I wanted him to come home to me and the only way that could happen was if I got Mbali out of the way which I felt would not be so difficult to do.

Mbali

“I am so sorry my friend... Do you want to maybe come over and talk?” – Andiswa

“I know you have to work. I don’t want to burden you with my problems” – Me

“Actually, I decided to take the day off today so come over and let’s spend a few hours together” – Andiswa

“Okay friend... I am just going to drop Thapelo off at school then I will come straight there. Luckily I will be going against traffic” – Me

“See you just now” – Andiswa

I had always been told never to discuss my marital problems with friends and to rather speak to God but I needed human contact. I needed someone to tell me I was not going crazy and to give me reassurance.

This was Andiswa after all, not just anybody... we have always shared everything and she has never mocked me or discussed my problems with anybody else. Besides, I honestly did not care anymore what people thought of Sizwe. He did not deserve my respect or anybody else's for that matter. He had hurt me in the worst possible way and I just could not forgive him. I could not. I always told him that if he cheated I would leave him and yet there I was, crying myself to sleep every night without any solution but I still stayed.

I did not even take a shower, I just pulled on a dress and some sandals, wore my wig, applied some lipstick and mascara then I got Thapelo ready for school.

Just as I was preparing his lunchbox, Sizwe walked in, still wearing the suit he had on for work the previous day. He did not look apologetic at all instead he put his briefcase down on the floor and started playing with Thapelo.

I felt nothing for him, nothing at all.

The only thing I felt was anger towards myself for letting him put me in a position where I was totally dependent on him financially. He must have planned this to make sure that I could not leave once he showed his true colours and I fell for it.

“Are you going somewhere?” – Sizwe

“Thapelo get your bag and let’s go,” I said ignoring him.

“Did you make me a lunch box as well? I’m running a bit late” – Sizwe

I chose silence.

“Mommy, did you hear what daddy said to you?” – Thapelo

“I heard my boy... Daddy can make his own lunchbox. Let’s go” – Me

Sizwe looked unaffected by my silent treatment. He just opened the fridge and proceeded to take out some ham and a couple of other ingredients supposedly for a sandwich.

As soon as Thapelo came back from his room with his bag on his back, we left the house.

The house had become a prison to me in the last few weeks. It was a place I had begun to associate with pain, misery and betrayal.

When Sizwe, Thapelo and I moved into the house, it was a dream come true... Nothing special but it was ours and considering where we came from, it was a true accomplishment. For the longest time, I loved that house because it was home. We had plans to upgrade and buy a bigger, better house in a more affluent neighbourhood not so long ago but I did not see that happening any longer. I did not see us recovering from the chaotic period Sizwe had put us through. Everything had changed. I hated everything that connected me to him in any way. I did not even want him close to me when he slept on our bed if he was not out with his mistress. I cringed even at the slightest touch. How could we then survive that?

“Mommy, are you okay?” – Thapelo

“I’m fine my angel... why do you ask?” – Me

“You seem to be very distant these days and your eyes are always red as though you have been crying” – Thapelo

The last thing I wanted to see happening was Thapelo being affected by the drama between me and Sizwe but I suppose it was inevitable. Kids are more observant than we give them credit for and I knew Thapelo could tell that there was trouble in paradise.

“Mommy is just going through a tough time but I don’t want you to worry yourself about that, okay? It will blow over and I will be happy again” – Me

“What about daddy? He is also acting weird and he sometimes does not come home” – Thapelo

It was strange for Thapelo to see Sizwe’s empty chair when we had dinner together on the table because he was always there before he started cheating.

“Daddy is under a lot of pressure because of the work he does now and sometimes they require him to go away on work trips. It has nothing to do with us,” I lied.

“Okay mommy... As long as everything is okay between the two of you” – Thapelo

“Don’t worry about that my angel, everything is okay. You are way too clever for your age,” I laughed.

I dropped Thapelo off and immediately turned the car and drove towards Andiswa's house. I absentmindedly turned on the radio and hummed along to the gospel music till I arrived at her place. I had not even reached her house but I already felt better because I knew Andiswa always had a solution and if not then she always knew how to make me feel better.

I parked the car and knocked then went in as the door was open.

Andiswa appeared from the passage wearing a sexy set of black lingerie and a matching silk gown.

"Oh my friend! You have even lost weight... look at you! This cannot go on," she said giving me a hug.

"Andiswa Sizwe is killing me inside," I said, crying on her shoulder.

She pulled away, looked at me in the eye and said, "Mbali, I thought your relationship with Zaba taught you that once a man cheats and you let him get away with it, he will always do it again. Are you willing to become Sizwe's doormat or are you going to stand up for yourself?" – Andiswa

"How do I do that Andiswa when I'm totally dependent on him" – Me

"Get a job, start a business... Sort out your finances and then make a decision. I am not saying you must leave him but that might be the only solution" – Andiswa

Chapter 13

Andiswa

When I saw Mbali standing at my door looking skinnier than I had ever seen her. I felt guilt surge over me. The fact that this woman was having sleepless nights, crying and stressing was all my doing but I was not the only one to blame. The biggest culprit here was Sizwe. He was the one who said vows and made a commitment to Mbali, not me.

As much as I tried to justify it, the whole thing was just horribly wrong and I knew it. The problem was that it was too late to turn back. I already had a plan in motion and I was not backing down because this time, the price would be mine and that just happened to be Sizwe. All my life I have had to back down and let people have their way and I always stood on the side line cheering them on. I had to accept second best all the time even with my own mother. I was always second to the parties and the men she was seeing, never a first priority. The cycle continued well into my adult life but I was putting my foot down and saying it's enough. This time, I was putting myself first.

I longed to have a man freak out at not being home on time... Home with me. I watched how Sizwe would get so restless and protective at the mention of Mbali's name. I wanted the side chick to be silenced on my account when I called my man (hopefully there would not be one) and not have to be the one who is told to be quiet.

I was going to be Sizwe's main priority and I would do whatever it took but not before I made sure Mbali would be okay on her own. She was still a woman I cared very deeply about regardless of the situation we both found ourselves in even though she did not know it.

"Mbali have you forgotten that I own a recruitment agency and it would be very simple for me to place you in a good position for employment?" – Me

“I don’t know if I am in the right space for that now Andiswa but it is definitely something I need to do. Can you really do that for me my friend?” – Mbali

“Of-course I can and I will. I know you wanted to go into business but that takes time and a whole lot of energy which are two things you do not have at the moment so we are going to get you a job” – Me

I closed the door and pulled my silk gown closed, covering the lingerie I had worn for her husband the night before.

“I’m sure you have not had anything to eat so let me whip up something to eat quickly and we can sit and chat. You deserve a bit of rest after everything you have been dealing with in that house” – Me

“You don’t even know the half of it. It’s so strange that I have no appetite at home but as soon as you mentioned breakfast, I realised I was starving” – Mbali

“It’s tension friend. The body reacts. Look how skinny you have become” - Me

“I know hey... I’m almost disappearing” – Mbali

“Luckily Sizwe likes his women slender,” I lied.

“That is also true but he likes one particular, slender woman these days and I want to find out more about that woman and hopefully even meet her for a little chat,” Mbali said trying to hold back tears.

“When you find her, call me. You are too soft, that woman needs to be taught a lesson or two”- Me

It was so sad how completely clueless she was about what her husband really got up to.

She just let the tears drip down her face.

“Hey... no more tears alright. We are going to have something to eat and then sort out your cv and start sending it out” – Me

I made an English breakfast with lots of greasy bacon and sausages but instead of tea or coffee, I served it with some cream liqueur... our favourite one, Amarula. I mixed it with a dash of milk.

As early as it was to be having a drink, Mbali did not protest. “Lord knows I need this,” she exclaimed instead then I saw a smile on her face. That genuinely made me happy.

“That’s my girl! That’s what I want to see” – Me

“You always know how to cheer me up. You should have been a psychologist” – Mbali

“I would be fired on the first day of work because I would tell all my clients to have a glass of wine and forget about all the shit in this world,” I said laughing.

She joined me in laughter.

We spent the next few hours going through the vacancies that would fit her profile and we updated her CV and sent it through.

I went to get dressed and stole a moment to send Sizwe a message.

“Your wife is here at my place” - Me

“I hope you are not poisoning her mind about me” – Sizwe

“What the hell Sizwe? So you still care more about what she thinks?”

Mbali

I drove home feeling a whole lot better about my situation. I felt a little more in control again knowing that I had taken some action towards getting myself out of the mess I was in. The one thing I still intended to do though was to find out more about this woman who was a catalyst in the collapse of my marriage.

Not because I planned to do anything but for my peace of mind I needed to feed my curiosity. The only way to do that was through Sizwe’s phone.

I had to get his phone somehow.

Seeing Andiswa had motivated me to fight my way out of this marriage and come out okay financially and otherwise. I had no intentions of finding myself on the streets with nothing.

I had however made my decision. I was leaving Sizwe. He had managed to kill the love I had for him and if I was not doing it for myself then I would be doing it for my son. I did not want him growing up in a loveless household with a

miserable mother and an absent father. I just thanked God that I had not fallen pregnant when we were trying.

It was not an easy decision because I felt like a failure. After all these years, it just ends as though we were never happy. We had plans together and we were once untouchable, what happened to my Sizwe? I yearned for the man that I had met at the shopping centre years ago. The man that would go to the end of the earth for me... Faithful, loving and charming. It was as though I had been scammed. I married one man and ended up with a completely different person. It felt so wrong. I stood by Sizwe through a lot and now that he was okay, he wanted to enjoy the fruits of our labour with someone else.

I felt that people would laugh at me because I always thought that Sizwe and I would be together forever and I was very vocal about it. What a fool I was.

Starting from scratch at my age was also not an easy thing to do but I decided that my happiness was more important than what people said and a few months of struggling never killed anyone.

I promised myself that I would stay single for much longer this time around and I doubted that I ever wanted to get married again after what I had been through. Look at Andiswa, she went to bed peacefully knowing that nobody was out making a fool of her. She was happy and independent. I could also manage to live that way.

Speaking of Andiswa, she started acting a little bit offish towards the end of my visit. Even though she had helped a lot, I still could not help but feel she was not her normal self. Maybe I was imagining things but she seemed to be a little bit nasty and she said a lot of offensive things that she claimed were unintentional, like, how I should have listened when she told me I was a bit boring and should spice things up more in my bedroom. I mean, who was she to have anything to say about what goes on in my bedroom?

That was just one of the hurtful things she said but what really caught me off guard was when she made a comment about how beautiful the woman that was with Sizwe at the jazz lounge was.

How do you even say that to a woman who is being cheated on by her husband? Tell her that the mistress is beautiful... who does that?

It was so out of character for Andiswa.

However, I decided to just be grateful for the helping hand and focus on more important things.

I got home, took a shower and started making dinner then I went and fetched Thapelo from after care.

Sizwe did not get home till after seven as usual. He knocked off at three thirty but it took him four hours or more to get home.

I was really no longer bothered. He could do whatever he wanted but honestly, it still hurt that he could not even respect me enough to at least hide his infidelity.

I dished up for both him and Thapelo when he arrived and then took Thapelo to bed. Sizwe got busy on his laptop for an hour or so and then he announced that he was going to bed. I watched him closely till I was sure that he was fast asleep. I then took his phone and went out into the lounge and started scrolling through his messages, whatsapp messages, e-mails and facebook account but I found absolutely nothing suspicious.

He was good at covering his tracks I had to give him that. I don't know why he even bothered because he was certainly not making it a secret that there was someone else.

I felt hopeless after not finding anything on his phone. I needed to know about this other woman, I was desperate.

I then remembered that he once hid a phone in his car. It could be possible that he still had a secret phone in there so I went out to his car and started looking in the boot, under the spare-wheel, in the cubby hole, everywhere... but there was nothing. I moved his seat to look underneath and bingo! There was a blackberry lying there and right next to it was a mug and it looked familiar...

I had a closer look... It looked exactly like the mugs Andiswa had used for the cream liqueur at her house that morning. That was weird, why would Sizwe have one of Andiswa's mugs in his car?

Chapter 14

Andiswa

Needless to say, I was quite pissed off by Sizwe's comment.

I thought we had made progress but obviously I was wrong, he still felt quite protective over Mbali. I had to step it up a bit more.

I could not hide the disappointment after my brief conversation with Sizwe and I found myself shooting Mbali down and she noticed. I had to correct this so I made a plan to call her and apologise. The last thing I wanted to do was to get on her bad books if my plan was to work, besides she was already going through a lot.

I tidied up and ended up doing some work after she left even though I had promised Sizwe that I would take the day off. Work was the only thing that kept me sane so I got busy to distract myself and before I knew it, the sun had gone down and the house was completely dark.

I stood up, switched on the lights, closed the curtains and locked the doors but I carried on working. I was too busy to cook so I warmed up one of the Woolworths frozen meals from the fridge and ate while I typed a document on the computer. Sizwe hated the frozen meals because he said they reminded him of the time when he was struggling whilst working for the company. He had apparently had too many of them before he met Mbali since he got them on staff discount. I loved the meals because they were so convenient and great tasting so I still stocked up on them for days when I did not have the time to be on the stove but when he came over, I made sure he got a home cooked meal no matter what. I had gotten used to that.

I got occupied with work and lost track of time, when I eventually stopped and checked the watch it was midnight. It was not surprising because I was exhausted. All I wanted to do was go to bed so I started switching off the lights all around the house only to be greeted by an open kitchen door. I could have sworn, I had closed and locked the door before I started working. I would never ever leave the door open especially because Dawn Park, like any other place in Gauteng, was not exactly safe. I was truly freaked out. What if there was an intruder in the house. I inspected the door but there was no sign of forced entry or anybody for the matter.

I picked up a knife from the drawer and did a brief sweep through the house but there was nobody there.

The only other person who had the key to my house was Sizwe and we had an agreement that he would stop coming and going as he pleases. We had agreed that he would call me whenever he came over and he had stuck to that so who could have unlocked my door plus the security gate and left it open like that. I was confused and scared so I called Sizwe on his secret phone, he answered but did not say anything.

“Sizwe? Were you at my place just now? Please say something,” I begged.

All I got from the other end of the line was silence so I eventually hung up and called him on his regular phone. It was on voicemail as usual. He normally switched it off when he got home.

I never called him at night when he was home, this was the first time I had ever done that but I was surprised that he had answered on the secret phone even though he did not say anything. He probably could not talk because of Mbali so I sent him a text message.

“Babe, were you at my place this evening? The door is wide open and I have no idea what is going on” – Me

“No, I wasn’t but you could have left it open... just make sure there is nobody in the house and text me if there’s any problem” - Sizwe

“I already checked, it seems like there is no one here but I’m still so scared. What if they are hiding somewhere? I would never leave the door open at night. I know I locked it earlier” – Me

“Just lock it now and keep your phone with you in case anything happens. I can’t come now, you know that” – Sizwe

“I know... I will do that. Will you be coming by tomorrow then?” – Me

“I will see how it goes. Good night” – Sizwe

I was almost shitting my pants. It was the scariest thing ever and it confused me how the door could have been wide open like that.

I closed and locked it and did a thorough search around the house once more before going to bed. I could not sleep so I took some whisky which knocked me out.

The next morning, I was woken up by a call from Mbali.

I did not answer but it managed to wake me up.

I got out of bed and checked around the house. Everything was still in place and there was no sign of an intruder.

I was feeling too grateful to start worrying again.

I checked the time and it was only half past six.

Why would Mbali call so early again just like the previous morning? It was beginning to become a habit.

It surely could not have been about Sizwe sleeping out because he was not with me the previous night or could it have been? Maybe he went to his other side chick that I didn't know about ... anything was possible with that man.

Curiosity got the better of me so I picked up the phone to call her back.

“Hey Mbals... I just saw your missed call, I was still asleep” – Me

“Hey friend... sorry to wake you up so early but I was just thinking, would you like to go away for the weekend with us?” – Mbali

“Wait... us meaning you and Sizwe or excluding him?” -Me

“Us, meaning Sizwe and I, yes... I have decided to ask Sizwe for a divorce and I would like you to be there when I do that... for support. That is what this weekend is all about. I just don't want him to know because I want it to come as a surprise. Please don't say anything to him about it” – Mbali

I was shocked as well. I was not expecting Mbali to throw in the towel so soon but this was exactly what I had been praying for. I could have jumped up and down in delight but I had to pretend to be sad.

“Of course, I will come friend... You need a lot of support right now and I think you are making the right decision” – Me

“It is for my own good, I just hope that I will find a job soon” – Mbali

“You will friend... I will make sure of it” – Me

I meant that, I had spent hours after she left, placing applications and recommending her to potential employers.

“Anyway, I have to take Thapelo to school now. I will call you later to discuss the details” – Mbali

I hung up and a broad smile formed involuntarily on my face. I could not believe it was finally happening. Mbali was leaving Sizwe, not only that but she was divorcing him.

I decided to keep my lips sealed about this. There was no way I would give Sizwe the heads up. That would only make him want to convince her to change her mind. I was not going to let that happen.

Mbali

No! It could not be what I was thinking, Andiswa was like a sister to me. She would never betray me like this.

Why then did I feel like my whole world, as I knew it, had come tumbling down? I just had this undeniable feeling that there was much more to this than I could even phantom but the answers were in that Blackberry so I took it and went back into the house.

I switched on one of the side lamps in the lounge and started going through the call register. There were two numbers only on both the outgoing and incoming calls but they were not saved.

I then went to messages and started with the first number I saw. There were about twenty messages under that one.

10:00 - "Hi Sizwe... Coffee at two?"

10:02 - "I will meet you at our spot at two"

17:45 - "It was great seeing you this afternoon, you are still just as good as I remember xoxoxo"

17:50 "There is more where that came from"

Two days later...

11:32 - "Hey Sindi... When am I seeing you again? I can't get my mind off you"

11:40 - "I will be in Vosloorus this afternoon visiting my parents... Would you be able to make a plan and meet me somewhere?"

11:43 - "Let me call you so we can talk"

The next day...

05:38 - "I cannot believe you played me for a fool yet again even after I had agreed to give you another chance. I sacrificed a lot for you Sizwe in the four years that we were together, even paid for your studies and this is how you repay me? Wow... So, you went and got married?"

12:05 – “Sindi it is a very complicated situation. The woman you saw yesterday is my wife but the reason I married her was simply because I was lonely and hurt after we broke up. I needed to create some sort of balance in my life. You know that I will never love any other woman like I love you and that will never change”

I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach. This was obviously the woman I had caught Sizwe with at the Jazz Lounge the other day. All along I thought she was just a woman Sizwe had lined up for the evening and ended up having an affair with. The truth was, they had a history and it seemed deep. She even paid for his studies at some point and I was under the impression that Sizwe worked his butt off to get himself through law school. What more did I not know about this man? On top of everything he was declaring his undying love for her and claiming that he married me out of convenience. Was he actually on the rebound when he started a relationship with me?

12:30 – “Save it... I’m not interested. This was the last time I let you hurt me like this. I have never felt this much pain not even when we lost our child”

Our child? Oh, my word!

One week later...

13:01 – “I hope you got the package I sent you. Your PA said you were in a meeting when I called”

13: 30 – “I appreciate it but I never asked you to pay me back”

13: 33 - “I wanted to... it was only fair”

So Sizwe had taken money from our account and paid back this lady without my knowledge? He could not have done that without me knowing about it or getting any notification because it was obviously a large sum of money. That only meant he had a secret stash of cash outside of our joint account that I did not know about.

Four days later...

19:15 – “Thank you for agreeing to see me, I promise to sort this out. I will do right by you”

19:50 – “Have you even told her that you are planning on leaving her?”

19:58 – “We will discuss this when I see you tomorrow”

The next day...

18:14 – “Sizwe, I’m at room number twenty -seven”

18:20 – “I’m at reception... see you just now”

Two days later...

16:16 – “I love you handsome”

16: 29 – “Love you too beautiful”

The last message was sent exactly four days prior to me reading this which meant Sizwe had patched things up with the woman and he was making plans to leave me. Sizwe did not compliment me like he did with her anymore... I had no tears. I was in complete shock and my hands were shaking uncontrollably. This was much worse than I had ever imagined.

I took a small break just to try and compose myself and then I started reading the next batch of messages from the other number on the phone. There were hundreds of messages to and from his number so I scrolled right to the beginning.

17:07 – “Got the new phone”

17:09 – “Sizwe we have to be very careful this time. The last thing I need is Mbali finding out about us”

So, this one knew about me.

17:15 – “Mbali does not suspect a thing... Anyway, I don’t want to talk about her now. Can I come over, I have an hour to kill?”

17:20 – “What kind of question is that? You know Andy is always ready for you”

17:25 – “I will be there in fifteen minutes”

17:42 – “Andiswa?”

17:43 – “I just took a shower... I will come open for you now”

My gosh! Andiswa? My Andiswa?

Chapter 15

Andiswa

I was so excited about the news Mbali had shared with me, so much so that I decided to go shopping and spoil myself a bit. I truly deserved it. Finally, Sizwe was going to be mine and nobody else's. I would be the leading lady and nobody was going to stop that, not even Mbali. I just had to make sure that she went through with the divorce before she ever found out about us because if she did, she would never do it.

It was too early for the mall so I made myself some fruit, yoghurt and muesli for breakfast and then did some exercise in the lounge.

I could not remember the last time I felt this good. For once in my life, my love life was looking positive and that made me feel invincible.

If this was how secure married women felt all the time then I also wanted a taste of that. Marriage had never been in my plans but everybody needs companionship and ever since I started this affair with Sizwe, it has made me realise just how much.

My Blackberry rang... only Sizwe called me on that number. I jumped up from the floor where I was busy with lunges.

"Hey babe! What's up?" – Me

"I have a little surprise for you and I thought maybe we could go out for breakfast and then I would share it with you" – Sizwe

"That sounds exciting but I have already had breakfast besides, I was planning to go shopping this morning" – Me

“How about lunch then?” – Sizwe

“Lunch sounds great... I will be at Eastgate so why don't you meet me there and then we can decide on the restaurant?” – Me

“Brilliant! One – thirty?” – Sizwe

“See you then” – Me

I wondered what surprise Sizwe had for me. He did not even ask how I was doing after last night's scary experience so whatever it was had better be good.

I got dressed in high waist jeans and a white vest to show off my curves.

I then put on some sneakers, normally I wore high heels but never to the mall. I took a matching handbag to go with my outfit. I normally advertised the stuff I sold by using them myself. People would always ask me where I bought the bag or shoes and then I would use my great sales skills and usually make a sale or two. I prided myself on my smooth tongue because it made me lots of money.

I was then off to the mall. I did some shopping for the house and ended up buying rugs and ornaments I did not really need but then again that was just me.

I then went shopping for clothes, my favourite part. I had to look dazzling on the weekend getaway. I wanted Sizwe to look at me and think, “If I can have this beauty, why fight Mbali over the divorce?”

I felt butterflies in my stomach just thinking about it.

I hopped from shop to shop looking for the perfect outfits and when I was finally satisfied with what I had, it was already one o'clock so I decided to go and look for a nice restaurant while I waited for Sizwe to call. I went up the escalators, pass the cinema and decided to settle at Piatto.

I ordered a big glass of red wine while I waited just to wind down.

Not even ten minutes later, Sizwe called.

“Hey babe... where do I meet you?” – Sizwe

“I am sitting inside at Piatto” – Me

“Cool! I will see you just now. Order a beer for me please” – Sizwe

This was one of the downfalls of being in a relationship with a married man, it was a hot day but I could not sit outside where it was cooler, I had to find a more hidden position in case Mbali happened to pass by... but this wouldn't be the case for much longer. Things would change very soon.

We never actually went out but I was surprised Sizwe suggested it and I was not complaining.

Sizwe arrived with a bigger bounce in his step than normal. I wondered what he was up to.

“Hey sexy” – Sizwe

“Hey love... How has your day been?” – Me

“Super busy but I managed to get away for a few hours because I had to give you the surprise gift I was talking about” – Sizwe

“I can’t wait... So? Where is it?” – Me

“Relax... later I will give it to you, for now I just want to have fun and enjoy lunch with my woman” – Sizwe

“Sounds great!” – Me

We ended up spending a couple of hours there and then Sizwe suggested that we go to a jewellery store because he wanted to buy me a pair of earrings and a necklace. I thought that was my surprise but boy was I wrong.

I settled for a pair of diamond studs and a white gold necklace with a matching pendant.

Sizwe was really splurging with no limit. At the restaurant he had ordered an expensive bottle of French champagne after our first round of drinks. I did not even want to ask where all the money was coming from. I did not want to be a wet blanket and spoil things.

It could have already been dark outside because it was seven in the evening. I really did not want the day to end, it had been amazing.

“Sizwe are you going home after this?” – Me

“No... I really don’t feel like Mbali’s whining or silent treatment tonight so I will go home with you” – Sizwe

He never bad mouthed Mbali so he must have been getting tired of her.

“I’m so glad to hear that” – Me

As we were walking, I turned around and right behind me... There was Mbali.

I have never panicked so much in my life. I immediately turned around, my heart almost pumping out of my chest.

“Are you okay Andiswa?” – Sizwe

“Mbali is right behind us” – Me

He immediately looked back and scanned the crowd then he turned and said, “There is no Mbali behind us and I spoke to her via sms a few minutes ago. She is home with Thapelo” – Sizwe

I turned to look again and there really was no sign of the woman I had thought was Mbali. How was that even possible?

“I know what I saw. She looked straight at me and she was wearing white pants and a floral blouse” – Me

“Andiswa, you must have been mistaken. If it were Mbali she would be right here with us now, causing a scene. Why don’t you call her to put your mind at ease?” – Sizwe

I suppose Sizwe was right. There was no way Mbali would have just disappeared after having seen me with her husband in her absence but I needed to be sure so I called.

She answered on the second ring...

“Hey my friend... How are you doing? I was just thinking to call you” – Mbali

She sounded quite cheerful and her background was very quiet, she could not have been in a mall. I was relieved.

“I just wanted to check on you but I will call you when I get home. I can’t talk now” – Me

“Okay friend... talk to you later” – Mbali

Sizwe gave me a goofy look...

“You see? I told you, where are you parked?” – Sizwe

I told him and he said it was not too far from his car and asked that we get the surprise from his car first before going home.

We paid our parking tickets and walked to his car but then he stopped next to a white Jeep and then handed me some key.

“Surprise!”

“What?” – I yelled

“This car now belongs to you babe”

Mbali

I read till I could read no more... All the disgusting details of their secret meetings, the seduction, the discussions on how I was to be deceived... It was all just too much to take in. I could not believe what I was seeing with my own eyes. The woman I had come to love like my own flesh and blood, I had brought her into my family and given her love, only for her to betray me in the worst possible way. It could not be... It had to be another Andiswa. This woman had to be someone who shared a name with my best friend.

In one of the messages she had mentioned giving Sizwe a key to her place. I knew where Sizwe kept all his keys and I hoped to find them and prove my suspicions wrong. At the back of my head I knew that my eyes were not deceiving me but somehow my brain just could not process this. I needed to see something else for all of this to sink in.

At this point I was shaking uncontrollably all over my body. My gut resembled a vibrating massage device. I was in utter shock at this discovery.

One thing was certain, I would not be able to close my eyes for a single second till I was completely sure who this Andiswa was.

I went in search of the set of keys. There was a box where Sizwe kept his office, car, safe and house keys. I searched through it until I found a couple of loose keys without holders on them. I was feeling determined and fearless. I was going to drive to Andiswa's house and try them out and I did not care if she caught me doing it. It did not bother me that what I was about to do was dangerous and illegal, that was the least of my worries. The main priority for me was uncovering the whole truth so I did just that.

I was completely numb as I drove to Dawn Park.

I parked the car a couple of houses away and walked the rest of the trip. When I got to Andiswa's house, I opened the gate because I knew exactly how to do that since it was problematic, she had shown me. The lights were still on so she was obviously still up and there was a big chance that she would hear me fidgeting with her door. I did not care though because by the time she got to the door, I would have figured out if one of the keys belonged to her.

Luckily there was music playing inside which faded out the sounds.

With shaky hands and wobbly knees, I tried the first key and it was definitely not a fit, then the second one... The third one went in and as I twisted and pushed the door open, it felt as though I was in a nightmare and someone would come and wake me up and I would realise it was all just a dream.

But unfortunately, it was my reality.

I pushed the door wide open and in a trancelike state, walked into the house, all the way to the lounge. Andiswa was sitting on her desk, focused on the computer screen in front of her, completely oblivious to my presence. I tried to speak with tears in my eyes and a mouth full of thick saliva that I just couldn't swallow, but nothing came out... absolutely nothing.

How could she? After everything I shared with her. How could she do something like this to me? I looked at the woman I had loved and cherished for so many years and just saw a stranger. A cruel, evil and conniving home wrecking bitch.

I knew if I confronted her at that moment, I would just break down but I was not about to let her have power over me again. I would never be vulnerable to Andiswa ever again! She had taken the most sacred and fragile gift I had given to her and used it to destroy me and a covenant my husband and I had made with God. Could anybody be this cruel?

I decided to turn back and softly walk out. I did not even bother closing the door behind me. I knew I was putting her in danger but I did not feel any guilt at all. In fact, I welcomed the idea of her being possibly attacked or robbed, she deserved every bit of it. As I walked back to my car, in a zombielike state,

just like that, the unbearable pain I had felt less than a minute back turned into vigorous anger.

It took everything in me to restrain myself from turning around and going back inside to strangle the life out of her. I actually turned and started running towards her house but sanity prevailed and I began to walk in the opposite direction. I swear, I lost my mind for a minute and should there have been anybody watching me, they would have picked up as much.

I continued walking until I got to my car. When I was safely inside with all the doors locked, I lost it. I cried like I had never cried before, almost screaming my lungs out. What could have been a few minutes later, a light at one of the houses went on, I realised how loud I must have been so I started the car and drove off before anybody came out to investigate. I could not even see the road ahead because I was blinded by tears. The street lights fooled me with brightness and I even forgot to switch on my headlights until I got to a very dark end of the street.

I cried like a baby as I drove on.

It did not bother me that I could not see clearly, actually I would have been glad if something happened to me and I had died or ended up in a coma. At least that would kill the excruciating pain I was feeling inside. I cried until I found it difficult to breathe.

Eventually I got home and it was only by God's grace. I went straight to the bedroom where Sizwe was sleeping soundly, even snoring slightly.

'Oh! the thin line between love and hate!' I thought to myself as I looked at him.

He had not moved an inch... He did not even realise that I had left the house.

I decided not to cause any drama for Thapelo's sake. There was enough trauma waiting for him and I would not forgive myself if I had to add on to that.

A strong drink was the only thing that could have calmed me down at that point so I poured myself a long glass of Sizwe's cognac and took a swig at it.

It instantly hit a nerve.

I then walked down the passage to check on Thapelo who was sleeping like an angel. Somehow just one look at him gave me strength... the strength to fight back. At that moment I decided I was not going out of that marriage with my tail between my legs. I was going to teach them a lesson... All these years the two people I had given my all to had taken advantage of me, made a fool of me and backstabbed me without even flinching...

It was enough! Sizwe and Andiswa would regret the day they laid eyes on me and I knew exactly where to start.

Chapter 16

Andiswa

I could not believe my eyes.

“Sizwe please tell me you are joking!” I shrieked, jumping up and down like a five - year old.

“Why would I joke about something like this? I’m not a cruel man. It’s yours! Here are the keys, you will drive us home tonight in your brand - new car,” he responded in a smug tone.

I could not help it. The tears just ran down my face. They were tears of joy. It was not even about the car because I was content with my small car, it was mostly reliable and I had become so attached to it.

The gesture was what brought me to tears. Mbali did not even have a car of her own, she used Sizwe’s old car and here he was, upgrading mine. If that was not a sign of love then I did not know what was.

It just confirmed that I had become more important to him than Mbali was otherwise why else would he do this for me and not for her?

I took the key from him and unlocked the car in disbelief. As I opened the door, I was overwhelmed by the smell of brand new leather.

It had maroon leather seats and there was no doubt that it was brand new because even though it was dark outside, everything inside just glistened.

“So, do you like it?” – Sizwe

“I love it babe! I’m still in shock, I truly did not expect this” – Me

“Well, lets jump in and go home for a little celebration... What do you say?” – Sizwe

“I say, let’s do it” – Me

We hopped inside the car and I reversed out of the parking. It would take me time to get used to the car because I did not have to fight with the steering wheel or the gears like I did with my little one and it moved like a dream.

“Oh, my word Sizwe, I still cannot believe this” – Me

“Believe every bit of it because we will be transferring the car to your name next week and the paperwork is in the cubby hole” – Sizwe

“So, you mean it’s fully paid?” - Me

“Yes” – Sizwe

“Please pinch me and tell me I am dreaming!” – Me

He just chuckled and said, “When I saw this car I just knew it was the perfect make for you and I was not wrong. It is as though they had you in mind when they made it. It really suits you”.

“How will I explain it to Mbali though because she will be a little suspicious that I did not tell her anything about it plus it’s kind of out of my price range and she knows that” – Me

“Does she know exactly how much you make from your small businesses?” – Sizwe

“Not exactly” – Me

“Does she know how much you have in you bank account right now?” – Sizwe

“Of - course not” – Me

“Then, problem solved... You just need to tell her that you have been saving for this car for years and you did not want to jinx things by announcing it prematurely but you finally managed to save enough and you wanted to surprise her” - Sizwe

“That can work... You are almost as good a liar as I am, not that it is something I am proud of” – Andiswa

“I also hate all the lies and sneaking around but for now it is our reality, unfortunately” – Sizwe

“Sizwe, will it stay like this forever or are you planning to do something about this situation?” -Me

We had never had an open and honest conversation about this but I felt it was a good time to ask since he had indirectly mentioned it. Either way it was going

to happen because what he did not know was that Mbali was going to beat him to it.

“You mean would I divorce Mbali to be with you?” – Sizwe

“That is exactly what I mean” – Me

He suddenly looked a bit uncomfortable.

“Look Andiswa, let me be straight with you. Divorcing Mbali would mean I would lose a lot of things because of various legal factors. I don’t know if I can afford to risk that at the moment” – Sizwe

“That is an excuse that all married men make,” I said disappointed.

“Well if it makes you feel better, should it not have been for that, I would not have thought twice about taking you as my wife and leaving her” – Sizwe

I knew he could have just been sweet talking me but it still felt good to hear it.

“You still have not said the magic words though,” I said blushing like a teenager.

“Andiswa, I love you and you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I wish I had met you first” – Sizwe

And that was all I needed to hear. It was like music to my ears. I had finally won him over.

I drove on feeling like I had conquered the world. What more could I have asked for?

“I can’t wait to load my music onto this machine!” – Me

We finally arrived at my place and Sizwe walked out to open the gate as I drove into the yard.

As soon as we walked into the house, I started playing some music and took out my best bottle of champagne, one that was for special occasions. The occasion was definitely befitting.

We had already had quite a few drinks but it would not hurt to share another bottle, after all we were home and nobody was driving anywhere.

“Babe, can you do me a favour and pop this bottle while I check my e-mails?” – Me

“Work again! Do you ever just let loose and forget about your business?” – Sizwe

“If I did that then my businesses would not be where they are now” – Me

I immediately disappeared into the lounge where my workstation was before he could say anything more. I needed to see if I had any orders for the following day so I could plan ahead. I was secretly hoping I did not because I needed a few hours to flaunt my new wheels around my circle of friends or fellow party goers. I just could not wait to see the looks on their faces!

I started my computer and immediately went to my inbox. There was a bunch of useless mail and adverts as usual but then one particular mail caught my eye. It was in response to a job application I had placed for Mbali.

I opened it and read.

They were requesting an interview with her that Friday morning and it was a very good position. 'Could this day get any better?' I thought to myself.

Of-course I could not share the news with Sizwe because he would know what Mbali was up to but I was excited for Mbali. This meant that if she got the job, she would definitely be confident enough to request a divorce from Sizwe and I would somehow clear my conscience because that meant Thapelo and her would be okay after leaving "my" house.

I could not help but smile as I responded to the mail, confirming that Mbali would be at the interview on Friday morning.

Everything was coming together perfectly!

Mbali

I fell asleep eventually after tossing and turning for hours. I must have only had an hour and a half of sleep before the alarm went off indicating that it was time to take Thapelo to school.

I was tired and I looked like death.

For the first time since the whole ordeal with Sizwe's infidelity started, I took a really close look at myself on the mirror.

The mirror in the passage was quite long and wide so it aloud a full view.

My cheeks looked sunken in and my body looked like it was that of a fourteen-year old and not in a good way. I had bags underneath my eyes and my weave looked as though it was just begging to come out.

I was basically a starved mess.

How did I even get to this place?

“Mommy, are we late?” Thapelo asked as he appeared behind me unexpectedly, rubbing his eyes.

“No, my angel, we are not late. Why do you ask?” Me

“I don’t know... it just feels that way” – Thapelo

“I was about to come and wake you up... your bath is ready” – Me

“Can’t I have breakfast first?” – Thapelo

“Since when do we do things that way? You know you must take a bath first” – Me

“Aaarrggghh... I hate this boring routine I have been forced into,” he said as he slumped his shoulders and started walking towards the bathroom.

He knew he was not allowed to speak to me in that manner but I let it slide.

I was too focused on the gaunt faced woman starring back at me from the mirror.

That was a moment of awakening for me. I had completely lost myself and I needed to change it.

I loved too much and I compromised way too much when I did, which could be the reason why I ended up in the situations I did. I had to learn to look after Mbali and give her value. I let myself be taken for granted and that is why people did not think twice about doing as they pleased at my expense.

I had become a people pleaser and this was the result. I failed to teach everyone around me how to treat me... but I could still give them lessons on how NOT to treat me because I did not deserve what Sizwe and Andiswa did to me. Nobody deserved that kind of betrayal.

“Mommy, I’m done... you’ve been standing in front of that mirror for a long time. Are you okay?” – Thapelo

“I’m okay my angel but tell me something, do you think mommy looks good?”
– Me

“Ammmm... you are beautiful mommy but you have been looking very tired and thin lately” – Thapelo

If you want an honest opinion, there is no better person than a child to tell it how it is because even drunk people sometimes modify their answers.

“That is going to change! I promise you” – Me

“Can you just give me my uniform so I can get dressed, I’m getting cold” – Thapelo

Guess he was not so interested.

After dropping off Thapelo at school, I decided it was time to get things in motion. Sizwe had already left for work.

First thing, I needed to do was to find out what Sizwe's plans for the day were so I went to his emails. What Sizwe had forgotten was, I was the one who had set up his gmail account for him so I still had his password and knowing how sloppy he is, he surely had never bothered to change it or put some security settings in place.

I had never had a reason to spy on him until now.

On the first attempt, I landed on his inbox.

I went through the previous week's emails and as I was doing so, an email came through. It was from a car dealership... Jeep in Sandton.

They were informing him that his vehicle was ready for collection.

I almost fell off my chair when I saw the price. Just when I thought that things could not get any worse than they already were...

So Sizwe had bought a brand - new car without my knowledge, not only that... it was a cash sale.

Everything I had suspected was confirmed. I knew the bastard was up to no good but I never thought he had it in him! Wow...

I was completely taken aback by how little I actually knew about this man when throughout my marriage, I thought I knew him better than anybody in this world. Heck... I thought I knew him better than he knew himself but as it turned out, I was fooled.

The only other woman who could have better insight into Sizwe's games was Sindi. Andiswa was just his whore, I had no doubt that she had no clue about Sizwe's plans.

I called her. I had kept her number from the other night when I found messages on Sizwe's phone.

This was something I had never done before... calling my husband's mistress knowingly that is, with Andiswa it was a special case.

"Hello" – Sindi

"Hello, may I please speak to Sindi?" - Me

"Speaking" – Sindi

"Sindi, please do not hang up but you are speaking to Mbali... Sizwe's wife" – Me

There was a moment of silence from her side.

"Look, I know everything about you and my husband. I also know that you paid for his studies and I am aware of the fact that you have a history together but that is not the reason I'm calling you. Would you happen to have an hour or so to see me? Trust me, you want to hear what I have to tell you. It will save you a lot of heartache" – Me

She remained silent for a few seconds...

"Okay... Where can we meet?" – Sindi

"How far are you from Boksburg?" – Me

“I am in Rosebank at the moment” – Sindi

“Let’s meet at the Zone in an hour... How’s Tasha’s?” – Me

“That’s fine” – Sindi

“Perfect... oh and Sindi, please do not say anything to Sizwe about this phone call or our meeting. Trust me, it’s for your own good” – Me

“I won’t” – Sindi

My first instinct was to trust her. She was just a woman in love but she knew deep down inside that it would never work between her and Sizwe. I was only going to confirm that. I just prayed that she was not stupid enough to tell Sizwe about the meeting...

Chapter 17

Andiswa

“Aaaahh babe... that was amazing,” I said as I snuggled up to Sizwe after a steamy “morning glory”.

He just looked up at the ceiling unresponsive. I suddenly could not read him.

All the excitement was gone and he was back to being the serious Sizwe that I was not so fond of.

He always became that way before going home and it annoyed me.

“Sizwe... why don’t you go home now, you need to prepare for work and it’s already five thirty” – Me

He turned to look at me in disbelief.

“You have never encouraged me to go home in the morning... In fact You hate it when I do. What’s going on? Are you expecting someone?” – Sizwe

“Don’t be ridiculous! It’s just that I hate it when you become so serious and I hate it when you have to leave so I want to get it done as quickly as possible so I can stay and lick my wounds” – Me

That was an honest answer but I also could not wait to get ready and start showing off my new wheels. One more thing I needed to do was to call Mbali and inform her of the job interview she had the following morning.

“Okay well, I can take a hint,” he said as he stood up to go to the bathroom.

As soon as he was up and taking a shower, I started making the bed and tidying up the previous night’s mess while I boiled some water for coffee.

Sizwe appeared, dressed up and ready for work. He had started leaving some of his stuff at my place to cater for early morning meetings or to make it easier for him to avoid seeing Mbali after he had slept over. Luckily Mbali hardly went into my bedroom and even when she did, she would never open my wardrobe or go through my toiletries.

“I feel a bit hungover, we might have gone overboard last night” – Sizwe

“Really? Alcohol is obviously not for you. I feel just fine... The trick is to eat something and drink a lot of water before going to bed” – Me

“I did not see you do any of that last night and we went to bed at the same time if I remember correctly” – Sizwe

“I woke up when you were snoring and drank some water” – Me

“Ok... I will remember your tip hopefully there won’t be a next time though” - Sizwe

“Sit, let me make you a nice cup of coffee” – Me

“Before I have coffee... Do you have any lemon? You know Mbali always squeezed lemon for me first thing in the morning before I had anything else” – Sizwe

“Well, I am not Mbali and no, I don’t have lemon” – Me

“Ok then, it’s fine. I will have some coffee at the office, just a glass of water will be fine for now” – Sizwe

So, he was comparing me to Mbali? I hated that with passion.

I was about to open the door and let him out very quickly when I remembered that I had a brand - new Jeep parked in my yard because of this very same man I wanted to kick out.

“Okay my love,” I said instead as I got him a glass of cold water.

He had his water very quickly and then asked me to book an Uber to take him to work. I did that and luckily there was one which was just ten minutes away.

As soon as he left, I took a shower, had breakfast and left.

It was only seven and the traffic was horrible but I just had to see Selena before she went to work.

Selena was an old buddy of mine. We were not really close even though we spent lots of weekends partying together. The reason for that was because I did not really trust her. She silently competed with me and I’ve always known that to be a sign of jealousy. She was the type of woman who would see you buy a new pair of shoes and then go look for a better version of what you bought even though it did not really suit her.

I was going to eliminate any hope of her catching up to me because she would never be able to afford a car like the one I was driving, never in a million years.

I could not wait to see her face.

I decided to call Mbali as I was driving.

“Hey Andiswa, how are you?” – Mbali

“I’m great my friend. I have wonderful news for you” – Me

“Really? What could that be?” – Mbali

“You have received a request for an interview tomorrow morning from one of the companies we placed an application with”- Me

“That is wonderful news... what position is it?” -Mbali

“Personal assistant to the CEO... The salary is great” – Me

“Brilliant! You just made my day... Will you forward me the details?” – Mbali

“Of -course I will, I just wanted to break the news to you first” – Me

“I have more good news though and this may come as a big surprise...” – Me

“What is it? Are you seeing someone?” – Mbali

“No silly... I bought a new car and it is a brand - new Jeep!” – Me

“You have got to be kidding! How did you manage that? Are you seeing a sugar-daddy or perhaps a married man that wants to silence you?” – Mbali

I was a bit shaken by her second question but I knew it was meant as a joke.

“Neither my friend, I have been saving but anyway we will discuss this when I see you” – Me

“Why don’t you come over for lunch? I would love to see it” – Mbali

“That sounds like a plan. I will see you around one but I will call you before I come over” – Me

“Can’t wait” – Mbali

I hung up and just as I was about to put my phone away, another call came through. It was a number I did not recognise.

I ignored it. I was not ready to take orders because I planned to spend the day giving my new car a spin around town and I had a feeling it was business.

The person calling was persistent though. The phone just rang non-stop until I gave in and answered it.

“Hello” – Me

“Hi, Am I speaking to Andiswa?” – Lady

She sounded quite eloquent, definitely not the type of lady I spoke to on a daily basis.

“It is Andiswa speaking” – Me

“Andiswa my name is Sindi and I was wondering if you have time to meet with me this morning. It’s about Sizwe”

Mbali

Traffic had died down so I arrived in Rosebank about twenty minutes early. I settled down at Tasha’s and ordered a macchiato while I waited for Sindi.

I felt determined and I had a good feeling about the meeting.

The call I got from Andiswa had boosted my mood considerably, even though I hated the source. It did not matter though because she was getting what she deserved soon enough and by then I would have a job and hopefully be moving on with my life. I felt a bit of hope lighting up inside me for the first time in months.

Sindi would be there in a short while but I felt really self-conscious because I was sitting alone looking a bit lost. It had been quite a while since I had sat on my own in a restaurant because I always had Sizwe around me and if he was not around, Andiswa was. Even after everything they did to me, I still missed those times. Sometimes I just wished that they could have carried on cheating without my knowledge and everything would be normal.

It might sound strange but anything was better than being in so much pain and turmoil. I would have been completely oblivious to their despicable behaviour, been fooled but at least I would have been spared the pain.

I felt a surge of pain and darkness wash over me again. The tears forcing their way out of my eyes.

The last thing I wanted to do was sit alone in a restaurant corner looking dishevelled and crying like a creep so I distracted myself by playing candy crush

on my phone. It was downloaded by Thapelo and I had never really used it after he taught me how to play but that morning I was so grateful for it.

I kept looking up to check if I would see Sindi because an hour had already passed. 'What if she changed her mind? What if she was not coming? What if she told Sizwe about my phone call to her?' I thought to myself.

Then suddenly a tall, slender figure appeared at the entrance. I recognised her from the other night at the jazz lounge but this time she was in a white business suit, a light pink camisole and light pink high heels.

She took off her sunglasses and started scanning the room. I raised my hand so she could see me.

She smiled in acknowledgement, probably for the benefit of the other people in the restaurant who could not help but look at her as she gracefully crossed the room to make it to my table.

I had to admit, she was quite eye catching... Ok, I was being jealous. She was stunningly gorgeous and she exuded confidence and great poise. I was not surprised that Sizwe had fallen in love with her but I was quite disturbed that she had fallen for Sizwe. I mean, Sizwe was charming and all but he was not so much of a looker and he could be very uptight and boring (Or so I thought). He was not even financially stable back when they met so whatever it was that drew her to him must have been something really special because this woman looked as though she could have any man she wanted.

Finally, she reached the table where I was seated and she immediately extended an arm for a handshake.

"Hello, I'm Sindi, sorry I'm late" she said looking a bit uncomfortable.

I shook her hand.

“Mbali,” I responded.

The faint scent of her perfume drifted briefly in the air as she took a seat on a chair across from mine.

I thought about my own dreadful appearance and started feeling a little bit intimidated... until she spoke.

“Mbali before you say anything please allow me to say this... I am so sorry. I do not know you but when I spoke to you this morning, it suddenly hit me how much pain Sizwe and I must be putting you through and for that I am asking you to find it in your heart to forgive me. I am not a home wrecker... It’s just a situation I found myself in” – Sindi

I looked into her eyes as she said this, trying to figure out which place this apology was coming from. Was she being genuine? How could a woman knowingly go and rip apart another woman’s home then be so quick to apologise for it?

“Sindi, I am not here for your apologies because the damage is done. I also know that you love my husband and you are planning a future with him but do you know what you are signing up for? Do you really know?” – Me

She looked straight ahead at me and then leaned back slightly in a defensive way.

“I don’t think you do, which is why I called you here. The least I could do was to warn you about the pain you are about to inflict on yourself. Am I doing it because I care? I would be lying if I said that was my reason for warning you

but I have something to benefit for sharing the information I'm about to share with you" – Me

"Mbali, look... I am not here to fight or explain myself to you if that is where you are going with this. I was simply apologising to you because..."

I stopped her mid-sentence by raising my index finger.

"Let's skip all that Sindi... After apologising, would you then leave my husband alone and let him be happy with his family? I doubt that's the case so save it... I am truly not interested. Anyway, Sizwe and I are history, he just does not know it yet," I said as I briefly scrolled through my phone for screenshots.

I then handed it to her, "Please read this... take note of the dates and please do not be afraid to scroll forward"

What I was showing her were messages between Sizwe and Andiswa.

The look of pain and shock combined on her face as she read the first screenshot was priceless. She tried to hide it but there was no way. I thought I would have enjoyed that moment but I was indifferent.

She kept reading and scrolling forward with her long, manicured finger. The look on her face changing to anger which was exactly what I was counting on.

Chapter 18

Andiswa

I felt my heart begin to beat faster. Who was this woman and why did she want to speak to me about Sizwe? Could it be possible that she knew about the affair? But how could she have known?

“Sorry, what about Sizwe? And who are you?” -Me

“Well, can we meet so that I can answer all your questions” – Sindi

I contemplated this for a few seconds.

“Okay but I have a couple of things to do so I can only meet you in the afternoon” – Me

“That’s fine” – Sindi

“Where do I meet you?” – Me

“I am in Rosebank but I can come to wherever is suitable for you” – Sindi

“Let me call you back towards the time” – Me

“Not a problem but please do not mention this to Sizwe” – Sindi

I hung up and drove straight to Selena's house but she had already left so I went to a place where we sometimes hung out near her house. I would not call it a pub but it was something similar.

I parked the car and decided to call Sizwe. I needed to know who this Sindi was and even though she told me not to say anything, I just had to find out from Sizwe if he knew her.

"Hey babe..." – Me

"Hey... what are you up to?"- Sizwe

"I'm around, went to see Selena but she was not home so I'm just chilling at Rocky's" – Me

"Okay... what's up?" – Sizwe

"Sizwe do you know a lady called Sindi?" – Me

He immediately cleared his throat.

"That's a very common name, can you be specific?" – Sizwe

"There is a lady that called and asked to meet me, she said she wanted to talk to me about you. Do you know anything about that?" – Me

“No but what could she want to tell you about me and why is she calling you?”
– Sizwe

“That’s what I would like to know” – Me

“Do you still have her number on your phone?” – Sizwe

“Yes...” – Me

“Please send it to me, I would like to see if I have it on my contacts but in the meantime please do not go to meet her. What if it’s a trap?” – Sizwe

“A trap for what? Who would want to trap me and why?” – Me

“Maybe to steal your stock, hijack you... you never know these day. Just send me the number” – Sizwe

Sizwe sounded suspiciously alarmed, understandably so because he was probably thinking the same thing I was thinking. This woman could have information on our affair and she could tell Mbali or even try to blackmail us.

At the same time, I could not shake the feeling that he knew something about this but I sent him the number anyway.

Not even five minutes later I received another call from the same number... Sindi’s number.

“Andiswa, I asked you not to tell Sizwe but you went ahead and did it anyway. I was only trying to help you but since you are so in love with this man to the point of stupidity, then sorry I even bothered” – Sindi

“Excuse me what are you talking about?” – Me

It was only when there was no response that I realised she had hung up on me. I tried to call back but the number went straight to voicemail.

She knew about Sizwe and I... Damnit!

Who was this woman and how did she know so much?

I felt my hands begin to shake. I did not like being caught up in an unresolved mystery and now I had blown my only chance of finding out what was going on.

I called Sizwe.

“Babe... Did you find out who called me?” – Me

“No... I do not have that woman’s number on my phone which can only mean that I do not know her” – Sizwe

“Oh... ok then” – Me

“You sound a little bit nervous” – Sizwe

“Sizwe she knows about us” – Me

“Oh shit! What did she say?” – Sizwe

I told Sizwe exactly what the lady had said to me before she hung up.

“Look, just block her number and try not to think about this. I will call one of my contacts to see if I can’t trace this number so I can find out who this woman is and then I will sort it out” - Sizwe

“Please just do your best” – Me

“I will call and let you know” – Sizwe

What I did not understand was why Sizwe was lying about knowing this woman because he had obviously called her after I spoke to him. How else would she have known that I told him about the call?

I needed a strong drink so I ordered a double tot of vodka and lemonade.

The regular visitors of the place started trickling in and I got a chance to start showing off my wheels. It was a welcome distraction.

With the booze beginning to flow and lots of conversation all around, I lost track of time.

The next thing I knew Mbali was calling me.

“Andy... Listen, can we postpone our lunch meeting? I need to go do my hair for the interview tomorrow morning” – Mbali

I had completely forgotten about that meeting anyway.

“Oh yes... that’s fine boo... I can always just see you tomorrow afternoon when we leave for the weekend. By the way, are you prepared?” – Me

“Everything is going ahead as planned” – Mbali

“Great! I hope you get that job hey... By the way I forgot to forward the e-mail to you so I will do it now” – Me

“Perfect... Sounds noisy where you are” – Mbali

“Aaarrggghh... I’m at Rocky’s. I just came to show the guys my new car” – Me

“Okay then, we will chat later, love” – Mbali

“Ciao” – Me

A few hours later...

Eventually most of my buddies that did not work office hours had joined me so they could see the car. I was having a lot of fun and I was tipsy. I knew if I carried on longer, I would have trouble getting home so I left.

As soon as I was alone in the car, I started thinking about that morning’s events. The whole thing with this woman called Sindi truly bothered me.

I was going to call Sizwe as soon as I got home.

When I arrived, I left the car to open the gate and that's when I noticed that my kitchen door was wide open again. I knew I was not going crazy.

What the hell! Had I been robbed this time?

Mbali

She read on as though she wanted to pick up every single detail of the conversation, her hands trembling slightly.

Eventually she handed the phone back to me.

“I have seen enough” – Sindi

I looked at her straight in the eye. Her eyes were full of tears and she tried to avoid looking back at me.

“It's okay... I know Sizwe promised you a lot of things. He even promised to leave me for you but as you can see there is another woman in the picture that holds a place in his heart too, that's if he has one” – Me

“I cannot believe I fell for his lies again” – Sindi

“Believe it Sindi because that is the reality of the situation” – Me

“You seem very calm about this... Why?” – Sindi

“I have had time to internalise this but do not let looks fool you. I feel a lot of things but calm is not one of them. My whole life has been turned upside down in a very short space of time” – Me

She looked at me as though she was studying my face.

“I see a lot of myself in you when I first realised what kind of man Sizwe really was” – Sindi

“So why did you agree to back to him?” – Me

She looked away and then back at me as though to hide the shame that had become evident on her face.

“I don’t know Mbali... honestly I don’t know what I was thinking. I suppose I never really got over him and I had hope that he had changed. He came back into my life when I was feeling very lonely and I was not in a good space. I guess he sensed that and took advantage of the situation. I will never know why he even begged me to come back to him because it seems he is sorted” - Sindi

“So now what are going to do?” – Me

“One thing I know is, Sizwe needs to learn a very hard lesson. He cannot go on treating women this way. You see Mbali, I don’t think he ever told you about us but Sizwe and I were engaged to be married. We were so happy... When I met Sizwe he was unemployed and I was doing my last year in medical school. I was still quite young and naïve. I saw something in him, a burning fire...

Ambition. He was not as privileged as I was because his family could not afford to take him to varsity and bursaries were not as readily available as they are now. He was so charming and loving... I just could not turn my back on him so I agreed to start dating him. He was always there, taking care of me and even stayed up with me when I studied sometimes till the early hours of the morning. He even started studying with me so he could quiz me, he knew more about my modules than I did," she said chuckling a bit.

"I'm sure you know how attentive he can be, not to forget intelligent. He spent most of his time at the student residence where I stayed, I had to sneak him in most of the time of- course. He very quickly became a part of every aspect of my life, I even introduced him to my parents. Even though they really liked him, my dad was not happy about me seeing a guy who was unemployed and without any qualifications so he organised him a job at Woolworths and convinced him to save up and use his savings to study. He took the job and made a success of it. Eventually he became manager at the store. By that time, I had started working at a local hospital so I suggested that he keeps his savings and I would pay for his studies since I earned so much more than him. He agreed but still insisted on paying the rent for our flat. We were a normal, young couple with dreams and aspirations. We worked hard and played hard. Our relationship was very healthy. I then fell pregnant and that's when Sizwe asked for my hand in marriage, he even started lobola negotiations. I could not believe how well everything was going but then he went and ruined everything," she said as she wiped a tear that had rolled down her cheek.

"Are you ladies still okay? Would you like anything," asked the young waiter with a huge smile on his face.

"Could you bring me some rooibos tea with lemon and honey please and a big glass of water... Mbali?" – Sindi

"I'm still good, thanks" – Me

She continued with her story as soon as the waiter left.

“I caught Sizwe red handed in our flat with some student. They were having sex in our bedroom. I had come home early because I wanted to surprise him by preparing a romantic dinner to celebrate his birthday but as it turned out, he had already organised a gift for himself. It was such a huge shock for me and I just could not forgive him. I cried and starved myself for days because I just could not eat anything, the morning sickness was not helping. It was one of those pregnancies where the morning sickness went on until almost the last semester. I was only twenty - seven weeks pregnant and I went into premature labour, unfortunately my baby did not make it. It was a girl,” she said dabbing her lower lashes with a piece of tissue.

“I am so sorry Sindi, I had no idea about all of this” I said reaching out to hold her hand.

“He would never have told you the truth. He always told everybody who asked after we broke up that I left him because he was not earning enough and I was putting pressure on him to become something he was not” – Sindi

“So, you broke up after you lost the baby?” – Me

“Yes, I just could not forgive him after I found out that I had lost the baby due to stress. We started fighting all the time and we finally called it quits but I continued paying his fees until he finished his law degree, I had no idea he got married to you in the meantime” – Sindi

“Why did you do that? Why did you continue paying his fees?” – Me

“I guess I never stopped loving him and I still wanted to see him succeed” – Sindi

I could not believe I was sitting across my husband's mistress and feeling sorry for her because of what my husband did to her.

"Anyway, now you know the story... Please tell me more about why I am here"
– Sindi

"I wanted to ask you to help me teach Sizwe a lesson or two" – Me

"You know what? Count me in, he cannot get away with this" – Sindi

I could not help but smile.

"We must start by dealing with this slut... Andiswa" – Me

"I thought Sizwe was the one who needed a thrashing but judging from the smses you showed me, it seems you and this woman know each other" – Sindi

"She was my best friend until she started sleeping with my husband"

Chapter 19

Andiswa

My first instinct was to call Sizwe but then I did not want to turn into the weak girlfriend that did not know how to protect herself so instead I went to my neighbour's house to ask for assistance.

I had a good relationship with the family but they knew very little about me and I wanted to keep it that way but desperate times called for desperate measures.

Their yard was fully enclosed with a very high wall but they had an intercom at the gate so I pressed the button.

"Hello"

"Hi there, are your parents home? It's Andiswa from next door" – Me

It was the teenage boy who answered. They had two kids, the other one was a five-year-old girl.

"Yes, my dad is home but my mom is still at work" – Boy

"Could you please ask your dad to meet me at the gate, I need his help" – Me

"Just a moment"- Boy

A few minutes later the gate slid open and the boy's father came strolling down the driveway.

"Afternoon" – Neighbour

"Good afternoon John... I'm so sorry to bother you but I need your help. I came home to find my door wide open and I'm not sure what happened but I suspect I have been robbed" – Me

"What? I was hoping we would not have these problems again in this neighbourhood. Just give me a minute to get my gun, they might still be inside"
– Neighbour

The panicked look on his face made me fear what we would find in there.

It was not long before he was back, this time in sneakers instead of slippers.

We walked over to my yard and as soon as we got to the gate he turned to me and said, "Move your car and stay inside, don't follow me. I will go in and check".

"Okay, thank you. Please be careful" – Me

I reversed out of my driveway and parked on the opposite side of the street where I could still see my kitchen door as he went in.

A few minutes later, he emerged from inside so I walked out of the car and went over to him, feeling quite nervous about what he had found. I could not believe that these bastards could just break into someone's house and take stuff that took years of hard work to accumulate, just like that.

He waited for me by the door.

“Did they take anything?” – Me

“No... It seems to me like all your stuff is intact but let’s just go inside and see. You will know better” – John

We went inside and moved from room to room checking but it seemed everything was still in place and not a single thing was missing as far as I could tell.

“You are right. Everything is here” – Me

“I would suggest that you change your locks because whoever was in here had no trouble opening the door. There is no sign of forced entry” – John

“You think they could have a key?” – Me

“Yes, it’s possible. That’s the only sensible explanation” – John

Actually, he was right because there was absolutely no way they could have entered through any of the windows. They all had security bars on them.

At this point I wished I had not consumed so much alcohol because I was probably smelling like a brewery which did not look right at all. My neighbours were decent people and I did not want them to think that I was an irresponsible drunkard.

“Enquire with the people around you and find out who could have a set of keys for your house because more often than not it is someone we know that could have a reason to break in and not cause much damage” - John

“But why would anybody do that?” – Me

“I don’t know, maybe to scare you” – John

“Did you perhaps see any suspicious movement here during the day?” -Me

“Not at all and I was home all day today” – John

He could not have because he had isolated his family from the rest of us with those exaggerated, high walls around his house.

“Thank you so much John... I really appreciate this” – Me

“Just shout if you need anything or if you see anything unusual,” he said as he walked away.

“I certainly will” – Me

“By the way, that is one mean monster you are driving there,” he shouted from outside

“It was delivered yesterday...” – Me

“Congratulations!” – John

“Thank you” – Me

I started scratching my head trying to figure out who could have done this and why. How did they get a hold of a duplicate set of my house keys?

The only person who has ever had the keys to my place was Sizwe. Why would he do something like this though? It made no sense so it could not have been him.

There was no way it could have been Mbali because I spoke to her earlier, she seemed okay and she had made plans to go to the salon, that appointment was way overdue. She was beginning to look really scruffy.

I was glad she noticed and decided to do something about it before the interview.

I whipped out my phone and dialled Sizwe’s number. I needed to get to the bottom of this before I lost my mind.

“Hey babe” – Sizwe

“Sizwe, what is going on? You know, I came home and my kitchen door was wide open. This time, I know for sure I did not leave it that way” – Me

“What? Was anything taken? And why are you asking me what’s going on? What does that have anything to do with me?” – Sizwe

“Nothing was taken. I am asking you because at first there was that phone call from that woman who wanted to meet me and now this. Something tells me

there is a connection there. I don't even know how I will fall asleep tonight knowing someone has the key to my house" – Me

"I want to come over but because of this trip Mbali has planned for tomorrow afternoon, I don't know if it's such a good idea to sleep out" – Sizwe

"It's not as though you would be doing it for the first time. Besides, I have to sleep alone knowing that you are in bed with her all weekend. I really deserve to have a bit of action before we go on that trip" – Me

"Okay, I will come over. It's not safe for you to be alone but you must change your locks first thing tomorrow morning" – Sizwe

I smiled at this piece of news... two nights in a row...

"Perfect! See you later" – Me

After this trip he would be all mine but first I had to deal with this case of the open door.

I went into the lounge and threw myself on the couch, only to realise that the couch was soaking wet. What the hell?

On close inspection, I discovered that everything of upholstery in the house was wet... all the chairs, bed in my spare room... everything except my bed.

Whoever did that had wet everything and then put the covers and cushions back in place like nothing had happened. What the hell was going on?

I lay on my bed because that was the only place I could actually sit or lie down, almost in tears, desperate for Sizwe to arrive.

Mbali

“Oh my word... I am so sorry Mbali. The bastard! How could he do something like that to you?” – Sindi

“Same way he betrayed me by planning to leave me for you” – Mbali

She looked down in shame and I felt bad by pin pointing that out after hearing her story.

“Look, Sindi... I understand why you did what you did after telling me your story. Personally, I would not have gone back to him after the way he treated you but I understand. I’m just very bitter and I need to work through those feelings because if we are going to work together on this then we can’t be throwing snide remarks at each other, I’m truly sorry.” - Me

“It’s okay. I guess I deserve it” – Sindi

“So, do you understand why I want to involve Andiswa in this as well?” -Mbali

“One hundred percent... What a witch... I mean, who does this to their best friend? I have decided to help you get back at the bitch as well, they must both get a taste of their own medicine” – Sindi

“Thank you Sindi for agreeing to help me. You have no idea what this means to me. I actually want to brief you on what I have planned if you have a bit more time” – Me

“I have a meeting in an hour but after what I have heard, I will have to cancel” – Sindi

“Perfect because we don’t have much time” – Me

I briefed Sindi on the plan and as I had hoped she was willing to play her role in it. We laughed and added some extra bits to it just to make them squirm. She was actually such a wonderful person... She just met Sizwe and made him the love of her life when he was supposed to be just a lesson, nothing more.

“Okay, we will have to start by calling her now because I know she will run to Sizwe and he will then find out that you know about her which is exactly what we want. It will keep his focus on that while we execute the real plan” – Me

“Brilliant... Give me her number”

A few hours later...

I called Andiswa after I left the salon so I could find out where she was. She confirmed that she was not home so Sindi and I went straight to her house so we could implement the first phase of our plan. She had gone for her meeting while I went to do my hair and we met up in Sunward Park. We drove in Sindi’s Merc and parked it at the shopping complex not far from Andiswa’s house and then we walked the rest of the way.

Leaving the door open when we were done was my idea because I just wanted to screw with her mind and it felt so good.

I was a little bit shocked at how well Sindi and I got along but I had vowed to not keep any friends in future especially not someone who had planned, together with my husband, to move me out of my marital home.

We had the same taste, we found humour in the same things and even though she was a medical doctor, a gorgeous one too, she did not look down on other people. My self- confidence had taken such a beating from what Sizwe had reduced me to, I found myself feeling very self – conscious but not in Sindi’s company. She made me feel sane again and reassured me by telling me how bad she got after breaking up with Sizwe the first time.

This whole thing just reminded me of how Andiswa and I got on like a house on fire from the very first day we met.

As I was talking to Sindi and watching her speak with such eloquence and elegance, I decided it was time to step up my game. I was looking like a shadow of my former self and I hated it. I needed to do something about my look and changing my hairstyle was just the beginning.

After Sindi dropped me off in Sunward Park, I went shopping for clothing because I needed an outfit that would make a statement but still be elegant enough for an interview.

I felt better than I had in months. I went and squeezed in a nail session, bought Thapelo a game he had been asking me to buy him for months and I drove home.

Thapelo was already home waiting outside for me when I arrived. I hated it when that happened because it put him at risk and made me feel like an irresponsible parent. The funny thing was, he would never complain. He would always just say, “It’s okay mommy, I understand”.

God truly gave me an angel for a son. Luckily, I had bought him something that would make up for it and also make me feel better. He was extremely grateful and so excited when I gave him his new game. It kept him busy while I cooked up a storm. My appetite was back and I hoped it was there to stay.

Just as I had hoped, Sizwe did not come home because it was already eight o'clock when we finished having dinner and there was no sign of him.

I was not bothered instead I was very happy because he was walking right into the trap. I had the urge to call Sindi and have a mini victory celebration but then I had to quickly remind myself that she was not my friend. I had to remember who she really was in this whole set up... a woman with a broken heart. When a woman goes through such she's very unpredictable so instead I took Thapelo to bed, poured myself a glass of sparkling water and started preparing for my interview. I felt light and my heart sang for the first time since all the drama started.

I was not a victim this time. I was taking my power back.

Chapter 20

Andiswa

I was not in the mood to cook anything but I remembered what would happen over the weekend and I felt my spirit lift a bit even though I was feeling uncomfortable and insecure in my own home. I dragged myself off the bed and went to the kitchen to start preparing a meal for Sizwe.

I had to take a deep breath and reassure myself. The issue with the door would be fixed the next day since I would be changing the locks and soon I would have Sizwe to protect me every night because Mbali was finally leaving the picture. If she thought she was throwing a bomb at Sizwe that weekend and that would be it, she had no idea what awaited her but I would wait for her to settle into work (should she get the job) and heal a bit before I threw my own dynamite.

The phone rang as I was busy cutting onion.

“Hey my love...” – Sizwe

“Hey babe... Are you still coming?” – Me

“I’m on my way out of the office. I will come straight there. Don’t cook, I will bring some take - aways” – Sizwe

“Aaah - ahh love, no man of mine is having take - aways when I can still stand in front of the stove. You hardly ever spend a night here so when you do, I will feed you” – Me

I was not about to drop the ball when the price was so near.

“What did I ever do to deserve such a thoughtful, sexy woman with brains?” – Sizwe

“You had better recognise!” I said laughing.

“Okay since we are on that tip, can I make a request?” – Sizwe

“I’m listening” – Me

“Please put on that black and gold lingerie, I hope I still remember the colour correctly... you know the one you had on that day when I first rocked up at your place and you had left the door open?” – Sizwe

“Oh yes... what’s the occasion?” – Me

“Do we need to have a special occasion?” – Sizwe

“It’s just that you have never made that request before” – Me

“There’s a first time for everything... I just could not stop thinking about you in that outfit, all day, for some reason” – Sizwe

“Your wish is my command then kind Sir” – Me

“Can’t wait,” he said as he hung up.

I finished cutting up the veggies and then headed straight for my closet to look for that lingerie. I took a quick shower then wore it and paired it with a pair of black stilettos. I felt super sexy as I finished cooking.

This is how it would be when Sizwe and I moved in together and I would make sure that I did not let that spark burn out like Mbali did.

Minutes later, Sizwe walked in as I was taking the meat out of the oven.

“Oh yes! What more could a man ask for, both my main meal and desert in one go” – Sizwe

“Well... so are you just going to stand there or are you going to help me with the baking tray?” – Me

“Of course,” he said as he placed his book-case on the floor and took the tray from my hands and placed it on the table.

“I have one more request though...” – Sizwe

“I’m all ears” – Me

“Can I have desert first,” he said with a smile while nibbling on my ear.

“How did I know you were going to ask for that?” – Me

“You know me too well” -Sizwe

“Well, do you want it here or on the bed?” – Me

“I want it on the couch” – Sizwe

“I only gave you two options because those are the only two options available”
– Me

“Why?” – Sizwe

“Long story, I will tell you afterward. I do not want to spoil the mood” – Me

“Okay, let’s take it to the bedroom, there’s all sorts of food and things here which will disturb us” – Sizwe

“The bedroom it is” – Me

We walked to the bedroom and as soon as we got there, he started kissing me and stepping back now and then to take in all the beauty that was my body.

We undressed each other while kissing passionately and enjoying looking at each other’s naked bodies. Sizwe always managed to get me in the mood very quickly.

“Babe, can we skip the foreplay and get straight to it. I’m just so horny right now” – Me

“Judging by how wet you are, I cannot dispute that,” he said as he moved his finger inside me, making me moan.

We had the best sex ever. He seemed really energetic and so into it.

He came first which was unusual for Sizwe because he always made sure I had my orgasm before he could relieve himself.

“Sorry love... I could not hold it in, you were just too hot but I can still make you reach North West,” he said playfully showing me his finger.

“Stop talking and get started” – Me

He played with my clitoris while thrusting his finger in and out ever so gently... It was not long till I also came and we lay next to each other breathing heavily after the nice work out.

“I seem to have worked up an appetite, can we have that main course now?” – Sizwe

“I’m also hungry... Let me go clean up and then I will finish preparing the meal” – Me

I did just that and then lay out the plates and cutlery by the kitchen counter as Sizwe joined me.

“So, what happened with your couch? You said you would tell me later” – Sizwe

“Whoever broke into the house threw water all over my couch, chairs, beds, pillows... you name it” – Me

“What?” Are you serious?” – Sizwe

“Do I look like I’m joking?” – Me

He did not say anything more but he looked very thoughtful as he dished up.

“With the exception of your bed?” – Sizwe

“Yes...” – Me

“Please pass me the salt” – Sizwe

As we ate, we realised the food tasted funny...

I was not sure what it was but the food was just fine before we added the extra salt so I opened the salt shaker to check and instead of salt there was washing powder in there...

“Sizwe! What the hell is going on here? Whoever did all this obviously just wanted to get back at me,” I said with tears in my eyes.

What else was next?

“Have you spoken to Mbali?” – Sizwe

“It is not her... I spoke to her before I came home and I can guarantee that she knows and suspects absolutely nothing” – Me

“Just give me a minute, I want to check something in your bedroom. It seems strange that the culprit only left your bed dry”

Mbali

Time flew by as I surfed the internet for popular interview questions. My eyes started itching and that’s when I realised I had been on the computer for more than three hours. I needed this job and I wanted it so bad. It would be the first step towards my independence and I really could not miss the opportunity especially because I knew that I would not be getting any help with applications from Andiswa after the weekend. I had too much on my plate and finding the right vacancies would just be too much for me. Besides, Andiswa had been in the recruitment business for years. She knew which doors to knock on. What I did not get though was why she was even helping me with this. Was it maybe to ease her guilt or did she want to make sure that I was set up and I would not think twice about leaving Sizwe so she could have him to herself. Maybe a bit of both, whatever her reasons were, I did not care much. All I wanted was a good paying job so that I would be able to take proper care of my son and myself.

Just as I was about to go back to bed, a call came in.

I answered...

“Hello” – Me

“Hi, Mbali... I’m so sorry to call so late, I hope it’s not a problem”

It was Zaba, Thapelo's father!

Why was he calling me this late and what did he want? I had not spoken to him in more than two years.

"Hi Zaba... Can I help you?" – Me

"I just wanted to find out how Thapelo is doing" – Zaba

"He is the same as he has been for the past two years" – Me

"I know I have been absent but that's only because I have been going through difficulties since you left and it hurts me to see my child being raised by another man when I cannot even offer my support" -Zaba

"You mean the other man that took on the responsibility of making sure that YOUR child is fed, guided and educated while you fuck around?" – Me

"Okay... I guess I deserve that" – Zaba

"What exactly do you want? What is the reason for this call?" – Me

"I just wanted to check in on my son and to also make sure you are okay. Are you?" – Zaba

I wanted to just burst into tears and tell him everything. Nobody had actually asked me how I was doing since this whole thing with Sizwe started.

I needed a shoulder to cry on, just somebody to tell me that everything would be fine and I was not making the biggest mistake of my life by giving up on my marriage... But that person was not Zaba.

“We are okay. In fact, we couldn’t be better. Is that all or is there something more you wanted to add?” – Me

“If everything is okay then I’m happy. Just remember that I’m a phone call away if you ever need me for anything... anything at all” – Zaba

“Good night Zaba” – Me

I hung up before he could say anything more, perhaps also fearing that I would give in to his charm and spill my guts out to him. Zaba had a tendency of calling me whenever things were not going right and he never called when things were okay. It was as though he had a radar that informed him when I was feeling vulnerable and in need of care. It was truly mind boggling.

I fell for it a few times and then felt like an idiot afterwards. I suppose I would always feel connected to him in a strange way, we shared a child and many unhappy years together but there were also good memories that were made. It always felt like I had taken five steps forward and ten steps back whenever I would let him in on how I was feeling and especially when it involved matters of the heart.

I was done doing that. I was proud of myself for standing up to him and showing strength this time around. I did not need him complicating Thapelo’s life even further. He was better off without him. I needed to protect him from the disappointment Zaba always brought along with him... The smug idiot.

Only after speaking to Zaba did I discover how exhausted I was. It had been a very long day and I had a very busy weekend ahead, starting with the

interview, so I got ready for bed and prayed that I would not have trouble falling asleep. As soon as my head hit the pillow I was out.

I was woken up by a familiar warmth on my body as I turned over. In my sleepy state, it took me a while to figure out that the warmth was my husband's body against mine. I was a bit shocked to see him there. He was supposed to have spent the night at Andiswa's house. Did it mean that he did not go or did they have a fight or something?

If that was the case then my whole plan would be ruined. I did not have time to worry about that, I could only find out later.

I reached across to the night stand and checked the time. It was already five o'clock. It was almost time to wake up anyway, so I did. It was much easier to do that than to sleep next to Sizwe.

I prepared lunch for Thapelo and got his uniform ready, took a shower and prepared myself for my interview. I took my time with the make – up but I made it very subtle and natural. I had gone for a short length weave this time, a bob that just grazed my shoulders so I did not need to do anything with that except to brush it in place. It actually framed my smaller face very well and it looked professional yet not too serious.

I did not want to come across as an uptight person.

I was glad I woke up early because by the time Thapelo was up, I was ready.

“Mom you look like a boss... wow!” – Thapelo

I laughed so hard at the statement, my mascara almost started running from the tears that came along.

“That is a very creative way of describing how mommy looks... Thank you my angel. Now, go brush your teeth and get in the bath. We don’t want to be late”
- Me

“Where are you going?” – Thapelo

“Somewhere...” – Me

“Dad, doesn’t mom look great?” – Thapelo

I turned around to find Sizwe standing behind me, staring admiringly at my backside.

“She looks amazing... It’s good to see you laugh again” – Sizwe

“Come on, get going Thapelo” – Me

He ran down towards the bathroom and I followed him down the passage, feeling great in my beige coloured, fitted suit and black stilettos. It was inspired by the outfit Sindi wore the previous day. I looked fantastic and I knew Sizwe was looking.

I wanted him to have a good look at what he had lost.

“Don’t forget to pack some clothes for the weekend getaway, we leave this afternoon at five” I said, not even looking back as I spoke before I disappeared into Thapelo’s room.

Chapter 21

Andiswa

This invasion of privacy was a really difficult for me to swallow. The fact that whoever was doing this just wanted to frustrate me made it even worse.

Sizwe came back from the room looking relieved.

“What exactly are you looking for?” – Me

“It just seems strange that the person would wet everything except your bed. I just wanted to make sure that nothing was placed there but there seems to be nothing in suspicious in your room” – Sizwe

I just could not help it, the tears of frustration spilled out even though I was trying my best to hold them in.

“Our meal is ruined so maybe I can make you a sandwich or something” – Me

“No, don’t worry about it. I need to take care of something... I think I might have an idea about who is behind all this” – Sizwe

“Who?” – Me

“You know the woman that called you and said she was Sindi?” – Sizwe

“I thought as much. I could tell that you knew more than you were letting on. Who is she?” – Me

“Sindi is the woman you saw me with at the jazz lounge in Vosloorus the other night. I was not sure that it was really her that called you because it just did not seem like the sort of thing she would do but I guess I was wrong because that is the only explanation. Why would all these things happen around the time that she called you? What I would like to know though is how she found out about us and where she got your keys” – Sizwe

“Wow... So why would she be stalking me like this? Are you still seeing her?” – Me

“Of - course not... I told you that she is my ex and she never really got over me. Maybe she is bitter because I dropped her and still carried on seeing you” – Sizwe

“Shouldn't she be doing all this to Mbali though... I mean, you are married to her” – Me

“Well she knows that I will not leave Mbali but I can leave you... Look I don't know what's going on in her head but all of this is just not making any sense” - Sizwe

Hearing that hurt, so Sizwe was really not thinking about leaving Mbali, it was a good thing that Mbali was doing it for him...

“Wow... Please give me her address, I need to have a word with her, she cannot carry on tormenting me like this” – Me

“Well, that’s why I have to deal with it before she says anything to Mbali” – Sizwe

“So, you are more concerned about Mbali when my safety is in question?” – Me

“Aaarrghh Andiswa, if she wanted to hurt you she would have done that by now. I think she is just trying to get my attention that is why I need to go and see her before this gets out of hand” – Sizwe

“Don’t you see that you are playing right into her hands?” – Me

“What do you want me to do Andiswa? I’m trying to sort this out” – Sizwe

“Fine, just go” – Me

He picked up his stuff to leave.

“If I do not come back then I will see you tomorrow at Harties okay?” – Sizwe

“So, you might not come back?” – Me

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. Tomorrow morning call someone to come and change the locks for you” – Sizwe

“Who is supposed to help me carry the couch and everything outside to dry?” – Me

“Even if I slept over I still would not have the time to help you with that. Call one of your friends to help you. I have to go” – Sizwe

He looked like he could not wait to leave the house. Whatever that woman was playing at was really working in her favour.

Sizwe left and it made me feel so empty inside, even reminding myself of the weekend ahead did not cheer me up so I decided to start packing for a bit of distraction.

I had not even taken the clothes I bought the other day out of the plastic bags. I would have to just wear them as they were, I had no time to wash them.

I started by laying out each outfit on the bed so that I could find the perfect pair of shoes for each one. I was not taking any stilettos, we were going on a mini holiday so none of that would work, just sneakers and sandals.

I opened the closet so that I could pick out shoes that matched only to find a big shock.

All my shoes were not paired... The left shoes were missing on all the pairs. All my shoes were laid out single! She took one shoe from each and every pair in my closet.

This woman had really gone too far. How childish was this?

“Foookkk!!!” I yelled in anger.

Now I was forced to go out shopping for new shoes because I only had the stilettos I was wearing and the pair I had on earlier.

I was very proud of my shoe collection. My shoes were also a big point of marketing for my business and now I could not wear them anymore.

I did not even have stock, that way I could have taken shoes from there for the weekend.

If I got my hands on that slut, it would be the end of her!

I threw myself on the bed and cried like a little baby. I know it seems petty but I really loved my shoes and I had hardly even worn most of them.

I tried to call Sizwe once I had pulled myself together but he was not answering my calls so I cried myself to sleep.

The next morning, I woke up feeling a bit better.

The day had finally arrived when Mbali would tell Sizwe of her plans to divorce him. I had to put all my issues away and try to focus on being “the concerned friend” just to make sure that she did not change her plans.

I sent her a message...

“My dear friend... I just wanted to wish you good luck for the interview. Please let me know how it goes. I know you will get the job. Love, Andiswa”

“Hey Andy... I’m almost there. I’m a bit early which is good... cross fingers for me. I will call you when I’m done”

“Break a leg”

I truly wished her well but I needed to organize someone to help me put out the furniture... I wondered if being with Sizwe was worth all this trouble. I had even neglected my business but looking out the window and seeing my brand - new jeep parked outside just made it all okay again.

Anyway, soon enough I would be a kept woman and I would not have to worry about hustling so much.

Mbali

The little slut... pretending to be my friend sent me a good luck message just when I parked my car outside the large building that would possibly be my future workplace. It was situated in a large office park in Bedfordview. The distance from there to my house was not too bad but it was not very ideal because of the traffic I would have to face daily on the N3 unless I found an alternative route.

The nerves started to kick in so I stayed inside the car a bit longer just to calm myself down and say a little prayer. I had to remind myself who I was in God... I had authority to command a mountain to move and it would do so. I declared the job as mine with faith in my heart and confidently started making my way inside leaving my fears behind.

When I walked in, the receptionist flashed a broad smile and asked, "Are you Mbalenhle?"

"Yes, I am" – Me

“Our manager is expecting you. She is in her office, you are a bit early but I’m sure she will be able to accommodate you” – Receptionist

“It’s not a problem, I can wait” – Me

“Sure, can I bring you something to drink in the meantime? Coffee... tea?” – Receptionist

“A glass of water will do. Thank you” – Me

“Perfect. I will let him know that you are here” – Receptionist

I gave her a warm smile before she turned to leave.

At that moment my phone started ringing... it was Sindi.

“Hey Sindi....” – Me

“Mbali, I hope you are not busy” – Sindi

“I have a few minutes. What’s up?” - Me

“What happened last night? Did Sizwe not go to Andiswa’s house because he rocked up at my place with his tale between his legs very late last night” – Sindi

“Oh, please don’t tell me our plan did not work... He came to your place?” – Me

“Yes, but it was quite late, around ten thirty...” – Sindi

“This doesn’t sound good but I suppose we will only know once we have wrapped things up” – Me

“Yes... I am so anxious to find out. When will you go there?” – Sindi

“I am at a job interview right now so as soon as I’m done, I will go straight there”- Me

“Okay... Good luck with that. Anyway, Sizwe came here asking me why I was calling your friend accusing her of things neither of them knew anything about. I then told him I hired a private investigator to follow him because I wanted to make sure that he was serious about the plans we were making. I told him that I knew that he was seeing Andiswa and he had bought her a Jeep. He then told me that he was not seeing Andiswa, he had befriended her to get as much information about you as he possibly can before he asks you for a divorce so that he is always one step ahead and he also said he only gave the car to her so that you did not know he had it so that should you have to split things, the car would be safe so he convinced Andiswa to keep it with her and pretend that it was hers” – Sindi

“The sneaky idiot...” – Me

“I know, if only he knew that I was aware of his lies. Those messages you showed me still give me nightmares. Anyway, he then went on to say that he was still planning to leave you and make me his wife. He begged me to calm down. I had to play along and pretend I believed everything” – Sindi

I wondered if the “playing along” meant she had to get intimate with him or even sleep with him but I did not ask. It hurt so bad to hear that my own husband was out begging other women to love him while he could not care less about what I felt or thought of him. It hurt and at the same time made me even more resentful and filled with anger.

“I’m glad you did that but look, I can’t really talk right now. I will give you a call once I’m done here just to keep you in the loop” – Me

“Cool... If you cannot get a hold of me, please leave a message with my PA. I will send you her number just now” – Sindi

“Thanks, Sindi” – Me

My husband’s mistress had a personal assistant and I was looking for a job as one... how funny was that.

I switched off my phone and tried to clear my head and refocus my energy on what I was there for.

A minute later, the receptionist came back in and asked me to follow her to the boardroom where the interview would be held.

“I placed the water there for you” – Receptionist

“Thank you so much” – Me

I walked in and sat down.

“The manager will be with you shortly” – Receptionist

A few minutes later, a well- groomed, middle- aged caucasian woman walked into the room and shook my hand.

“My name is Natalie and I will be doing the interview with you. Unfortunately, our CEO, whom you would be assisting, is out of the country at the moment so I am here in his place. We will have to record the interview for him if that’s okay with you” – Natalie

“That’s totally fine” – Me

She continued to ask me some questions which I answered confidently. There was something very soothing about her energy even though I could not tell what she thought of my response to her questions. She had mastered the blank stare and after a while it started to get a little bit intimidating.

Needless to say, I was quite relieved when the interview was over. I was told the CEO would be back over the weekend and I would know by Tuesday if I got the job or not.

Chapter 22

Andiswa

There was a guy that usually helped me with my garden not far from my house so I called him to come and help me take out all the wet furniture and pillows. That and cleaning up the mess took up most of my morning. By the time I was done it must have been around eleven. That's when Mbali called me.

"Hey friend, I'm done with the interview. Are you home so I can tell you all about it?" – Mbali

"Yes, I am but I need to go somewhere very quickly" – Andiswa

"Oh, come on, I also still need to see your new wheels. I won't be long. Anyway, I also still need to go back home and finish packing for the trip" – Mbali

I could not really tell Mbali what was going on without having to explain but I needed to call the locksmith to change my locks and I still had to go shopping for shoes but then again, I could not turn her away. I had to play the caring friend because this was a crucial time.

"Okay, come through. I want to hear all about it plus my beast is here bringing sunshine into my life. You will love it" – Me

"I'm sure I will... See you just now. I'm not too far from your house, give me about fifteen minutes" – Mbali

“Okay cool” – Me

I used that fifteen minutes to check my mail and as I was getting into it, Mbali arrived.

My jaw almost dropped when she walked through the door. She looked absolutely stunning. I hated the fact that Sizwe might have seen her that way.

“Wow my friend! This divorce thing suits you, look at you!” – Me

“Thank you... And that is how it will stay from now onwards. What’s up with all this furniture outside?” – Mbali

“Oh that! I decided to do some spring cleaning so... these are the results” – Me

“Shoo friend, in this heat! Rather you than me. Do you think this furniture will dry though before we leave this afternoon? Some of that stuff is still dripping of water” – Mbali

“If it doesn’t dry then I will have to take it out again when we come back, no big deal. Enough about that, how did the interview go?” – Me

“It went well... I did good but I just could not tell if the lady that was conducting the interview liked me or not. She was quite expressionless” – Me

“Oh, one of those. I’m sure you have nothing to worry about, you are smart, well spoken, good CV and not to mention gorgeously beautiful” - Andiswa

“Is that all?” she teased.

“So where is the car?” – Me

“Oh, I parked it at the back to make some space for the furniture outside.
Come let’s go and see it” – Me

I started looking for my slippers but then I remembered there was only one left
so I opted to go barefooted.

“Where are your shoes?” – Mbali

“I’m enjoying walking on barefoot today,” I lied.

When we got to the back, I made a dramatic bow.

“Taa daa!” – Me

She covered her mouth in awe.

“Andiswa! Wow... you did not tell me you bought such an expensive car. It’s
fantastic!” – Mbali

“I worked very hard for it friend... And I finally got it” – Me

I wasn’t lying about working hard for it. I had to spread my legs very wide to
satisfy her husband in bed and feed him in the kitchen too.

“So, what are you going to do with your old car, I might need to buy it from you since I will have to give back Sizwe’s” – Mbali

Shame the poor thing.

“We will talk about it friend but of course I can sell it to you. It’s not like I will need it now... Come and see the interior” – Me

She made all sorts of noise about the car and I felt very bad for her because she did not know that her husband bought it for me.

Why don’t you have a seat here on the kitchen counter while I make a call. I need to phone the locksmith.

“Sure” – Mbali

I went in the other room to make the call but they did not answer. The phone just rang non-stop.

“Mbali, I’m sorry but I will need to go and take care of some things. I will be gone for a while but I will see you later in Harties” – Me

“I understand, I also need to go finish off packing?” - Mbali

I was forced to wear stilettos even though I was going to the mall. It was going to be a long trip! I just decided I would go straight to the locksmith and ask them to come here and then take a chance to buy shoes.

Mbali and I left together. I could see she wanted to talk some more but I did not have time for that. I had lots to do. I had to change the locks because I could not let that skank have access to my house all weekend.

The trip to the mall was a painful one. I was so uncomfortable walking on that slippery floor with high heels on. I vowed to take them off right after buying flats which I did.

I managed to get the guys to go over to my place and fix the locks in the meantime which was a huge relief.

I finally got done, went home and finished packing.

I then called the gardener again to help me put the furniture back in the house even though it was still quite damp. I would sort it out when I got back, I had more important things to do. That weekend getaway was not to be missed.

Finally, around five thirty I was ready to go. I put my suitcase and cooler box in the boot of my Jeep and hit the road. 'It was going to be quite a memorable trip,' I thought to myself as I hit play on my radio and listened to my favourite jams in celebration.

Mbali

When I was done with the interview, I went to do a little bit of last minute shopping and then I called Andiswa. I needed to get to her house whether she was there or not. She told me she was going out so I insisted that she wait for me. After all she could have changed the locks which meant I would not be able to get in and that would ruin everything.

Luckily, she waited and I almost burst out laughing when I got there and saw all the furniture laid outside in the sun. She proceeded to lie to me about the reason why it was out there but the priceless moment was when she had to walk out on barefoot because she did not have any shoes to wear.

The smug look on her face when she showed me the car that my husband bought her made me sick to my stomach and having to pretend to be surprised and happy for her really took a lot out of me but I played along anyway. If all went well, I would have the last laugh. I just prayed that we had captured the evidence we needed otherwise all the energy put into this whole weekend trip would have been a complete waste of time.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity she told me she was leaving. It would have been easier for me to grab my equipment from her room while I was there but there was no way of doing it without her being suspicious so I left as she did but then I parked my car at the Spar not very far from her house and I turned around to go back when I was sure she was nowhere nearby.

I had to be very careful and very quick.

I parked at her gate this time, put the key in the lock and it worked. I then went inside and pulled a chair to retrieve the lipstick camera that Sindi and I had installed inside her bedroom light just above her bed. That thing was so tiny there was no way they could have seen it... technology.

I said a little prayer that there was something worthwhile in there as I placed the chair back in its place and made my way out.

I locked the door behind me this time. I did not want to cause anymore suspicion.

As soon as I drove off, I called Sindi. Fortunately, she answered so I did not have to call her PA.

“Hey Sindi... I’m done. I have the camera with me” – Me

“Brilliant, we have a lot of footage to go over because that thing can record for twelve hours non-stop after sensing movement. I just hope that we will find what we are looking for even though I’m a bit doubtful now” – Sindi

“Well, we will just have to try” – Me

“Can I send you the address of the video guy then we can meet at his office?” – Sindi

“Yes, please do it now because I’m already on the road... you said it was in Primrose, right?” – Me

“Will do... yes it’s in Primrose so you can head in that direction so long. I just have two more patients to attend to and then I will come straight there” – Sindi

“Cool” – Me

“How did your interview go?” – Sindi

“It went very well but I will only get the results next week” – Me

“Good luck on that... I will see you later and I will send you that address just now” – Sindi

“Thanks, Sindi” – Me

The suspense was killing me. I had to find out if we got anything worthwhile recorded on that camera because if not we would have to switch to plan B which was to record them at the chalet in Hartebees over the weekend but that would be a lot trickier and it would also take longer. I could not bear to be in that house pretending to be the sweet little wife who was being fooled by the two closest people in her life. I did not have the strength to carry on with the pretence.

As soon as I got the message with the address from Sindi, I parked on the side of the road and punched it into my GPS then drove straight there.

The guy was expecting me so his equipment was already laid out in his studio.

“It might take a while so take a seat, can I get you anything to drink?” – Guy

“No thank you, I’m fine... I suppose Sindi has briefed you on what exactly it is we are looking for?” – Me

“Yep, I will fast forward the irrelevant parts otherwise we could be here all day” - Guy

“Great” – Me

The video started where Andiswa walked into her room and threw herself on her bed looking very frustrated. She just lay there for quite a while and then she was on the phone and off she went. There was nothing after that for a while but then she came back, went into the bathroom, came back out with

only her robe on and started searching for something in her drawer. She then pulled out some lingerie and started stripping off her robe to put on.

Yes! That might mean there was something in there after all but I did not want to get too excited.

She put on a pair of stilettos which had survived the raid somehow because they were not stored with the rest of the shoes.

Then there was nothing for a while.

Schucks! We might have missed all the action.

But then Andiswa came back into the room followed by Sizwe, they started kissing passionately.

Bingo! There it was.

“We might have something here!” – Guy

“Please go ahead and save this part from the moment they walk in” – Me

“Excellent” – Guy

As excited as I was that we might have something solid. I felt as though I had been punched in the stomach after seeing my best friend and husband clinging on to each other in a passionate kiss. It got worse and a whole lot spicier.

Sizwe would step back and salivate at the sight of Andiswa’s body and she just lapped up the attention... Loving every second of it.

I felt sick to my stomach, I was actually on the verge of throwing up.

“Oh Lord have mercy,” the video guy exclaimed as it got more explicit and they started having sex.

I could not hold in the tears as I watched this scene play out... I was crushed.

I could see the guy getting a bit uncomfortable because he realised the man in the video was my man. It was obvious because of the tears on my face. I just let them flow because it was too much to see.

Sindi arrived just as we watched the final part of the sex scene.

“I’m so sorry, I had to fit in a few more patients before I left” – Sindi

I did not respond but she gasped as she saw the screen.

I knew it was just as horrific for her to watch as it was for me.

There was just silence in the room until the end when Andiswa stood up to go to the bathroom. We both knew that this was happening but I guess seeing it made it so real.

“I’m so sorry Mbali” – Sindi

“Don’t be... You should feel sorry for my former husband and best friend”

Chapter 23

Andiswa

The road to Harties can be a bit terrifying in the dark and I found myself wishing I had left earlier. My mind was racing as I could not stop thinking about Mbali and her plans to ask Sizwe for a divorce. I still felt very sad for her because she was still a woman I loved and cared for but I had grown to love her husband more.

I wondered how she was planning to do it. I would have to be in the room when she told Sizwe but I would not even be able to comfort him. I knew he still loved her and he probably always would in his own, funny way. I was realistic enough to understand and accept this.

My biggest role after that would be comforting him and making sure he got over her as soon as possible. That would not be such a difficult task.

He was already more in love with me than he was with Mbali, he just needed to admit that to himself. I would be there to help him get to that stage.

My phone rang just as I stopped at a petrol station to buy some snacks and water.

It was Mbali...

“Hey Andiswa... how far are you? We have already arrived. I booked a three - bedroom chalet but Thapelo is at a friend’s house so it will just be the three of us” – Mbali

“Sounds great... I miss Thapelo though. I wish he would have been there so I can spend some time with him but I understand why you would want to keep him away” – Me

“Yes, it wouldn’t be appropriate for him to be around” – Mbali

“Is Sizwe close to you or can you talk?” – Me

“I can talk, he is off loading our luggage from the car” – Mbali

“So, when are you planning to tell him, tonight?” – Me

“No, we are all very tired and I do not want to spoil the trip from the start” – Mbali

“I agree... Well, just know that I’m here for you. Anyway, we will finish the conversation once I get there” – Me

“Are you still on track? The last thing I would want to see happening is you getting lost” – Mbali

“Don’t worry, I’m still fine. I should be there in less than half an hour” – Me

“Good... See you just now” – Mbali

“Excitement galore,” I said as I hung up.

When I arrived Sizwe was outside preparing fire on the griller.

“Hey sexy...” he whispered while grabbing my ass.

“Sizwe... Behave yourself,” I whispered back as I smiled and went pass him.

Mbali was inside making salad.

“Hey Mbals! Finally, I’m here... It was a long ride,” I said dramatically dropping my handbag on the couch.

She left everything she was doing and came over to give me a hug like we always did but it was much quicker and more formal, not as tight and genuine as it usually was. Shame, it must have also been the fact that the poor girl was disappearing slowly but surely. There was nothing to hold on to.

“I’m so glad to see you” – Mbali

“The place is absolutely stunning. I can’t wait to see it in daylight” – Me

“I wanted to make this a memorable weekend,” she said looking straight into my eyes in a very creepy way. She must have been referring to her plan.

“I put our favourite bottle of wine in the fridge to chill... Help yourself in the meantime. I’m almost done here” – Mbali

“You are heaven sent, I need that after the week I had” – Me

“What happened?” – Mbali

“Aaaarrghhh, nothing serious... just hectic workwise but I got my car which made up for all the hard work” – Me

“Well, you can get me a glass as well. I suddenly feel like something to take the edge off” – Mbali

I poured two glasses for both of us.

“What about Sizwe? Maybe he wants something too... let me ask him,” I said as I made my way to the patio without waiting for a response.

He must have been listening in on the conversation because he picked up his tumbler half filled with what I assumed was cognac.

“I’m good, thanks” – Sizwe

I winked at him and went back inside.

“Why don’t you ask Sizwe to help you get your luggage inside? Then we can relax and have a bit of a chat while we wait for the meat” – Mbali

“Great idea...” – Me

I went back outside and asked Sizwe to follow me to the car and he picked up his glass as he did just that.

When we were out of sight. He kissed me very hard on the lips.

“How was your trip? You look very sexy in those shorts” – Sizwe

That was the point of the outfit.

“I know... I thought I could offer a bit of eye candy seeing as your wife does not have much to show,” I replied flirtatiously... throwing shade at Mbali for her skinny frame.

“Well, I’m glad you did but you just managed to give me a hard on” – Sizwe

“So, what are we going to do about that?” - Me

“We will make a plan later when she falls asleep” – Sizwe

“Right now, let’s get going before she gets suspicious” – Me

We picked up the suitcases and made our way back only to find Mbali standing outside on the lawn with a glass of wine in her hand. She was looking in the direction where Sizwe and I had been standing but she was smiling.

I panicked but I was a bit confused by her reaction. She did not look like someone who had just caught her best friend and hubby in a compromising situation. She looked like her normal cheerful self.

“Come on you two... Sizwe needs to start on the meat! Andiswa we have a lot to catch up on” – Mbali

I suppose she only came out later and did not see anything... Luckily!

What a close call.

Mbali

When the guy had finished saving the footage onto a memory stick, I paid him and then Sindi and I left.

“Sindi, thank you so much for your help... It was fun,” I giggled, “I would not have known where to start looking for this guy if it was not for you”.

“Mbali, it was the least I could do and besides, I also cannot wait to see him pay for what he has done to both of us” – Sindi

“Why don’t you come with then?” – Me

“What do you mean? How would we explain that?” – Sindi

“They do not have to know you are there. We can book you into a different chalet” – Me

She just looked at me as though I was speaking Greek.

“Look, I really think that it will give you closure to see how everything unfolds and just to see the look on their faces. Plus, it will have that great impact if you show up” – Me

“Not a bad idea at all now that I think about it but I’m working tomorrow and Sunday all day. Why don’t you give me a call and let me know exactly when you are planning to do this then I can drive there at that exact time and drive back the very same day” – Sindi

“I’m in” – Me

“Perfect... We will chat later then” – Sindi

I rushed home because I had told Sizwe we leave at five. I did not have a lot of packing to do but I needed to take Thapelo to his friend’s place when he came back from school.

There was no hard traffic so I made it home on time, finished packing and then took Thapelo to his friend’s house.

I changed into jeans, a white vest and sandals before Sizwe came back. He then just finished off packing his stuff and we loaded everything in the car. All of this was done in complete silence.

I normally did all the packing for him but I was not going to do that anymore... not even if I was paid to do it.

The trip to Harties was quite short but it seemed like the longest trip I had ever taken. There was so much tension in that car, you could slice it with a knife.

We both made no effort to start a conversation. We only spoke if we really needed to and it would either be an instruction, question or a very quick answer.

I could not wait to finally get there and be out of this suffocating space. I decided to confront the situation the following day because I was just too tired and all I wanted to do was to relax for the rest of the day even if it meant pretending to be Andiswa's best pal.

I could not even look at Sizwe and being stuck in the same car as him made me want to scream. I was not sure how long I would be able to keep up the act especially when I had to spend time with both of them under the same roof but I just had to be brave and see it through.

When we finally got there, we offloaded the luggage in silence and I took out the groceries that Sizwe had bought on his way home.

"I'm a bit hungry so maybe we can start preparing dinner" – Me

"What are we having? I bought some meat maybe I can just grill it" – Sizwe

"I will make salad and butter the rolls while you do that" – Me

"Okay... Mbali, what's the point of this trip if you are not going to talk to me?" – Sizwe

"Oh, I will... Just not now. Give it time" - Me

"And you never really explained to me why you invited that friend of yours, Andiswa" – Sizwe

I almost burst out laughing at his tone. If I did not know what I knew, he could have fooled me.

“To neutralise the situation, that’s all” – Me

“I still don’t get it but that’s fine... let’s just try to have a good time okay?” – Sizwe

The nerve of this man... If Sizwe had chosen acting as a career, he would have been winning Oscars but unfortunately in real life, he sucked big time.

I just walked over to the kitchen and started packing the groceries into the fridge.

When Andiswa arrived all bubbly and cheerful, I almost puked. It was nauseating.

I had to pull myself together and act normal but I saw how she wanted to be as close to Sizwe as she possibly could. Offering him drinks and all that crap, so I gave her what she wanted by sending her off to her car with him so they could get her luggage but what they did not realise was that I was following them in the shadows at a fairly safe distance. I saw them steal a kiss and get lovey - dovey, they were not even ashamed.

At this stage I was amused at their stupidity but then again when you do dumb things, you always reduce everyone else to your level in your own head and assume that they are as stupid as you are because that is how you would like them to be. It makes it comfortable. Unfortunately, in most cases you are found out.

I felt nothing... absolutely nothing for these two. I had blocked them out of my heart. I did not even feel hatred. They were just non – existent to me. They went too far... They hurt me too much.

As they walked back, they realised that I had seen them but then I confused them by acting normal when they started panicking.

It was my turn to beat them at their own game...

Chapter 24

Andiswa

The rest of the evening was quite chilled. We had dinner and sat outside to chat. It was a bit tense but as soon as I started getting tipsy, I did not care much, I just babbled on about anything and everything till we all went to bed.

It killed me that Sizwe would be sharing a room with Mbali while I slept on my own right next door but I looked forward to him sneaking into my room later.

It turned out to be a long wait... I ended up falling asleep.

When I woke up, I was blinded by the sun rays. I had not bothered to close the blinds the previous night because the chalet was in a very discreet position and I enjoyed looking at the stars from inside my room.

I checked my watch, it was seven in the morning so I decided to wake up and take a shower. I could never manage to sleep in because I was so used to waking up very early.

Mbali was already up having breakfast.

“Hey... you are up early” – Me

“Yeah, I’m so used to waking up before six to get Thapelo ready for school and even on weekends I end up being up around that time” – Mbali

“Yeah... I have the same problem” – Me

“What are you having?” – Me

“Cereal” – Mbali

“I don’t know how you stomach that genetic food” – Me

“It’s Thapelo’s doing” – Mbali

“I see... Do we have eggs or something?” – Me

“Have a look in the fridge... I’m quite sure Sizwe bought all the necessary groceries, I’m just not that hungry” – Mbali

I made myself a proper breakfast and then sat to watch some TV.

“I’m going for a walk... I will be back in about half an hour” – Mbali

“Enjoy” – Me

I sat on the couch for about five more minutes and when I was sure that she was gone, I made my way to their bedroom where Sizwe was still sleeping.

I climbed on the bed and whispered in his ear, “Hey handsome”.

That startled him awake.

“Andiswa! What the hell are you doing in here?” – Sizwe

“Relax... Mbali’s gone for a walk” – Me

“What if she comes back... You need to leave, seriously... this is not on” – Sizwe

Poor soul, he was not even aware that he was going to be a single man by the end of the weekend. Then he would need me.

I just left the room, a bit pissed off.

The rest of the day was spent at the pool, enjoying the water and fresh air. I was never really a good swimmer but I enjoyed strutting around in my new bikini knowing that Sizwe was probably drooling.

Mbali was unusually quiet and she spent most of the day, lounging on a deck chair, reading a novel while Sizwe swam and spent time at the bar near the pool area.

Eventually we all went back to the chalet and ordered food from the restaurant.

Mbali got dressed in a very sexy black dress and got all made up. I saw how Sizwe looked at her with admiration in his eyes and it drove me crazy. Heck, I had also made some effort in the outfit I had on but it was almost as though, I was non-existent.

As soon as we ate, Mbali cleared the table and then suggested that we watch a movie.

I honestly did not feel like drinking so a movie seemed to be a good enough distraction because I was so anxious about Mbali's announcement and she seemed to be taking her time. I could not even ask her when she was planning to do it because she would start being suspicious about why I kept asking her that question... Besides she seemed very distant and unapproachable that day which was understandable.

"What movie are we going to watch?" – Me

"I brought a USB with one very interesting movie. I'm sure you guys will love it"
– Mbali

"Okay... Let's make some popcorn then" – Sizwe

"Great idea" – Mbali

"I will make it" – Me

"The corn is in the cupboard right next to the stove" – Mbali

I put it in a bowl and popped it in the microwave and in a few minutes, it was ready.

"I'm going to have some wine, anybody joining me?" – Mbali

I was not planning to drink anything but then I just felt like having a glass so I asked Mbali to pour one for me.

Sizwe declined the offer and so Mbali installed the USB on the TV and waited for everyone to settle down before she played the movie.

“Is everyone ready, can I start the movie?” – Mbali

“Go ahead” – Sizwe

“Ready” – Me

She pressed the play button and then...

I almost spilled my wine when I saw my bedroom on the screen and just seconds later Sizwe and I appeared and we started kissing.

Was this not from the other night?

“Oh my gosh... what the...”

I heard the words slip out of my mouth.

I was in total shock! My heart was racing as I looked at Mbali...

She was sitting comfortably on the couch opposite mine, right next to Sizwe. Looking as calm as ever.

Mbali

The look on Sizwe's face as I started the video was priceless.

He looked as though he was choking on a hot potato.

He truly did not see this coming!

I do not even want to get started on Andiswa, she even mumbled something incoherently.

"Interesting hey?" - Me

Sizwe tried to grab the remote but I was too quick for him as I stood up taking the remote with me.

"Not so quick. I want you to sit and enjoy watching the magic you made together. I must give it to you Sizwe, you sure have some mean moves when you're excited. As for you my lovely friend, I still wonder why you have never been able to find a man of your own when you can open this wide for mine" – Me

She just sat there looking pathetic.

"What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?" – Me

She got off the couch and went down on both knees.

"Jesus... Mbali..." – Andiswa

“Do me a huge favour and keep Jesus out of this... The nerve of this woman!” I said wagging my finger at her.

“Mbali, please forgive me, I never meant for this to happen...” – Andiswa

“Oh, spare me Andiswa...” – Me

At this point Sizwe was sitting with his face buried in his hands as the sound of Andiswa moaning on the video filled the room. I stood right next to the TV screen making sure that they did not get any chance to pull out the USB as the video played on.

“Sizwe I loved you when you had nothing, gave you a home and supported your dream. I gave you love and made sure you were taken care off. We struggled together at some point not knowing what we would eat the next day when money was tight and we were just pushing for you to get your degree. I took your position as the provider in our household, depriving my son of things he should have been provided with so that you could realise your dreams and you made me quit my job with the promise of a good, secure family life. And you know what? I fell for it, hook, line and sinker.

What did you go and do? You went and betrayed me with a woman I loved and cared for like a sister. How could you be so cruel? How could anybody intentionally hurt a person who sacrificed so much for them in such a sick way? As for you Andiswa, I wish for you to spend the rest of your miserable life with this demon over here so that you can experience hell on earth. You think he loves you? You think now that I’m out of the picture he will be all yours? Is that what you think? Because if that is what you have in mind... you better think again. Did he tell you that he had intentions of leaving me to go and marry someone else? Except that person is not you” – Me

“Mbali... Mbali, my love... Can we please talk about this?” he requested with tears in his eyes when he had finally managed to raise his face.

“Talk? You want to talk now? Don’t make me laugh and wipe those crocodile tears off your face, you look pathetic” – Me

“Mbali please calm down...” – Sizwe

“Oh, I’m calm Sizwe... In fact, I have never been this calm before in my life” – Me

“I want us to fix things sweetheart... this, all of this is not me... I don’t know what came over me” – Sizwe

“Did you decide that this was not you when you realised that you are not as clever as you think you are or after you bought this whore a Jeep with money saved at my expense? By the way Andiswa, you will be leaving the keys to that car here this weekend. It no longer belongs to you. Your boyfriend over here, owes me money. I paid his varsity fees and he never paid me back so I’m claiming my money back. By the way, he was never going to give you legal ownership of the car so stop dreaming” – Me

Her demeanour suddenly changed at the mention of handing over the car. Gone was the begging Andiswa...

“I am not giving up any keys because that car was a gift to me. End of story” – Andiswa

“Oh, now the claws come out... That’s the Andiswa I want to see not the fake one. I want to see Andiswa the shameless slut, the real Andiswa” – Me

“You will not talk to me that way Mbali” – Andiswa

“Shut up Andiswa!” – Sizwe

“No, let your little slut loose... you gave her the power so why are you supressing her now?” – Me

I turned back to face Andiswa.

“Now listen here, you do not get to tell me what to do. Do we understand each other? You will leave my husband’s car keys on this table for me as soon as we are done here” – I said banging on the table.

“Just give Mbali the keys Andiswa” – Sizwe

“What? I cannot believe this, Sizwe you gave that car to me” - Andiswa

“And now I am telling you to give the keys to Mbali. Are you deaf?” – Sizwe

“I am still talking. I am not done. Sizwe you will leave the house as in this weekend and change ownership to me. You no longer stay there. You can feel free to go live in this rat’s cave seeing as you enjoy it so much there” – Me

“Leave my house?” – Sizwe

“You heard me correctly... I’m quite sure I did not stutter” – Me

“There is no way” – Sizwe

“Well then prepare to be famous because this sex video will be uploaded before you can pop your busy dick out your pants tonight... Oh and as I was saying Andiswa, Sizwe has a fiancé. Did you know about that?” – Me

She looked at me like I had just crawled out of a rock.

I picked up my phone and called Sindi.

“Please come in,” I said to her.

Sindi did not waste any time within seconds she came strutting in with a broad smile on her face.

Chapter 25

Andiswa

I could not believe what was happening. I wished it was all a horrible dream but it wasn't. The embarrassment of seeing myself all spread out on the bed, having sex, not just with anybody but with Mbali's husband. I wished a huge hole could open in the middle of that living room and bury me whole.

The magnitude of my betrayal was highlighted in an awkwardly unbearable way. What a fool I was, all along Mbali knew about Sizwe and I kept lying to her even about the car and she played along. I had gotten a bitter taste of my own medicine and it was a bitter pill to swallow.

I did not know what to do with myself and when she demanded the car that Sizwe had bought me, my first instinct was to be defensive. How was I expected to just give it up? I quickly realised that I was fighting a losing battle though because it was very clear to see where Sizwe's loyalty lies and besides, the last thing I wanted was to see that video trending on social media. That would be the end of me. Mbali got me good. How could I have been so stupid though? What was I thinking?

As though that were not enough, Mbali then said something about Sizwe having another woman in his life whom he had promised to marry. How could he? Was this really true? As I was asking myself that question, she picked up the phone and asked someone to come in.

'It must be the woman she is talking about'

My word! How many people knew about this affair? And there I was thinking we were playing it safe...

I almost fell out of my seat when I saw the beautiful woman from the other night. She was the one that called me the other day according to Sizwe and he had convinced me that she was just a bitter ex - girlfriend but then again this was coming from a man who was sleeping with his wife's best friend.

"Hi Andiswa, good to finally meet you. My name is Sindi... We spoke once before over the phone" – Sindi

She was standing right next to Mbali as though they were buddies. Were they in this together? But how?

I just continued staring at her without saying a word. This was the worst humiliation I had ever had to go through in my entire life. The sound on the video was almost deafening as Mbali had turned the volume up after her torturous speech.

It was mostly me moaning and screaming while Sizwe told me how good and hot I feel. All I could do at this moment was sit and take everything thrown my way because I could not afford to have this posted online. I would never recover from that.

"Speechless I see" – Sindi

"Sindi, don't bother, everything that comes out of that mouth is lies and rubbish anyway" – Mbali

As difficult as it was to sit and take the insults. I knew I deserved it and what could I say?

"Sizwe... How are you feeling? Ready to start your new life?" – Sindi

Sizwe was now slouched on the couch looking like a sheep going in for slaughter.

“Sindi... what are you doing here?” – Sizwe

The words came out of his mouth like a whisper and he sounded more like he had not intended to speak out, it was more of a thought.

“What am I doing here? That’s a good question... I came to see for myself what a conniving, lying idiot looks like when he realises he is not as clever as he thinks he is. What did you think would happen? You thought you would just play three women, two very intelligent women and one just as stupid as you are, and get away with it? You are an imbecile... sick man” – Sindi

“Sindi... Please accept my apology...” – Sizwe

“Unfucken – believable!” - Mbali

“What apology? So, you think you can just play with people’s lives and say I’m sorry and it makes it all okay? You must be kidding me. You lied to me and told me you were going to leave Mbali and marry me meanwhile you were busy buying expensive cars for whores on the side. I do not even know what I was thinking when I agreed to that bullshit. Look at this woman, look at her...” she said pointing a perfectly manicured hand out at Mbali.

“She is a God - fearing woman, a beautiful person inside and outside, she has sacrificed so much for you but what do you do? You treat her like a doormat just like you did with me when I was with you. I do not even know what possessed me to let you fool me into trusting you again. To think that I hurt such a wonderful person, makes me sick to my stomach. On top of everything,

you betrayed her with someone who was supposed to be her best friend... Sisi, Good luck to you. Rest assured, he will do to you what he did to his wife, I guarantee it. The two of you deserve each other” – Sindi

Those words pierced my heart like a sharp sword going through cotton but I was not going to let Sindi insult me. She was just as guilty as I was and now she was here acting all holy.

“Excuse me but you are the last biscuit to crack. If you dare call me a whore again, I will slap you so hard, you will go flying out of here. You are no better than me so sit down” – Andiswa

“Stop talking rubbish and give me my car keys” – Mbali

I had no other choice. I went to the bedroom to get the keys and handed them over to her with a lump in my throat.

“Good girl... Sindi let’s go. It’s starting to stink in here. All this rot...” – Mbali

Mbali pulled out the USB out of the TV connection before they both headed to the other side of the chalet and left Sizwe and I sitting in the living room in silence.

I was just relieved that the video had stopped playing.

A few minutes later, they emerged carrying Mbali’s suitcase.

Mbali

After getting all my stuff with Sindi's help, we headed straight towards the door.

"I hope you took all your belongings out of my car Miss Thing..." – Me

Andiswa shot me such a dirty look but stood up to go and check... I returned the look with a smile.

"I will go check" – Andiswa

"No sit down, if there is anything that belongs to you there, I will leave it by the parking and you can fetch it when I leave, I've seen enough of your sorry face. As for you Mister, I expect to see you fetch your stuff from my house when you come back and I also need the necessary documents for change of ownership of the car signed, sealed and delivered as soon as possible. Do the right thing otherwise..." I said animatedly showing Sizwe the USB for effect.

"And Andiswa... you need to take care of that cellulite... It's nasty," Sindi added before stepping out.

"Oh, by the way, you can carry on with what you started by the parking lot earlier, you have all the time in the world now... Enjoy it" I added as I poked my head back inside through the door and winked.

What they did not know was, I was not done...

We quietly hung a DO NOT DISTURB sign that we had taken from the chalet earlier, locked the only door that could lead them outside and headed for the parking lot where I started taking out what was left of Andiswa's belongings from the Jeep. There was not much in the car, a USB probably with music so I kept that, a car charger, some coins and a jersey. I put everything in a plastic bag including their phones that I had taken without them noticing. If they wanted to be together and have fun, they would be together all weekend without any interruptions if all went according to plan.

I took the plastic bag and placed it inside the griller on the patio much to Sindi's amusement.

We then drove off into the tranquil darkness of the night.

I felt very comfortable in the car, that was actually an understatement, I loved it! No wonder Andiswa looked like she was about to burst into tears when I ordered her to hand over the car keys in exchange for my silence on their disastrous affair.

As soon as we left the gates of the resort, I saw Sindi flashing her headlights right behind me then she called.

"Let's stop somewhere for a drink" – Sindi

"Sure, I know a place right down the road which is probably still open, follow me" – Me

I felt empowered, free and very proud of myself. This time I was not going to leave the relationship feeling like a fool. Yes, I was taken for a ride for some time and stabbed in the back by the people I loved and trusted but I made sure that the story did not end there and I was satisfied. It was time for me to focus on my son and myself and now. I would try to pick up the pieces and carry on.

I stopped by the quiet parking lot where the small café was situated.

Luckily, they were still open.

I parked the car and struggled to lock it because I was not quite used to the key.

Sindi waited for me and then we went inside and ordered two glasses of wine.

“Did you see the look on their faces?” – Sindi

We both burst out laughing.

“Sizwe looked like a wet chicken” – Me

“And that bitch trying to defend herself but realising she was trapped... Priceless!” – Sindi

Sindi picked up her glass for a toast.

“Here’s to a brand - new life free of demons and open to a whole lot of possibility!” – Sindi

“May it be so...” I said as we toasted to that.

“So, what now Mbali?” – Sindi

“Well, now I must get myself a lawyer and start the divorce process, I need to make sure that Sizwe hands over the car and the house to me on paper. The most difficult part will be explaining to my son that yet again he has lost a father” – Me

“It can’t be easy but he will be happier seeing you in a more peaceful space” – Sindi

“That is what I’m counting on” – Me

“Are you not going to change your mind about Sizwe?” – Sindi

“Only if I completely lost my mind,” I said laughing.

Too much had been revealed about Sizwe. He was not the man I thought he was and even though I missed the man I had spent years of my precious time with, I had to also remind myself that, that man does not exist. I was with a psychopath that made me fall in love with the idea of him but in actual fact he was a twisted man.

“So, what was the whole thing you did with the DO NOT DISTURB sign?” – Sindi

“That idea just popped up in my head when I caught them stealing a kiss outside last night and I thought if they needed privacy, I would give them just that. I took their phones and put them on the patio so that they cannot call reception for help, the sign will make sure that even house - keeping does not come to rescue them because I locked them in and took the key with me. They will only leave that chalet on Monday after they are supposed to check out.

Sindi’s laugh filled the whole room as I told her what I had done.

Chapter 26

Andiswa

I heard the key turn by the door but I did not pay much attention to that because I was still shocked at what had just happened.

So, all along, Mbali knew and the joke was on me. My only question was, when did she find out about this affair?

It all started to make perfect sense now. Sindi did not do all the things she was accused of on her own, she was working with Mbali to destroy the peace in my home by wetting my furniture and so on...

Mbali probably made a copy of my key because she always had access to it but it bugged me that I would never really know how it all happened.

As for the sex tape, my stomach just turned at the thought of someone holding that much power over me. It was explicit and dirty. I would have to do everything in my power to make sure that it did not see the light of day. I had already lost my car. What was next?

The embarrassment of turning up in my old car and people asking me what happened to the new one was just unbearable to think about. I was so ashamed... I wanted Mbali to find out about Sizwe and I, eventually, so that we could be together openly and without fear but I did not want it to happen like this and definitely not at this stage.

I had lost my best friend forever. What was I thinking?

Sizwe was really something else, when confronted with his infidelity, he did not stand up for me and take responsibility like a man instead he was almost

begging for Mbali and that fancy mistress of his to forgive him. How could I go on and still trust a man like that?

He had actually promised the other woman that he would leave Mbali and marry her meanwhile he assured me that leaving Mbali was not even an option. So, who was he lying to? Did this mean he loved Sindi enough to give up Mbali or did it mean he trusted me enough to be honest with me and not with her? I was confused, disappointed and frustrated.

“Andiswa, I need to follow Mbali so I can speak to her, I cannot believe what just happened here” -Sizwe

“What? You have got to be joking. Do you honestly think that Mbali will agree to talk to you? And what about me because you know she took my car, so how am I supposed to get home?” -Me

The little idiot! He did not even see the need to apologise to me. He was, after all, the one that started this whole thing. He came to my house and seduced me.

“I suppose I will have to wait” – Sizwe

“You are really more stupid than I thought. Do you honestly think Mbali would take you back after all this?” – Me

“Shut the hell up Andiswa!” – Sizwe

“Do not talk to me that way! You do not even have the decency to apologise for two timing me with that skinny witch, Sindi. You lied to me about that and a whole lot of other things but here you are telling me to shut up. What the hell is wrong with you?” – Me

“I have had a night from hell, the last thing I need is to listen to you whining about an apology” – Sizwe

That is how important or rather unimportant I was to this man. This was not the way I picture this night turning out after Mbali asked for a divorce. I was angry, hurt and confused. I just wanted to be alone. Being in that chalet with Sizwe just drove me crazy. My whole plan had backfired horribly. I had to give it to Mbali, she did a great job.

“You know what, maybe it’s not such a bad idea to drive back to Johannesburg now. I cannot stand the sight of you. Please drop me off at my house when we get there and then go ahead and do what you want to do” – Me

“Well then get your stuff and let’s go. I don’t have much to pack anyway” – Sizwe

The tears just came streaming down my face. He did not even care that he was losing me instead he was pining after Mbali who had just insulted and humiliated him. On top of everything, I was going back home to a closet full of single shoes, wet furniture and no privacy... My car was gone and Sizwe had shown his true colours.

All I had been to him was a sex doll. He did not care about my feelings. I had lost so much because of him and here he was treating me like crap... Wow.

I went into my room and started packing all my stuff back into the suitcase then I realised, I had not seen my phone for a while. I searched for it all over the house but it was nowhere to be found. I must have left it in the car... I also remembered that Mbali said she would leave all my stuff at the parking lot.

Sizwe had disappeared into his room as well, probably packing.

I went to go see if I could find my things outside but the door was locked. Then I remembered Mbali and Sindi had locked it.

“Sizwe do you have another set of keys for this place? I need to go out and Mbali locked us in,” I shouted from the living room.

Sizwe appeared from his room.

“No there was only one set of keys. Shit! We will have to phone reception, I hope they are still open” – Sizwe

“I can’t find my phone so you will have to call from yours” – Me

He turned to go search for it in his room and after a few minutes, he came back and asked, “Have you seen my phone anywhere?”

We searched for it all over but it was not there.

“Please do not tell me it is what I think it is” – Sizwe

“It looks like they locked us in and took our phones”

Mbali

I woke up the following day to an empty, cold house. At least Thapelo was not home to see my grief. It was done, Sizwe was out of my life and now that the

adrenaline of setting them up was gone and I was faced with reality and loneliness it did not feel so good. I knew I would get over it but I just needed to cry and let go so I did just that as I cleaned out his closet and packed all his belongings into boxes. I took down all the pictures of him that I had framed and replaced them with pictures of just me and Thapelo.

I did not stop until every trace of Sizwe was gone. I then put all the boxes and suitcases in the garage. I threw the clothes I could not fit into the suitcases in black bags. It was dark by the time I finished but I felt better. Thapelo would only be coming home after school the following day which was a Monday.

Sizwe had not shown up so I assumed he was still stuck in the chalet with Andiswa. My heart sank at the thought of her. I got angry all over again. I should have just continued with my plan to take her phone and throw it out the window on my way back home but my conscience could not let me. At the time I thought what I had done was enough for one night but now that I was home, I regretted not doing it.

‘Stop thinking about her and focus on yourself. You do not have time to feel sorry for yourself’ I chided myself.

I decided to write down everything I was angry about, everything that was hurting me inside, all my regrets and mistakes, not leaving anything out. I wrote everything on two pages from my notepad. I then tore the pages out, went out to the back of the house with a lighter and I burnt the pages as I chanted. “I let go of all the anger and pain... I let go of all the anger and pain.”

I felt so much lighter once that was done. It was something I had watched in a movie and it actually did make me feel like I had let go somehow.

I cooked up a storm and treated myself to a scrumptious meal and some tiramisu for desert before going to bed. It was a good sign that my appetite was back. I needed to gain a bit of weight, I did not like how skinny I had become.

The following morning, I woke up feeling a whole lot better. It felt good to not worry where Sizwe was and with whom.

I cleaned up the house and then searched for a nearby locksmith who then came and changed the locks on both doors leading outside. I wanted Sizwe to have no access. He had no business being in my house anyway.

As though I had attracted him with my thoughts... just as the locksmith left, Sizwe drove in and parked outside the garage.

I was looking at him from the living room window so I quickly went outside before he could come in.

“Are you here to get your stuff?” – Me

He was locking the doors to his car, just about to come in.

“Hi Mbali... Can we please talk inside” – Sizwe

“You no longer live here and you are not welcome here either so please take your things and go” – Me

“Mbali you are not thinking clearly, how are you going to manage paying the bills without me? Let’s talk about this. I can help you if you let me stay” – Sizwe

“Sizwe, your stuff is in the garage... Everything! It’s not locked so please take all of it and leave. I don’t have time for this” – Me

“I love you Mbali... Please give me a chance to prove it to you. I don’t know what made me hurt you like this. Andiswa must have used ‘umuthi’ on me because I was not being myself” – Sizwe

“So, did Sindi use umuthi on you as well? Don’t make me laugh Sizwe. Take your stuff and go be with Andiswa because that’s what you wanted to do all along when you did not come home, now that you have the chance to be there permanently, suddenly you are being bewitched. Don’t be pathetic” – Me

“Mbali, I know you are angry but please give me a chance to explain” – Sizwe

“Explain what? By the way, how was the rest of your weekend?” – Me

“You really did not have to be that cruel and lock me in there with her all weekend...” – Sizwe

I laughed really loud which irritated him.

“You wanted some alone time with her because you just could not keep your hands off her so I gave you exactly what you needed. What’s the problem?” – Me

He looked at me for a few seconds and then said, “It’s funny how you forgave that useless ex of yours who does not even know what size shoe his son wears but I make one mistake, just one and you were so quick to kick me out of my house and wave divorce in my face” – Sizwe

He was trying to manipulate me and it was not going to work.

“Whatever makes you sleep better at night Sizwe... All I ask is that you take what’s yours and GET OUT”

I left him standing there.

“And trust me, Sindi is not your friend... Be careful,” he said behind me.

Chapter 27

Andiswa

I burst into tears at the thought of being stuck in that chalet with Sizwe even a minute longer but it seemed I was.

“Look Andiswa, house - keeping will come in the morning and they will help us so calm down” – Sizwe

“I do not want to be here with you, not even for another minute” – Me

“Well, it does not look like you have much of a choice. We are locked in with no form of communication so stop being childish and sit down” – Sizwe

All the things that Sindi had said about Sizwe just kept replaying in my mind and I could not stand to be near him. On top of everything, he had started speaking to me like I was nobody to him. I just wanted to run but I couldn't so instead I lay on the couch and carried on crying.

“I know it's been a very emotional evening for you, it has been the same for me too. I certainly did not expect what happened here tonight. I am still trying to digest it but crying will not change anything. Instead you will just give yourself a headache and we don't even have any painkillers” – Sizwe

“Sizwe, stop.. Will you just stop talking to me like this! You have already shown me that you do not care about me or my feelings but you do not have to rub it in. Just shut up and pretend I’m not here”- Me

I had raised my voice out of frustration. He did not say anything instead he stood up and went to his room.

I sat there all night, thinking how this could have happened. My whole life had turned into a mess for a man who actually did not even want to be with me.

Eventually I fell asleep on the couch and woke up the following morning with a stiff neck.

I managed to get myself to the kitchen and make some coffee. Sizwe was still asleep.

I could not wait for house - keeping to arrive so that we could leave the place.

It was around ten when Sizwe finally woke up.

“Morning... Did the cleaners arrive yet?” – Sizwe

“No” – Me

“Ok, it smells good in here, can I also have some coffee” – Sizwe

“You can make it yourself” – Me

“Oh, come on Andiswa, are you still angry with me? I am sorry” – Sizwe

“Sizwe, please leave me the hell alone” – Me

Actually, I needed something stronger even though it was only ten, who was counting? I opened my cooler box and took out the bottle of cognac I had meant to give to Sizwe. I poured myself a bit of it in a glass and started drinking. It at least made me feel better... it even soothed my sore neck.

If I had to be stuck in there, I would have to be intoxicated and at least we had food.

Sizwe looked in my direction and held back from saying anything even though I knew he was just itching to say something about my drinking at that hour.

When the clock hit two, we knew nobody was coming and we would have to spend another night there. I just could not understand why nobody came to clean the chalet like they had done the previous day.

I could tell Sizwe was thinking about the same thing.

“Can I join you?” – Sizwe

Oh, so he finally saw the light.

I just pushed the bottle across the table and said nothing else.

He took it and poured quite a large amount in a glass.

By seven in the evening, we were both quite drunk. Sizwe was much worse than I was.

I was at least pacing myself because I knew if I drank too quickly, I would not have made it pass midday.

“You know Andiswa... You have been good to me. I’m just an asshole that’s the problem,” he slurred, with his eyes half closed.

I had still not said a word to him but he kept babbling on about how much he appreciated me and how we could make it work. I think he was trying to convince himself more than he was convincing me.

I was not in the mood for drunken ramblings even though I was intoxicated as well. We both passed out in the living room but I was woken up by a cold breeze around midnight so I picked myself up and went straight to bed. I left Sizwe laid out on the couch, his left foot swinging uncomfortably towards the floor. He had also not bothered to wake me up the previous night when I fell asleep on the couch with my head hanging to the side.

Eventually the following day around eleven there was a knock on the door. I ran as though my life depended on it to open the window and ask the lady standing outside with a vacuum cleaner to please open for us.

She fiddled with some keys until finally she managed to open the door.

“Thank goodness you are here. We have been locked in here for the whole weekend. Our friend left with the key by mistake,” I lied.

“I’m so sorry mam. You should have called reception” – House - keeper

“We did not have phones and we thought someone would come and clean up here... Nobody did” – Me

“You have a Do Not Disturb sign hanging on your door. I did come but I turned back because I am not allowed to knock or come in when I see this sign” – House - keeper

So Mbali had it all planned out.

Sizwe appeared from his room, interrupting our conversation.

“Oh, thank God!” he exclaimed, looking up at the ceiling for effect.

“Andiswa, let’s not waste any time. Take your stuff and let’s go” – Sizwe

“Oh mam, I found this plastic bag by the griller outside,” the lady said as she handed it to me.

It had my jersey, some stuff from the car and both our phones inside. The little bitch!

The first thing that greeted me as I walked into my house was the damp smell of the furniture but I was so happy to be home.

Mbali

I had to have a talk with Thapelo when he came back from school. I explained to him that Sizwe was not going to be staying with us anymore. I told him it was just going to be the two of us in the house but we were going to be alright.

He did not say much about it, which worried me but it was out of my control and the only thing I could do was to be there for him and try to spend as much time with him as possible.

On Tuesday morning, I woke up quite nervous. I was supposed to get a call about the results of my interview. I was not quite sure how to feel about it because that woman did not give me much to go on but all I knew was that I needed the job desperately.

I had enough money to keep us going for the next two months or so and then all the funds would have dried out. I could not count on getting anything from the joint account, I knew Sizwe was bitter and he would use that to get back at me. If he had not withdrawn all the funds from there, it would only be a matter of time before he did so. I could have kicked myself at that time for not creating an emergency fund account for myself when I still had the chance to do so.

After getting Thapelo to school, I kept myself busy by cleaning the house and playing some gospel music for encouragement. I made sure that my phone stayed with me at all times because I did not want to miss that important call.

It seemed like it was taking forever.

My phone finally rang and I jumped for it but it was not the call I was expecting, it was Zaba. I felt a twinge of irritation.

“Yes Zaba, can I help you?” – Me

“How are you doing Mbali? How is my boy?” – Zaba

“I thought we’ve had this conversation already” – Me

“Listen, I just wanted to offer some support and I need your banking details” – Zaba

“Really? How many years did it take you to realise that you had a financial obligation towards your son’s needs and how many times have you asked for my banking details in the past with no results?” – Me

“I know I have not really been fair to you but I want to make it up to you. I’m financially stable now and I want to make things right” – Zaba

“Do you think being financially unstable kept me from making my son the top priority? Get a life Zaba... Take that money and go buy yourself a Rolex or something because it should amount to that” – Me

I hung up without even thinking about it. I was fuming. Even though I needed the money, my pride would not let me accept it and he was probably lying anyway. Who the hell did he think he was? Did he think he could disappear for years and then just show up one day and expect to make everything alright again by flaunting cash?

As I was trying to calm myself down, my phone rang again. It was a landline number I did not recognise so I hoped it was about the job.

“Hello?” – Me

“Hello, could I please speak to Mbalentle?”

It was Natalie.

“Speaking” – Me

“Hi Mbalentle, Natalie here”

“Oh, hi Natalie, good to hear from you,” I said casually trying not to sound as nervous as I was.

“Listen, I’m calling you about the results from the job interview we had with you last Friday. My boss has since gotten back from abroad and he had a chance to listen to all the recordings of you and the other applicants” – Natalie

“Yes...” – Me

“You and one other lady were his two favourites and I must say you were my favourite candidate but unfortunately he chose to go with the other lady but thank you very much for coming and should there be any other vacancies, we will consider notifying you if you are available” – Natalie

“That’s okay Natalie. I would appreciate that. Thank you very much for the call” – Me

I was so disappointed, my lip started quivering as I tried to hold back the tears. Why did nothing ever come easy for me. I always had to suffer and struggle for everything I had. Even though I was not so sure about Natalie’s reaction, I had felt it in my spirit that the job was mine and now this.

I felt as though God was being unfair towards me. How much disappointment could one person take?

I was angry and I felt sorry for myself.

I even turned off the gospel music that was still playing in the background. I rolled myself up in a fetal position on the couch and cried till my eyes started burning from all the wiping.

My phone started ringing again but I was not in the mood to talk to anyone. I checked who it was and it happened to be Sindi. She was the last person I wanted to talk to. She would never even understand my struggles. She was a doctor from a rich family and I doubt she ever had to face unemployment and the struggle of being in the job market.

Eventually the phone stopped ringing but she called again and again until I could not take it anymore so I answered.

Could people not get the message when you were ignoring them?

“Hello Sindi” – Me

“Hi Mbali, how are you?” – Sindi

“I’m good... How are you?” – Me

“I’ve been better... I’m really sorry for calling so much and making a nuisance of myself but I have been really worried about you. How are you holding up?” – Sindi

“I have been coping just fine but today seems like a tough day” – Me

“Anything specific that triggered it?” – Sindi

“I got a call back about my interview but unfortunately I did not get the job” – Me

“I’m so sorry Mbali but listen, maybe you could send me your CV and I could forward it to a few of my contacts and see what we can come up with” – Sindi

From what I heard, Sindi came from quite a powerful family and she wasn't doing too badly herself so why not?

"I will send it to you immediately... I really appreciate that" – Me

"Not a problem, I was thinking maybe we could catch up over coffee or something..." – Sindi

Chapter 28

Andiswa

My head ached from drinking so much the previous day... I felt horrible physically and emotionally. The events of the weekend crept into my mind and it felt as though I was being squeezed out of breath. I still could not believe how Mbali had found out and kept pretending to not know so she could execute her plan. I guess I underestimated her, big time. I never thought she was capable of pulling off something like that but she did. It was amazing how far a woman could go when pushed hard enough. Everybody had a limit.

‘Andiswa pull yourself together’ I thought to myself.

I had let business slip and my mind was all over the place. I needed to reconstruct my life and move on with or without Sizwe.

I had no energy for household duties, all I wanted to do was to sleep off this hangover so I got undressed and slipped under the covers. I wondered how, when and where the camera Mbali used had been planted. The view came from the ceiling but I had no energy to deal with that, all I wanted to do was sleep.

I passed out as soon as my head hit the pillow then the next thing I was woken by a knock on my window, much to my irritation.

“Andiswa, it’s me... Please open the door” – Sizwe

What was he doing back here? Oh yes, Mbali had kicked him out and obviously his other mistress had no time for him so he had no choice but to come back here. I wanted to just leave him out there until he left but my heart would not

let me. I still loved Sizwe in spite of everything that happened so I got out of bed and walked to the kitchen to open the door for him.

I just unlocked the door and went back to bed. My body felt too weak for anything else. I did not want to fight or discuss anything with him. All I wanted to do was sleep and regain my strength.

He obviously saw that I had opened the door because seconds later, I heard him walk in and he came straight to my bedroom.

He came and sat on the edge of my bed.

“Andiswa, I know I was very unfair towards you and I want to apologise. I was just taken aback by everything that happened and I took it out on you but it wasn’t your fault. It was my fault for putting you in this situation and I am asking you to forgive me for all this especially for the way I reacted” – Sizwe

I did not say anything in response. I just lay there with my eyes closed.

“I will buy you another car, I promise. We just need to let this one go, as tough as it is, you know what’s going to happen if we don’t” – Sizwe

I still did not respond.

“The most important thing is that we can be together now without feeling guilty about anything. The truth is out and I want to spend the rest of my life with you if you could just allow me in” – Sizwe

“Sizwe, did you decide that you want to be with me after all your other options were exhausted... and there were quite a few... or do you really want to be with me?” – Me

“I know I made foolish mistakes but I don’t love Sindi... I bought a car for YOU and I spent my time with YOU. That should tell you something” – Sizwe

“You promised to marry her Sizwe and it’s not like she needed you to buy her a car from what I saw, she is doing quite well for herself” – Me

“I just promised her that because she was threatening to expose me. You have got to believe me. Look at everything I have risked for you. Doesn’t that tell you something?” – Sizwe

I did not know what to believe anymore. My head told me he was lying but my heart was clinging on to his every word. I suppose the only way I could find out if he was serious or not was to give it a try.

“You can stay but only until you sort yourself out. I need to rest now so please give me some space. There is food in the fridge so you can make yourself a sandwich or something” – Me

“Thank you, my love... Are you okay though? If you are not fine with me being here, I can always leave my things and go book into a hotel” – Sizwe

“It’s fine... Stay but I really need to sleep Sizwe” – Me

He kissed me on the forehead and left the room. He then started bringing in all his belongings from the car. My heart just betrayed all my other senses at the sound of that. Sizwe was moving in! Even though it was not under desirable circumstances, I got what I wanted sooner than I had expected.

Mbali could think she won this battle but I got the man, the ultimate price.

I felt all warm and fuzzy inside and slowly drifted off to sleep.

Mbali

Somehow, I felt better after speaking to Sindi. She gave me hope that all was not lost but I had declined her offer to meet for coffee. The whole ordeal with Andiswa had given me major trust issues so I wanted nobody to come too close to me especially not Sindi.

My heart bled every time I thought about Andiswa. I loved that woman like my own sister. I would have done anything for her but she hurt me in the most cruel and evil way imaginable. The truth gnawed at my heart like a rat going through paper. How could two people be this heartless? I wondered if Sizwe had really gone to Andiswa when I kicked him out or had he gone elsewhere... I knew I was not even supposed to think about that but how could I not? This man had been a part of my life for years in the most intimate way. I had plans to spend the rest of my life with him before all this happened. I definitely did not feel sorry for him or want him back but I was curious and I hated to admit it but I still cared. It was not as though, I could just switch my off my feelings.

I remembered that I had to send my CV to Sindi. I immediately got on my laptop and forwarded a copy to her.

I hoped she would be able to help me but I did not want to put my hopes up too high. I had no faith in people anymore. They always promised but never delivered. She could have just offered because she felt obliged to do so.

As soon as I finished doing that, I decided to leave the house. Being alone in there was just too depressing and I did not want to dwell on the bad news I had just received. I did not know where to go so I went to church, every Tuesday and Thursday there was a service at one and at four in the afternoon.

It had been a while but as soon as I entered, I knew I had not made a mistake. The holy spirit just filled me up and made me feel whole again. I needed to hear the word and I realised how much my spirit had just been leaking... I cried throughout the service and I really felt touched. I remembered that even though I felt alone, I was not alone and God was with me. I had pushed to make things happen on my own and forgot that all I needed to do was to ask him to take over.

I left with a message of faith in my heart.

I felt peaceful, as though there was a quiet presence that was walking with me, comforting and healing me.

Being at home knowing that Sizwe was not coming back was tough. I knew it was tough on Thapelo as well so I spent as much time with him as I possibly could when he came home from school just to somehow fill the void.

Even though Sizwe was spending more time away from home before he left, at least then we knew he would come back but this time it was final and it left me feeling empty.

This too would pass.

Even though I could not afford it, I went on a few shopping sprees and bought stuff for myself and Thapelo for the next few days. There was nothing like retail therapy to soothe a broken spirit even if it was just momentary happiness.

That Saturday morning as I was preparing to take Thapelo to his Karate class, I got a call from Sindi. I hoped that she was calling to ask me out for a drink again because I needed to see someone even if it was just to make small talk. I had not felt like being with her the other day but all that had changed. I did not need to attach myself to her but it would not hurt to have someone I could at least go out with and have adult conversation with now and then.

“Hey Sindi... Good to hear from you” – Me

“Hey, how are you doing?” – Sindi

“It’s getting better... I’m getting there. I’m just stressed about finding work and all the applications I have sent through have had no results but I hope you are calling to ask me out for coffee” – Me

“I wish I could but I’m swamped this weekend. I have better news for you though” – Sindi

“I could do with some good news” – Me

“Well, I gave your CV to a few people I know and one man named Theo gave me a call a few minutes ago, he says his secretary / PA fell sick so she went back home and now he is looking for a replacement for her. It just happened that I had given him your CV... He had a look at it and was quite impressed so he asked me to organise an interview with you for Monday at nine in the morning” – Sindi

“Oh, my word Sindi! I don’t know how to thank you for this. You have just made my day” – Me

“You can thank me with lunch next week once you have the job. I know he will like you” – Sindi

“It’s a deal” – Me

I hung up and started jumping up and down in celebration.

Chapter 29

Andiswa

I woke up to find Sizwe sleeping behind me on the bed with his arm on my waist. I must have passed out after speaking to him. I looked at him sleeping peacefully under the moon-light that shone through my window and I just felt my heart melt. This whole thing could not have been easy on him too. I felt bad for giving him such a hard time but I was angry.

I felt much better, physically, but I could not sleep anymore so I checked the time. It was two o' clock in the morning.

'Might as well wake up and catch up on some work', I thought to myself.

I woke up, made myself some warm milk and cookies, sat on my desk and started going through my e-mails. There were a lot of orders that had gone unattended so I started replying to each and every e-mail that was in connection with that, making an excuse about not being well but I promised that I would make the deliveries in the next twenty -four hours and I intended to do so.

I had stock that I needed to fetch from my supplier before I made deliveries so after getting all my admin sorted, I took a shower and started preparing all my packaging. I then woke Sizwe up so he could get ready for work. All his stuff was still laying on the floor in the lounge, taking up all the space in the room but he had taken out all the furniture and put it back in, I noticed because the damp smell was gone and everything was completely dry but not in position. 'The joys of having a man around'.

It felt good waking him up to get ready for work instead of alerting him that he needed to go home. This was his home now and I got butterflies in my stomach just thinking about it.

“Hey sleepy head... wake up... you need to go to work” – Me

“What time is it?” Sizwe asked sleepily.

“It’s six, babe” – Me

“Oh shit, I need to get going. I have an early meeting,” he said as he shot out of bed.

I immediately started going through his luggage looking for a suit that he would wear. I found one and matched it up with a tie and a shirt.

I made a mental note to start unpacking his stuff as soon as I had made the deliveries.

I lay out his clothing on the bed while I made a quick lunch for him. It was a woollies lasagne but he did not have to know that. I packed it in a lunchbox and made coffee.

This is what I had always dreamt of and finally my dream had come true. It did not come easy but it came and I was happy.

Sizwe got dressed, had his coffee and a muffin with me and then he left.

I left the house straight after he did. Having to start my old car again was a huge slap in the face, a reminder of what was taken away from me.

I was going to use this opportunity to show Mbali that she was not as clever as she thought she was. I hoped that she did not get the job she had been interviewed for and in fact I had received a lot of other invitations for interviews for her. I had seen and ignored them when I checked my e-mails the previous night. Sizwe was not burdened with debt as far as I knew. He earned well and he was living with me. I would still carry on paying my own bills but I would make sure that he made enough money to buy me a car better than the one Mbali took. I would make sure that I looked on point and expensive at all times and I would flaunt it on social media for her and everybody else to see. In the mean time she would be struggling with bills and being a single parent. She might have had her way with me this time but the glory would not last very long.

I would give Sizwe the child that he longed for, the child that Mbali could not produce for him and make sure that he stayed forever indebted to me for that. I was going to live my dream of being a fabulous housewife and soon enough we would get a mansion in the suburbs and she would be left with egg on her face. Watching from the background in poverty and misery.

It made me feel good just thinking about it. I would have Sizwe wrapped around my little finger and make sure that I kept him on his toes, something that she did not manage to do. Our wedding will be the talk of the town. I will not be mopping the dusty streets in my wedding gown like she did instead it will be held in a classy venue with marble floors, a wedding fit for a king and queen.

I made that my personal goal and all I had to do was make sure that the divorce process went smoothly and quickly.

That motivated me to face the day with pride and enthusiasm just like I always did.

After I had finished off packaging my stock and delivering to my clients. I checked my bank balance as the cash came rolling in. I was happy and in a good mood so I started making dinner while I unpacked Sizwe's things and re-arranged the furniture. He had a lot of books and stuff, it took up a lot of space

and cluttered my lounge but I did not mind, that would be one reason to convince him to one day buy a bigger house for me. For now, the main goal was getting a huge, luxury car, preferably a German machine. Those who would laugh at me for losing my Jeep and going back to my small wheels would be very disappointed and I just could not wait.

I had only two hours before Sizwe came home so I hurried up and finished off. I wanted the house to be perfectly warm and inviting when he arrived.

Mbali

The weekend passed very quickly. I had gone to church, prepared for my interview and prepared Thapelo's uniform for the whole week.

According to Sindi, this man Theo ran a medical aid company but he had a lot of other business interests that I would be assisting him with. Apparently, he was very big in both the corporate and the medical fields so Sindi advised me to prepare thoroughly for what he may ask me because he wanted someone very efficient since there is a lot that his assistant would be handling but the pay was good and it came with benefits so I was happy with that.

On Monday morning, I woke up very late, I had forgotten to switch on the alarm.

"Aaahhh not today of all days," I grumbled as I shot out of bed and ran to Thapelo's room. He was still fast asleep so I woke him up and rushed him to the bathroom for a shower while I went to my own bathroom to also do the same. By the time we were both done, it was time to leave the house and we were not even dressed. I let Thapelo dress himself and have breakfast while I put on my suit, which I had prepared over the weekend fortunately and then I did my make - up. I could not let my make -up look anything but perfect so I took my time with that and my hair. When I was satisfied with how I looked, I packed Thapelo's lunch and we ran off.

I drove like a taxi driver until we hit traffic. I always left the house a bit earlier whenever I dropped off Thapelo to avoid peak hour traffic and even five minutes made a huge difference on the busy Jo'burg roads.

We came to a complete halt, that's how bad it was. It was bumper to bumper traffic and there was no way I would make it to Thapelo's school on time and even if we were half an hour late, it would be a miracle which meant I would also be late for my interview.

I remembered how smoothly things went when I attended my last interview and I did not even get the job. This time it was a big disaster.

By the time the road cleared, it was already eight o'clock and I still had to drive all the way to Bedfordview, this company was also situated there. There was no telling what would be happening on the N3 as it was a very unpredictable road so I made a quick decision that Thapelo would skip school and go with me to the interview as I turned to go on the freeway.

"Mommy, I think you are going the wrong way" – Thapelo

"No, I'm not. You are going to skip school today and go with me for my interview" – Me

"What? Are you serious?" – Thapelo

"Dead serious" – Me

"But I have Karate practice this afternoon" – Thapelo

"Well then you will attend karate practice but not school. I cannot afford to lose this job Thapelo" – Me

There was slow traffic again on the N3 just as I thought.

By the time we arrived outside the fancy building which was supposed to be housing the company, it was eight forty - five. I had just made it.

I parked the car by the outside parking lot just next to the reception area.

“Thapelo, you are going to have to stay here until I’m done okay. If you come in with me it will look very unprofessional, so I will open a window and you must not move” - Me

“Aaahhh... What am I supposed to do with myself until you are done?” – Thapelo

“Here... take my phone... download games... whatever” – Me

I did not care if he downloaded all the games on play-store... I just needed him to stay put.

“Yay... cool!” – Thapelo

“Promise me you will behave and not open the door to anyone until I get back” – Me

“Promise” – Thapelo

“Wish me luck,” I said as I rushed out of the car and ran into the building.

“Hi mam... I am here for an interview with Theo” – Me

“Okay, please come with me... he is waiting for you” – Receptionist

“Thank you” – Me

I checked my watch again, horrified that I had kept him waiting but it was only eight fifty – five. I took a deep breath in and out, relieved.

We went up the elevator and then the receptionist pointed me to his office and turned to go back to her work station.

I walked down the passage nervously and finally arrived outside his door, knocked and went in.

He was seated at his desk reading something on his I-pad. When I came in, he put it down, took off his glasses and stood up to greet me.

I was taken aback at how handsome this man was. He was tall, caramel in complexion (I was not into yellow bones but this one was extremely attractive) ... He had the most - sincere and piercing brown eyes covered by straight, neatly shaped rows of black brows. His ‘O’ shaped beard and mustache was perfectly groomed around his perfect strawberry lips. I felt something when I saw him that I just could not explain.

“Good morning, my name is Theo” – Man

“Morning Sir, my name is Mbalentle but you can call me Mbali” – Me

“Mbali, Sindi told me a lot of good things about you and I must say I trust her opinion but I had to see you myself so I could form my own opinion” – Theo

“That is understandable” – Me

I had to reprimand myself and remember what I was there for. I could not let this man’s looks distract me so much, even though they were intimidating. He looked like he did not even go to the toilet.

I sat up straight and gave very professional answers to all his questions but always giving him a hint of my warm personality by throwing in a joke here and there. The interview was quite short and then he told me I could leave, he would give me a call later that afternoon to tell me if I got the job or not.

I left quite confident that I did well but I could not wait to get to the bathroom as I realised I was quite pressed.

After leaving the bathroom, I went straight to the parking lot but to my dismay, there was Theo getting into a black Mercedes, I walked very quickly so that he would not see me getting into my car. What would he think of me, leaving a child in the car alone while I went for an interview. He would think I was totally disorganised. It was too late though because he parked right behind me and came out to greet Thapelo.

“Is this your son?” – Theo

“Yes, we got stuck in traffic so I had to bring him with” - Me

“No need to explain... he is a very handsome young man” – Theo

He smiled and flashed a perfect set of pearly white teeth.

He spoke to Thapelo a bit more, said goodbye and then drove off.

Chapter 30

Andiswa

For the next couple of days, Sizwe and I enjoyed getting into a routine. He would wake up very early and go to work, come back around seven thirty every day. Everything seemed perfect except for the growing curiosity from my neighbours. I would see John from next door hanging outside his yard quite often which was something he never used to do. He would look at me inquisitively before greeting. They all knew Sizwe to be Mbali's husband because they came together to visit a couple of times so I'm sure they were a little confused as to why he seemed to be staying with me. This was one of the times I felt relieved knowing that I kept to myself so they had no way of coming to dig for information even though it was quite obvious. The way I saw it, they should just mind their own business and stay out of mine.

I avoided my friends and going to my favourite hang - out spots because I knew everyone would want to know what happened to my hot new wheels. I was not ready for the interrogation besides I had Sizwe to look after now, I had no time to be out drinking, I had my drinks at home.

That Saturday afternoon, Sizwe came back from court looking very tired and flushed.

"Come in and take a seat, you must be starving... I made lunch" – Me

"Thank you... I am quite hungry and tired. It's been a long day" – Sizwe

"You work too hard but I understand... We have a lot to fulfil" – Me

He had to work hard if he was going to buy me a car better than the one Mbali took.

I dished up for both of us. I made pap and beef -stew... his favourite.

I also put some coleslaw and roasted pumpkin on the side then I opened a bottle of red wine.

“Andiswa can I ask you something? Please don’t be offended” – Sizwe

“Go ahead” – Me

When somebody asks that you do not get offended by a statement they make or a question they ask then just know that there is a ninety percent chance that you will be but they try and eliminate the possibility of a bad reaction by attaching that request.

“Are you unhappy with your life or is there something that is permanently bothering you?” – Sizwe

“I am very happy or at least I try to always be happy and no, there is nothing bothering me, why?” – Me

“Then why do you drink so much?” – Sizwe

I certainly did not expect that question from Sizwe. I knew that I enjoyed drinking a lot, maybe a bit too much but I never thought of the habit as being out of hand.

“Well I enjoy my wine, Is that such a bad thing?” – Me

“You see, there’s a very big difference between someone who enjoys wine and someone who is dependent on it. It’s almost as though you cannot go a day without it and when you do drink you do not just stop at one glass, that’s the problem” – Sizwe

“Sizwe is that not a bit of an exaggeration? I do not drink everyday” – Me

“Just remind me of an evening where you had your meal without any alcohol to wash it down” - Sizwe

“What exactly are you trying to say?” – Me

“What I’m trying to say is, you need to slow down on the booze. You drink way too much especially when you go out and I will not have a drunkard for a wife” – Sizwe

That really hurt... Was he calling me a drunkard?

“Are you calling me an alcoholic?” – Me

“You are certainly headed in that direction if you are not already there” – Sizwe

I was furious, in fact I downed the glass in front of me just to calm down.

“You have never had a problem with my drinking and this is the kind of lifestyle I chose. I have been living this way for quite some time now without any

problems so if you think you are going to come here and try to change me then you have another thing coming,” I said as I stood up and poured another glass of wine before I went into the lounge to start working.

“Are you not going to eat now? Come on, this is not how we should resolve problems” - Sizwe

“I lost my appetite!” I shouted from the other room.

Just when I thought things were going well, Sizwe had to start with his nonsense of being too uptight... Where was this going? Would he start monitoring how many drinks I take and make me feel ashamed for drinking at all. I was not ready to quit alcohol. If he wanted someone of sober habits then he should have gone for someone like that or better yet, stay with that wife of his. It was not as though he did not know that I drink when he came here begging me for a relationship. I was so pissed off. I hated being told what to do. If he thought that he was going to turn me into a nun by threatening not to continue with the relationship then he had to think again because it was not going to work, not with me.

Mbali

As soon as he drove off, I also left.

“Wow,” I said out loud.

“What mommy?” – Thapelo

“Nothing my boy, I was just thinking about something I saw in that building” -
Me

“Oh, okay... I had fun playing on your phone” – Thapelo

“That’s good but what do you want to do now? Maybe we can go to our favourite restaurant down the road. I can sit and make phone calls while you go and have fun at the play area, how does that sound?” – Me

“Sounds good to me” – Thapelo

“Great” – Me

“Oh, by the way mommy... Zaba called while you were in there” – Thapelo

My body immediately stiffened at the sound of his name especially because it was coming from Thapelo’s mouth.

“What did he say?” – Me

“He asked me a few questions then he said I must tell you to call him back” –
Thapelo

‘That little creep! What the hell does he want from me?’

To think that Thapelo was the one that had to answer his call just made me sick. I was trying to keep him out of my son’s life because I knew he was going to disappoint him... He’s had enough trauma as it is. A divorce can be much

harder on kids because they tend to blame themselves for things that have nothing to do with them and now I have to deal with this.

“What questions did he ask you my love?” – Me

“He asked me how we are and how daddy is so I told him we are fine. I also told him that daddy does not live with us anymore” – Thapelo

Oh gosh! Now Zaba knew that Sizwe and I were separated. I had to make it very clear to him that he should stay away from us. I was not going to entertain him and even if I was left without a cent, I would not take his money. That man wasted years of my life, killing my self - esteem and putting me at risk of all sorts of diseases. The day I left him was the best day of my life and I wanted nothing to do with him.

“Okay baby” – Me

“Mommy, why is he calling you now? Are you guys friends again?” – Thapelo

“No, my angel, we are not friends. I don’t know what he wants but don’t worry yourself about that” – Me

“Okay” – Thapelo

Thapelo was very intelligent for his age and I knew he could sense my discomfort with Zaba.

Somehow temptations to go back to what you are familiar with no matter how bad it was, always popped up in your most vulnerable times. In my case that temptation always happened to be Zaba and I was not falling for it.

We finally got to our favourite restaurant. And as soon as we arrived, Thapelo darted off to the play area. I loved being there because it was very convenient for me. I could get to do my own thing while he kept himself busy.

As soon as I was settled at a table, I called Sindi to let her know how the interview went.

“Hey Sindi” – Me

“How are you and how did it go?” – Sindi

“First of all, why did you not warn me that Theo was this hot! The guy is like a walking flame!” – Me

Sindi laughed out loud.

“I know! He is quite a looker and also a very decent man” – Sindi

“Tell me a little bit about him” – Me

“Well, he is a doctor. He is not practicing anymore though, he is more into business these days. Theo is a very kind person but also quite firm. He is chilled though so as long as you do your job, you have nothing to worry about, should you be hired. He is divorced with one child, a boy of fifteen... his ex-wife now lives in Tanzania with her new husband. He has been a bachelor for the past five years now” – Sindi

“He sounds amazing... I’m just wondering why nobody has snatched him up” – Me

“Theo is very particular about who he gets into a relationship with, sometimes I think he is a bit too picky so that could be the problem” – Sindi

“I see...” – Me

“Don’t tell me you have been charmed by him” – Sindi

“No, not at all. I am just very intrigued. He seems like a wonderful person and if I get hired to work as his PA then I need to know a little bit about him” – Me

The guy was way out of my league anyway.

“I see... anyway, how did it go?” – Sindi

“Except for oversleeping and getting stuck in traffic, the interview went okay but I don’t want to get ahead of myself after what happened with my last one” – Me

“I’m sure it will be fine... Maybe you were meant to work with Theo and that is why you did not get that job” – Sindi

“I’m hoping that is the case” – Me

There was an incoming call while speaking to Sindi.

It was a landline.

“Listen Sindi, I will have to call you back. There is a call coming in” – Me

“Go ahead and take it” – Sindi

I switched calls to the landline.

“Hello?” – Me

“Am I speaking to Mbalentle?” A lady inquired.

“Yes... It’s Mbalentle speaking” – Me

“Mam... I have been asked by Mr Mokoena or Theo to give you a call and let you know that your application for the job you were interviewed for was successful and he would like you to come in and sign the contract tomorrow. I will forward you a copy so that you can go through it” – Lady

I could not believe my ears.

“Thank you so much! What time can I come in tomorrow to sign the contract?”
– Me

“Anytime during office hours then we will take it from there” – Lady

“That’s okay. Thank you” – Me

I hung up and just felt tears fill my eyes.

I got the job!!! Thank you, Lord!

Chapter 31

Andiswa

Two months later...

I had lost quite a lot of friends because word got around that I had betrayed Mbali and taken her husband away. In fact, nobody wanted to hang around with me anymore. I was classified as a dangerous home wrecker. I could not understand why people acted as if I had a gun on Sizwe's head. He chose to be with me and nobody forced him. It was not the first time something like this happened and it certainly was not going to be the last but people made me feel like I was the devil himself.

I decided to not dwell on that, even though it did not feel good.

They had a ball, laughing at my car situation. People will always stick their nose in other people's business especially the ones that were not doing well in life.

Some-how they found out that I had lied about buying myself the Jeep and Mbali had claimed it for herself because it was actually bought by her husband... soon to be ex - husband. I let them have their time and turn me into a joke because Sizwe had agreed to buy me a better car and I just could not wait to see the looks on their faces when that happened. They would swallow their words.

Business was going well and I was being very consistent regardless of the changes in my life so I was very proud of myself.

On the home-front though, it turned out that cohabiting was not as exciting as I thought it would be. Sizwe had the ability to just turn my day upside down

with his obsession with perfection. He was becoming a bit of a control freak or maybe he always was and I just did not see it because what I had come to realise was that dating and living together were two very different things.

When you are just dating or chasing stolen moments, the other person sees only what you want them to see or what you allow but when you are permanently in each other's space then you see things that were once hidden, they come to the surface without a doubt.

I loved my space and having to share it with a man who felt it was my job to pick up after him, serve him food regularly, make sure the house is always clean and the laundry is done when I worked equally as hard as him on my business, just seemed so screwed up. I thought I would be able to handle it but I did not realise how tiring playing the perfect wife was. To top it all off, he expected me to have sex with him whenever he wanted and he would not even bother to get me in the mood first. He would just get straight to business and it was beginning to make me lose interest in sex. No wonder Mbali was like this. She had no spice in her life.

I once wore some expensive lingerie I had bought at Lasenza, like I always used to and he just said, "Aren't you cold in that? It's a bit chilly tonight". He then continued with whatever he was doing on his laptop as though nothing had happened. I was so annoyed!

What happened to the Sizwe with eyes burning of passion and desire? The Sizwe that would go crazy at the sight of me in sexy underwear.

I wanted him back not this uptight control freak I was stuck with. I saw the Sizwe that I used to see at Mbali's house, before I got to know him better, resurface. The boring, serious and irritating guy, I used to not like so much.

Sometimes I wondered if he became that way when he got bored or if it was because he missed his life with Mbali or maybe that was just who he was.

It was not all bad though, sometimes he would take me out for dinner and then we would do a bit of shopping. He would buy me expensive jewellery and

we only shopped at expensive stores, mostly boutiques. At least that part of the plan was covered.

I loved holding his hand and claiming him as mine when we were in public. I used to dream of walking freely with him that way when he was still with Mbali and now that I had the opportunity to do so, I used it and did not short change myself.

It was a Friday afternoon and Sizwe came home in a very good mood.

“I think we can get financing for a new car in two months from now so you can start shopping around. I will give you an estimated figure for the budget but then that also means I must get the divorce out of the way in the meantime because I do not want Mbali claiming this car too” - Sizwe

I jumped around with joy like a child.

“You know what? Let’s go out and celebrate! This is wonderful news” - Me

“Okay... I just don’t feel like going to a fancy restaurant and all that. Why don’t we keep it simple and go for a movie then we can have dinner or buy you something nice” – Sizwe

“You know I will not say no to that” – Me

“Good, let me just change into something comfortable and then we can get going” – Sizwe

“By the way, dinner is on me tonight...” – Me

“The money is no longer mine or yours now, it’s ours so it does not matter who pays” – Sizwe

I loved that. Sizwe could be a bit of an arsehole sometimes but he always made up for it in ways that mattered.

He happened to change into the same colour shirt as mine which I thought was very cute. I had always admired couples who went out in matching outfits and now I got to do the same.

We watched a movie and then Sizwe suggested that we go look for new bed linen and as we were walking around window shopping who do we bump into?

Mbali!

Mbali

The following day, I made my way to the company where I was now officially employed. I was so excited! It had been a while since I worked and I missed the feeling of independence, the rewarding feeling of getting a salary at the end of the month and paying my own bills.

I just could not wait to get started even though I was nervous. I was a little bit unsure of myself. What if I did not cut it, this man seemed like he was extremely professional and he was looking for someone who knew what they were doing. I have had quite a few admin jobs but nothing quite like this.

‘Mbali stop it! Stop doubting yourself,’ I whispered to myself in the car.

When I arrived, the receptionist took me to the lady I had spoken to over the phone, her name was Gugu.

“Hi Mbalentle, you may take a seat” – Gugu

“Thank you...” – Me

“I am the company’s HR officer so I will be handling things regarding your contract with you. I am sure you went through the contract already...” – Gugu

“Yes, I did Gugu, I am very happy with everything” – Me

The salary offered was much more than I had expected, in fact it was the highest salary I had ever worked for plus there were several benefits in addition.

“I’m glad to hear that... so you can go ahead and initial each page and put your signature on the last page,” she said handing me the document.

I did as she requested.

“You said you were available immediately but we will only need you to start two weeks from now, on the first of the following month” – Gugu

“That’s fine by me” – Me

It would give me time to prepare myself mentally, organise proper care and transport for Thapelo and everything else.

“Brilliant, that will be all. If you have any questions or need anything, please do not hesitate to call me,” she said as she stood up for a handshake.

“Welcome to the company. I am sure you will enjoy it here” – Gugu

“Thank you Gugu. I have no doubt about it,” I said shaking her hand.

“Oh, I almost forgot... Mr Mokoena asked if you could pass by his office before you leave. Do you know where it is?” – Gugu

“I’m not sure if I can find it from here” – Me

“I will take you there, please give me a moment” – Gugu

She picked up some documents and then she led the way to Theo’s office.

She was a very pretty lady, kind of reminded me of Andiswa because she had the same curvy body shape as her except Gugu had flawless dark skin with a beautiful heart shaped face. I just wished that she was not like Andiswa as a person. I did not even want to think about her... I got upset all over again whenever she popped up in my head.

We finally got to Theo’s office.

He immediately smiled when we came in, displaying that perfect set of teeth.

“Mbali! How are you doing? I take it you have concluded everything with Gugu” – Theo

“Yes, she’s been wonderful... thank you so much Theo” – Me

“Take a seat, I hope you are not in a hurry” – Theo

“Not at all” – Me

“Mr Mokoena... I brought you these, you asked for them earlier,” Gugu said as she dropped the documents on his desk.

“Thank you Gugu” – Theo

She then left the office.

“How is your son?” – Theo

“He is great” – Me

“He reminds me of my little boy but he is not so little anymore” – Theo

We made small talk and then he said, “You know Mbali, there was another lady that I had interviewed for your position and she had quite a few relevant qualifications and a lot of experience but the reason I did not hesitate to hire you was because I saw your son sitting in the car outside, I was also impressed by you on the interview of course. Back to your son... he was dressed in his school uniform and obviously, something happened there and he ended up waiting for you in the parking lot instead of being at school. That said a lot to me. It showed me just how much you wanted this job, the commitment was

just something I could not ignore and that is what I need from someone who would be my assistant” – Theo

“Oh wow... I was actually embarrassed by that incident. We got caught in traffic and I just had to make a turn and come here because it was my number one priority at the time but I am not proud about leaving my son unattended in the parking lot” – Me

“But you see, it worked in your favour... God’s ways are mysterious. Anyway, I would like to officially welcome you to the company and I have a feeling we will work very well together,” he said as he stood up to shake my hand.

“Thank you so much Mr. Mokoena” – Me

“No, please call me Theo... I let the rest of the staff call me that but you and I will be working very closely together so let’s keep it light” – Theo

For some reason hearing him say we would be working closely together made me feel a bit excited.

“Let me not keep you... I’m sure you have things to do. I will see you on the first, I believe” – Theo

“Yes, the first” – Me

Somehow that came out very awkward.

Chapter 32

Andiswa

Seeing Mbali like this made me very uncomfortable and a bit nervous. I had not seen her since the other night at the chalet in Harties and she had never seen Sizwe and I together as a couple. I wondered if she knew about us surviving the turmoil.

I quickly regained my composure. I was not going to be apologetic about being with Sizwe anymore, she let him go and he chose to stick with me so she had to accept that. Seeing her reminded me of how she was gloating about catching us out, making me hand over a key that was meant for me and humiliating me because she had the power at the time. I had the power now and I was going to make sure that she knew it, so I smiled as I spoke to Sizwe who had not noticed her.

I hoped that he did not see her because he might have annoyed me by acting embarrassed and in the worse-case scenario following her to try and speak to her. To my dismay, he looked in her direction and saw her. I was pleasantly surprised though because Sizwe reacted in a way that I had not expected at all. He put his arm around me and carried on with the conversation.

Mbali took a long hard look at us as she approached, with absolutely no expression on her face and then she looked the other way and carried on walking.

That look scared me and it made me somewhat feel bad.

I must admit, she looked good, she looked more beautiful than what I remembered. She was back to her normal weight and she was radiating confidence. She was dressed quite formally so I wondered if she was working somewhere. The last time I checked she got rejected at the interview I had

organised for her. Yes... I had called the company to enquire as her “agent” and they told me this. I hoped that she was just coming from another interview and they too would reject her.

She needed to struggle a bit so she could get down from her high horse but I knew that seeing Sizwe and I looking happy and in love in our matching outfits definitely got to her, even though she did not react.

“Did you see that?” I asked Sizwe laughing.

He did not look amused at all... as soon as Mbali went pass, the smile on his face disappeared.

“Mbali? Yes...” – Sizwe

“She probably will not get any sleep tonight. I’m am so happy about this! Thank God, we bumped into her now I have more to celebrate. She probably thought our relationship did not survive. This must have come as a shock” – Me

“Andiswa you are not serious. You mean to tell me that you are actually happy about what just happened?” – Sizwe

I was not expecting that reaction.

“What do you mean? Of - course I am happy... that woman humiliated us and made me think I was going crazy, breaking into my house and doing all sorts of crazy things... Do you remember what happened when I tried to cook pap after the weekend at Harties and it turned out she had also mixed the maize with washing powder and all I got were bubbles in the pot. She probably did all that

with the help of that skinny bitch, Sindi. You choose them very well Sizwe” – Me

“Will you just shut up! Listen to yourself... Me, me, me... everything has to be about you Andiswa. Did you not learn anything from this whole ordeal with Mbali. How do you think she felt? You were her best friend!” – Sizwe

“And you were her husband so stop before you even start acting all holier than thou...” – Me

“You do not see me gloating about what I did do you? Jeez... What kind of person are you?” – Sizwe

That hurt, it really did.

“That was a low blow Sizwe” – Me

“Really? I actually do not even want to be near you right now, I need some time to think... I will take an Uber home. Here are the car keys,” he said as he handed me his car keys.

I could not believe what had just happened. Was he not overreacting? I was so sure it was just an excuse to chase after Mbali and I wanted him to know that I was on to him.

“It’s fine... create a fight so that you can go running after that bitter ex of yours. I am not stupid Sizwe” – Me

“You are unbelievable! I really don’t have time for this” – Sizwe

He took off and left me standing at the bottom of the escalators. We were actually quite loud and people were staring at us.

I walked away very quickly, sat at a restaurant and started stalking Mbali's Facebook wall. There was nothing new... She had not posted anything since she and Sizwe were separated.

Mbali

Two months later...

I left the building, feeling the need to celebrate because it was Friday and exactly six weeks since I had started my new job so I went out to the mall for a bit of shopping. I justified it by convincing myself that I needed some things for work. If I was the CEO's assistant, I had to look the part.

I went to Eastgate shopping centre and browsed around, buying some perfume and a few clothing items.

I felt better than I had in a long time until I spotted Sizwe with Andiswa draped around his arm.

The smug look on Andiswa's face as I went pass them made me want to vomit.

Did I not deserve any happiness in this world? Just when I was beginning to heal and forget about Sizwe, I had to see this.

I must admit I was a bit surprised that they had actually stuck together but I knew Sizwe, it was just a matter of time till he showed his true colours and I knew Andiswa as well, she was not strong enough to handle it. You see, Sizwe was a difficult man to please but she would find that out on her own.

At least the question I had been asking myself was answered. Sizwe went back to Andiswa when I kicked him out.

The sight of them in matching outfits, holding hands...

They actually looked like they both enjoyed bumping into me so they could rub their sordid relationship in my face. It was not so much anger that had shown up after seeing them but I was hurt, deeply so.

I do not think I would ever get over those feelings of betrayal.

To cheer myself up, I bought the pair of shoes I had been longing for. I had kept the purchase on hold because of the price tag but after what I had seen, I was fearless.

The shopping actually worked because, I felt much more at peace even if it was for a little while.

As I walked back to the parking lot, my phone rang. I did not recognise the number so I answered.

“Hi Mbali, it’s me... Sizwe”

What in the world was he doing calling me after he smiled like a love - sick puppy when he saw me approach him and his little slut.

“Talk quickly... I’m busy, what do you want?” – Me

“Mbali, I just wanted to apologise for what just happened. I did not know how to react when I saw you but I want to tell you that I deeply regret hurting you like I did...” – Sizwe

I cut the line as he was talking and switched off my phone.

The truth was, I missed Sizwe a lot and I still loved him, I probably always would but the trust and respect I once had for him was gone.

I survived till this point by constantly reminding myself of what Sizwe did, whenever I would start missing him. The one thing that always popped into my head was that video of him having sex with Andiswa. It was still in my possession but I stored it very far back in my closet. I never wanted to see it if I could help it and I certainly did not want Thapelo finding it but I had to keep it as insurance.

I did not wish this cluster of emotions on anybody. All I knew was that I had to start dealing with the divorce proceedings and get it over and done with.

I hoped it would go smoothly. I wanted nothing more from Sizwe anyway. He could keep all his money and everything else. All I wanted was my freedom so I could move on with my life.

Chapter 33

Andiswa

Three months later...

Sizwe and Mbali's divorce had been finalized with Mbali stating that she wanted nothing either than the car and house from Sizwe and they came to an agreement. That coupled with Sizwe's good connections, made the process smooth and quick, much to my delight.

Even though I was looking forward to being married to Sizwe, things were not going very well between us. The alcohol story had started again and I had gone as far as buying the alcohol, hiding it around the house and only drinking when he was not around.

Getting rid of the empty bottles was sometimes a problem because he was the one that took out the trash and I could not throw them in the outside bin either because he would see them so sometimes the empty bottles stayed there till I got a chance to throw them out elsewhere when I went for my deliveries.

The housework and cooking after a hard day of work was also getting to me. He needed to help me out somehow and I made a decision to speak to him about it.

I did not cook that evening and when he got home I sat him down and started the discussion.

“Sizwe, I am not coping with all this work, I have so much to do during the day and then on top of everything, I must do house chores and cook for you. The problem is, you are not even helping me out” – Me

“Andiswa, when do I find time to do house chores?” – Sizwe

“You could at least put things back where they belong after using them and also stop leaving your clothes in a pile on the floor... That would be a start” – Me

“I spend most of my time at the office and you are telling me that clearing the small mess I make for a few hours is such a big deal? Even when Mbali was still working, she never complained and our house was much bigger than this one” – Sizwe

It frustrated me so much when he would compare me to his ex.

“Mbali this... Mbali that... Grow up Sizwe! Where is Mbali now?” – Me

“I know I should not have said that but...” - Sizwe

“You are damn right you shouldn’t have. Let’s find a solution for this problem instead of making comparisons, shall we?” – Me

“I wish you could speak to me with me respect” – Sizwe

“Sizwe we are talking about something else right now so keep that complaint for another day” – Me

“Okay fine Andiswa... I do not want to be a burden to you so we can get a lady to come and help us with housework so that you can have more free time” – Sizwe

I was never comfortable with keeping helpers in my house in fact I had promised myself that I would not do that but things had changed and I needed to adjust. There was just no way I would be able to carry on working like a slave.

“That could work” – Me

“Okay, it will be your duty to find someone then” – Sizwe

“Okay... no problem” -Me

I was glad that was sorted but there was one more thing we needed to discuss.

“Babe, what about my car. It’s been a while now since your divorce was finalized and you had said that it would take two months to get financing, it’s been three months now” – Me

“I was actually meaning to discuss that with you... Do you think a car should be a top priority right now? Shouldn’t we rather look into buying a bigger house?” – Sizwe

“I would like that but you promised me that you would replace the Jeep” – Me

“Do you maybe want to think about it?” – Sizwe

“There is nothing to think about, I need the car first” – Me

“Okay... Then you will get a car” – Sizwe

“When?” – Me

“We can start shopping around tomorrow” – Sizwe

That was like music to my ears!

Mbali

As the months went by, Zaba finally got the message and left me alone. He had started calling me regularly accusing me of not letting him see his son and all sorts of things. I even considered changing my number but he finally stopped.

The divorce was done and dusted which meant I was officially single and it felt good. I realised how stifled I had been with Sizwe.

He was a very insecure man and I ended up giving up a whole lot of things, my social life included, just to accommodate him and his insecurities. To think that I fought for him to accept Andiswa as a friend of mine... how ironic.

I suppose in his case he did not trust me being around other men because he did not trust himself around other women and he burdened me with his weakness... undeservingly so.

I had always been a house mouse anyway so it made no huge impact on me that I had to stay home more often. I never felt good about not doing certain things I wanted to do though, like volunteer work at the children's home

because Sizwe would always think I was elsewhere. I had started doing that years ago when I was still working for a company that helped certain NGOs by donating food and clothing. As the company's administrator, I used to organise the deliveries and sometimes I had to be there to make sure that the stuff reached its destination. That's when I fell in love with the work that those people were doing so I started volunteering on my off days. I would go there twice a month and sometimes I would take Thapelo with me because I wanted him to learn the importance of giving back and helping others even when they could not give anything in return. I loved the volunteer work I did. It made me feel brand – new inside every time I was around those kids.

Now that I was single, I started volunteering again much to Thapelo's delight because he loved spending time with the other kids from the children's home.

All the staff members and other volunteers were so happy to see me back and the most amazing thing was that not much had changed except the furniture was new, apparently it had been bought by one of the sponsors.

I also started going for spa treatments and doing all the things I used to love doing a before I got married and it made me feel like I had found myself again. It did not hurt that my salary was quite good and I did not have much debt or expenses except for the house bills, Thapelo's school fees and transport. I managed to save a lot and have enough left over to spoil myself and my son.

One particular Saturday morning, I woke up quite early, did the house chores and got Thapelo ready to go. We were going to spend the morning at the children's home.

I put on a hoodie and some leggings and sneakers for comfort and we were off.

When we arrived, one of the caretakers, Sibongile, was already waiting for us and we got going with cleaning each room and washing blankets in preparation for the winter season that was just around the corner. I felt sorry for my newly done nails but it was for a good course.

We were almost done and all that was left was to hang the last batch of blankets and mop the floors when Sibongile came running to the washing line from inside.

“Mbali, I would like you to meet the man that has been funding us for the last six years, he rescued the shelter when it was on the verge of closing down because we could not afford to keep it going anymore. He is a wonderful guy and we run to him for almost anything, he never says no” – Sibongile

“He sounds amazing! I would love to meet him but is he leaving soon?” – Me

“No, he mostly spends time with the kids when he comes through, which is mostly on Saturdays, so he should be here for a while longer” – Sibongile

“In that case then why don’t we finish up here and then we can go and see him?” – Mbali

“Not a problem, we are almost done anyway” – Sibongile

The real reason why I was hesitating to go was because of how I looked.

I was wet from washing blankets, no make - up on and my hair was hidden under a cap so I was kind of hoping that that he would leave before we got to see him.

Sibongile left to go and start mopping the floors after we had hung the last blanket and I stayed to secure the light ones with pegs.

“Do you ever rest?” – A male voice sounded behind me.

I knew that voice all too well but I could have been mistaken so I turned to see if I was correct.

I turned to find Theo, my boss, standing there with Thapelo sitting comfortably on his waist.

Chapter 34

Andiswa

The next week was spent shopping around for a car but in the meantime, I had found a lady to help us with the house chores. I had mentioned to a client that I was looking for someone and she recommended a lady that was working for her only on Wednesdays. She told me this woman had been doing her house work for the past three years and she was very reliable. I immediately called her and asked her to come and do work for me from Monday to Saturday with the exception of Wednesday, of course. She would be working from nine to five on weekdays and nine to two on Saturdays. I thought that was fair and she agreed.

I did not want anybody being permanently in my space so she was definitely not going to be staying in. She told me she was from Lesotho and I had never heard anything bad about the ladies from that part of the world.

We had gone from dealership to dealership looking for the perfect set of wheels... I wanted a statement car, one that would make every single person that spoke badly about me eat their words. I had not been on social media for quite a while because of the shame of being labelled a 'home wrecker' and a whore that stole her best friend's man. Now that those rumours had died down, I wanted to give them something real to talk about. I was going to flaunt my fabulous life with Sizwe and stick it on their faces. I wanted them to see who was boss. We also had to start taking vacations to exotic places just to show them...

Finally, I found what I was looking for... It was a black Audi R8, even though it was second hand, it was in tip top condition. Sizwe thought it was a bit too extravagant.

"We do not even have a garage," he argued.

“Then build one but this car is mine,” I ‘d responded.

I made sure he knew it was not up for debate. It was way over budget, at just over a million Rand after negotiations but I was not backing down so he gave in and bought it.

It was a monster on the road and I loved it!

The day after we bought the car, I told Sizwe that I was going out. I had been good. I had hardly gone out without him since he moved in but it was time to go show those so - called friends of mine what Andiswa was made of.

I put on my gold studs and necklace, wore my emerald green Versace dress and a pair of black Christian Louboutin stilettos. I finished off the look with an Ulysse Nardin wrist watch.

I looked expensive and that was the look I was going for.

“I would have invited you to come with me but I know that you will not enjoy the company there” – Me

“No, go ahead... I have work to do anyway” – Sizwe

“Ok, my love... Don’t work too hard. Saturdays are meant for relaxation,” I said giving him a kiss on the cheek.

“You look great by the way” – Sizwe

“Thank you” – Me

I knew I looked great but it was nice that Sizwe acknowledged it because he hardly complimented me in recent weeks.

I picked up my black handbag and started making my way to the door.

“Andy...” – Sizwe

“Yes, what is it babe?” – Me

We had gone back to the pet names and being nice since purchasing the car the previous day.

“Please do not drink too much because should anything happen, insurance will not pay this early” – Sizwe

“Please don’t spoil my mood Sizwe... Bye” – Me

I ran out of the door knowing that if I stayed he would start with his ‘responsible wife’ lectures. I had no time for that. Sizwe could be such a bore.

I felt alive! I could not wait for the night to begin.

I put on my sunglasses and took a couple of selfies next to my new car before I drove off.

The music was deafening, the engine was roaring... I wanted all the neighbours to come out and see.

Mbali

He was the last person I expected to see.

“Theo! What are you doing here?” – Me

“Mommy he was playing with us on the other side where the jungle gym is” – Thapelo

“Really?” I responded looking at Theo with enquiring eyes.

“Thapelo is correct, I now feel bad that I was out there having fun while you were slaving away all morning” – Theo

I chuckled... “Well somebody must do the tough work but honestly, I’m surprised to see you here.”

“I feel the same way... I spend most of my Saturday mornings here” – Theo

“Wait... Are you the man Sibongile was asking to introduce me to? The man that saved the shelter” – Me

“It might be a bit of an exaggeration but I suppose I am that man... And you must be the woman that made those beautiful paintings in the children’s rooms and on the walls outside years ago?” – Theo

“Guilty as charged... Even though they could have been better” – Me

I had just started doing an online art class when I made those drawings... I was still learning but I thought it would give the children’s rooms a bit of cheer so I volunteered to do that. Now when I looked at them, I could see all the mistakes I made but it was still art nonetheless. I loved painting and that was something very few people knew about me. I ended up taking art lessons online just to give that talent some structure but it was more of a hobby than anything else. It took me to another world and gave me allowance to express myself without fear of judgement because most of my artwork never saw the light of day.

“I saw absolutely nothing wrong with those drawings... In fact, they are quite something” - Theo

“I suppose only an artist would understand but thank you so much for the compliment” – Me

Suddenly the look in his eyes changed from that of amusement to something else. I could not quite figure it out but he looked at me with intensity and it made me feel very uncomfortable but excited.

“I must say, I am quite pleasantly surprised. You seem like a very interesting person and I just realised that I had a completely wrong picture of you” – Theo

“Please tell me all about it” – Me

Thapelo was getting bored so he jumped off Theo’s arms and ran back to join the other kids.

“I have a suggestion. Why don’t you finish off here and we can go for lunch, I’m sure you have not had anything to eat because I heard that you have done so much for today so you must have been here very early... That is if you are not rushing off somewhere of -course” – Theo

“Actually, I am starving” – Me

He smiled and said, “Well, I will wait for you by the jungle gym... let me know when you are ready to go”

“Alright,” I said flashing him a big smile.

I watched him walk away. He looked very casual in his black tracksuit pants and a white hoodie. I had always seen him in suits and I must admit he looked much less intimidating in casual clothing.

When I started working with Theo, he was very distant but professional. His many business interest meant that he was never at the office so we communicated mostly via telephone calls or email.

He would just e-mail me a list of tasks, some of which I had no clue how to execute but I never confessed that to him. Instead google became my friend. I thanked God for the easy access to information that technology afforded us. I remember spending all night learning how to make formulas for excel spreadsheets because Theo wanted me to draft a few of those. I came into the office the following morning with black circles under my eyes, well hidden in make-up but all my work was done and perfectly so. I did not want him to ever regret hiring me instead of the other lady who had been more qualified than I was, so I fought to prove myself. In all honesty, getting that job was a blessing in more ways than one because it also helped me forget all about my baggage and refocus my energy onto something positive. Sometimes I had a feeling that Theo did some things with the purpose of keeping me on my toes.

I had gotten used to the work and I had somehow fallen into a routine even though it was quite unpredictable because I never really knew what Theo would want me to assist him with.

I was pleasantly surprised to see that he was actually giving back in such a big way without making a big noise about it. It took a special person to do that.

I completed my task of securing the laundry with pegs and then went back inside where I told Sibongile that I had seen the man she was telling me about and he was actually my boss.

She was also quite surprised.

“This is no coincidence... There is just something about the both of you that seems so peculiar... Maybe this is a sign of something,” she had said.

“Don’t be ridiculous Sibongile,” I responded laughing.

I tried to clean myself up as best as I could, said goodbye to everyone and then I followed Theo to a restaurant he had suggested.

Chapter 35

Andiswa

I cruised through the roads leading to Vosloorus, enjoying the attention I was getting from on – lookers.

I felt like I had arrived! The looks of admiration I was receiving from people in taxis and smaller cars like the one I used to drive, confirmed that my feelings were correct.

I got to the Jazz Lounge in Vosloorus with my music still on full blast. Everybody outside turned to look at my car as I parked it. The windows were tinted so they could not see who was inside. I came out and took off my sunglasses while I grabbed my handbag and jacket because it was beginning to get a bit chilly in the afternoon.

“Sis Andiswa! Yoh! Yoh! Yoh!” one skinny guy who sold cigarettes outside exclaimed, grabbing his head in awe.

“Aaaahhh! My sister you are boss! You are top!” he said in Township lingo.

“You know this,” I said as I gave him a high five.

A group of young guys started gathering around the car but keeping a bit of distance as though they did not feel worthy enough to come any closer.

“I will give you guys a spin in this baby soon” – Me

“Yoh! Sister! Yoh! Imagine” – One of them shouted.

There was a lot of commotion at my arrival.

“Sis Andiswa, I always knew you were top! You just didn’t expose yourself” – One of the guys from the car wash said as he came to shake my hand.

The more middle- class guys who were there to drink just stood by the wall, continuing with their conversation while smoking, most of them giving me a look of admiration but you could tell they did not even think of approaching me because suddenly I was out of their league.

I locked the car and left the guys standing there and admiring it. It was not so packed yet because I arrived early. It was intentional because I wanted to get parking right in front of the entrance where my black beauty would glisten in the sun and be admired by all who walked by.

I went across the road and into the yard where I immediately spotted Aubrey.

“Hey Mntwana! Long time!” he shouted as he waved at me to come and join them.

All the usual suspects were there. By that I mean the regular patrons.

I knew they would all be there because it was Bhekza’s birthday, he was one of the owners of the lounge and every year he celebrated his birthday by giving out free bottles of cognac to the regular clients and they all loved free things.

“Aubrey! But I was banished from these places because apparently, I’m a danger to society,” I said that loud enough for all to hear.

Aubrey laughed out loud.

“Aaarggh man people talk... they always do and they always will. So, every time there’s a bit of gossip you are going to desert us? Don’t pay attention to all that. We come here to drink and have fun not to discuss people’s private stuff”
– Aubrey

“I wish everyone had the same mentality as you Bra Aub’ ... Seriously” – Me

“Forget about that... What are you drinking?” – Aubrey

“I will have some champagne today... I hope they have nice bottles” – Me

“You are upgrading yourself these days hey? Check how smart you look... Those jewels don’t look cheap” – Aubrey

“I thought you knew me by now” – I said teasingly

“Aaahhh Mntwana!” – Aubrey

He called one of the waiters to get me their best bottle of champagne.

It was not a popular drink in that joint so I knew their best would be average but it would do.

I greeted the ladies that were seated on the couches surrounding Aubrey

Some of them returned my greeting with a very disheartening “hello”. I figured they had also heard the gossip about me and Sizwe.

“So Mntwana vele this guy that you are staying with now is that woman’s husband... the one that came in hear fuming the other night?” – Aubrey

“Haa! Aubrey... I thought we had an understanding. Why are you contradicting yourself now?” – Me

He had just said we are not going to discuss private matters.

“Ay man, I’m just curious... But I’m talking to you right? I’m not gossiping about someone else” – Aubrey

“I don’t want to talk about it” – Me

I knew that he meant no harm... Aubrey had turned out to be a cool guy even though I did not like how he let people take advantage of his kind spirit.

Just as we settled down and the waiter brought my champagne, Gugu walked in...

“Heee Andiswa! Is that your car parked out there? The black one? I heard the guys saying it’s yours...” Gugu shouted at the top of her lungs from the entrance till she reached our table.

“You have not seen me in months and that’s the first thing you ask me,” I shouted back as we gave each other a long, tight hug.

“Look at you!” she exclaimed when we finally let go of each other.

“My friend I’m taken now so it must show” – Me

“Taken by who? I’m so lost...” she said giving me a high five.

“We have a lot to catch up on” – Me

I liked Gugu a lot. She was more my type of girl. Even though we were not so close we hung around from time to time. I met her through my recruitment agency a couple of years ago because then she was an HR officer for a large mobile network company and she would use my company to find people to fill in vacancies. I had befriended her somehow and introduced her to this place and she ended up becoming Bhekza’s girlfriend so she came from time to time.

“Before anything... Please confirm that the R8 parked there is yours” – Gugu

“Of- course it’s mine...” I said flashing the key

Aubrey stood up having overheard.

“Hhhhe? Did you say R8?”

I saw the other women that were giving me a cold shoulder earlier sit up straight suddenly.

Mbali

He drove up the road and took a few turns before we arrived at a cosy African themed restaurant. I never even knew that there was such a beautiful space in

that part of town where one could hang out, dine to AfroJazz music and have African cuisine. The place was furnished in classic antique furniture with portraits of different uncelebrated musicians hanging on the walls. Drums, trumpets and all kinds of musical instruments lined the room creating an out of this world ambience. I absolutely loved it.

“Wow, this is so cosy but I feel a bit underdressed” – Me

“I hang out here usually after leaving the shelter. I’m glad you like it and by the way you could make a potato sack look like a designer dress” – Theo

It made me feel better that he was in tracksuits as well.

We placed our orders and I asked for some iced tea, for both me and Thapelo, while we waited.

Theo was going for a beer.

I gave Thapelo my phone so he could play games because I knew he would get bored and become restless. It worked as a distraction.

“So, you were going to tell me what impression you had of me” – Me

I was quite curious.

“Well, when I first saw the kind of car you drive, the way you look and how you carry yourself. I formed a very different picture of you as compared to what I saw today. I thought you were just an average married woman, working hard to gain material possessions while your husband was paying the bills and your job was, as they say in these slang words... to slay” – Theo said smiling.

I laughed after hearing this... I was amused at how far off the mark he was.

“What? It is not the case, fortunately” – Me

“I was wrong and now I feel so stupid for doing something that I hate seeing from other people... putting people in boxes and labelling them without even getting to know them first” - Theo

“I think that I should change my look, it makes me seem like a conformist doesn't it?” – Me

“Do you like the way you look?” – Theo

“I do but...” – Me

“Then case closed. It is not your problem how people choose to perceive you so you must never change yourself to please other people, the most important thing is to do what makes you happy then you will be content” – Theo

“I know but if I give even an intelligent man such as yourself the wrong impression then something must be done about it” – Me

I did not really mean that, I was being a bit sarcastic. I loved how I dressed and wore my hair. I felt good when I looked good.

“Thank you for the compliment but it seems this man is not so clever after all” – Theo

“What I saw today though was something I had not seen in a long time. You know back then, people used to help each other and work together without

expecting anything in return. It was just a way of life for us in the township but things have changed. People are happy with what they have and they keep to themselves and if you happen to not be doing so well then you are labelled as lazy and all sorts of things” – Theo

“That is so true” – Me

“But you are one of the people that go, ‘I have what I need but I will still go out and lend a hand to those that do not have the same as what I have’... I admire that”.

It takes a special person to do that. You go out there and get your hands dirty, doing unimaginable things and yet you do not make any noise about it. It stays between you and God” – Theo

“I thought the same about you. What you are doing for those kids is amazing” – Me

“You know what... I have a hidden agenda. I grew up in a children’s home as well. My parents passed away in a car accident when I was only ten but I was a hyperactive child and none of my living relatives wanted to take me in so I ended up there till I finished High school. I give my time and money to these shelters because I know what it’s like to be that kid, feeling alone and neglected. I want them to feel wanted and to at least have their basic needs met without worry” – Theo

“Wow Theo, that is such a hard story. How did you end up being a doctor?” – Me

“I got a bursary after Matric and I was actually forced to study medicine so that field chose me but I’m very sensitive and I found that I took a lot of things personally when I started working so I moved to corporate” – Theo

“Where nothing is personal?” - Me

“Yes, exactly” – Theo

There was a lot of mystery surrounding this man. He sounded like he was a very warm person so why shy away from a job that would fulfil your need to help others so you could juggle a few very impersonal ones?

I did not want to get too personal though, he was still my boss.

“Enough about me and my assumptions, tell me about yourself” – Me

“You do know that is the most difficult question, ever, right?” I said smiling to lighten up the mood.

“I know,” Theo replied smiling back.

“Well, I am a single mother. I recently went through a divorce. I love being home, making all sorts of weird stuff like reconstructing old furniture, making scrapbooks and of course painting. Did I mention I love reading too? So, in a nutshell, I’m a very boring person but I enjoy my own company” – Me

“All the things you just mentioned don’t sound boring to me at all and I am sorry to hear about the divorce. I just assumed that you were married because it said so on your CV” – Theo

“I should have changed that” – Me

We talked about his hobbies and his interests too and it turned out we had nothing in common but he sat and listened to me talking about my creative work like it was the most interesting thing he's ever heard.

Chapter 36

Andiswa

“I must see this to believe it...” Aubrey said dramatically.

I knew he was doing it intentionally so that the haters could see my achievement.

“It’s parked right outside, go by the gate and you will spot it. It’s the only Audi R8 here,” said Gugu

“Give me your key so I can see if it lights up when I unlock it then I will know it’s truly yours,” Aubrey requested.

I gave him the key, laughing.

“Ay Aubrey”

He made his way out immediately while Gugu and I stayed behind laughing at his animated reaction.

I trusted Aubrey with my key... He was not jealous that was for sure. Aubrey was rich even though he did not act like it.

“So, my friend... How have you been? It’s been quite a while. Where have you been hiding?” – Gugu

“I have been home mostly... working and spending time with my man” – Me

“Yes! This is the part I want to hear about... Who is this man?” – Gugu

“You mean to tell me you have not heard? I thought the whole of Jo’burg was talking about this” – Me

“You know I hardly ever hang around these places. I’m always at home and when I do come around here, I don’t really pay attention to what people are saying, I chill with Bhekza. It sounds big... who is this guy?” – Gugu

“He was Mbali’s husband but now he is mine...” -Me

“Mbali? That friend of yours, you always told me about? The one I was supposed to meet last year on Bhekza’s birthday but she decided not to come?” – Gugu

“Yes... that Mbali. I am telling you because I want you to hear it from me and not as a rumour” – Me

She looked shocked and she did not hide it. She covered her mouth and her eyes looked like they were almost popping out.

“Don’t judge me... Let’s drink,” I said waving at the waiter and signalling for him to bring another glass.

“How can I judge you, I’m not a saint myself... it’s just that I’m so shocked. I did not see this one coming” – Gugu

“Neither did I but it happened. It just simply means Sizwe and I were destined to be together and no friendship formed against us would have prospered” - Me

Gugu laughed out loud.

“Woooo Andiswa!” – Gugu

Aubrey came back in, whistling...

“Eita! Please bring another bottle... same one,” he said to the waiter pointing at my bottle of champagne.

“Take my hand...” – Aubrey

I did and he gave me a firm handshake.

“I’m impressed Andiswa... Weldone Mntwana, yoh!” – Aubrey

I laughed as I thanked him.

“I ordered another bottle on me, to show appreciation and say congratulations!” – Aubrey

My conversation with Gugu was cut short because Bhekza came out looking for her so she could help him distribute the bottles of free cognac.

I watched her walk away and marvelled at how similar her body shape was to mine. We had so much in common except Gugu was a goody two shoes, just like Mbali. The only difference was that Gugu was loud and a bit of an extrovert.

By the time Gugu came back, the music was too loud for us to have a proper conversation so we made a plan to meet some other time. The party had started and so we drank, danced and had fun.

I enjoyed all the attention I was getting.

Suddenly I was not the loser that 'stole' her best friend's husband, instead I became a hero that drove an Audi R8 and wore designer clothing. That is how vain people could be but I was happy because my plan had worked out perfectly. I had shown them what I was capable of and I left them speechless.

Mbali

I do not remember ever feeling this safe and comfortable with any man before not even with my ex-husband when things were still good and the strangest part was, Theo was just my boss, nothing more. Even Thapelo felt comfortable with him.

After we had lunch and spoke about things in general, we parted ways.

From what I drew from him, Theo was a simple man who was hurt a lot in his childhood but he turned that pain into a stepping stone for himself. He loved having nice things around him and stuff that made life easier but he did not go

overboard. He could not stand shallow people which is the reason why he was still single.

“It’s so hard to find someone genuine who has the right priorities in life in this day and age Mbali so I chose to stay single, that way I am happier. If someone comes along then great, if it does not happen... I’m okay with that too,” he had explained to me.

The following week at the office was normal.

Theo had travelled to Kenya on business so I had a lot to do while he was gone and I just focused on getting things done.

I had gotten to know Gugu the HR officer a bit better and she was actually a lovely person. She was bubbly and honest which I liked. She was not one to mince her words.

I spent most of my lunch hours with her when I was not swamped with work and she would tell me a lot of stories about her township guy who had finally proposed to her. She told me how different they were but they still managed to find common ground. She seemed genuinely happy in her relationship. It was funny, now that I knew about her love life I felt so stupid because when I first started working at the company, I thought Gugu had a crush on Theo because of the way she always spoke to him as though she was flirting. I then got to realise that it was just in her make-up. She was just a flirtatious lady, she even spoke to ME in the same way which sometimes looked a bit funny.

I never really divulged much about my personal life. All she knew about me was that I had recently gotten divorced, I did not tell her the real reason why and I was not intending to. I did not want people to see me as a victim and I honestly just wanted to leave the pain of what I went through in the past.

Most of all though, I had learnt a long time ago that it was a bad idea to over share about your personal life at work no matter how comfortable you felt about doing so.

The following Friday as Gugu and I were hanging around at the cafeteria, killing time because we had nothing more to do until we knocked off, Theo called.

“Hi Mbali, I tried to call you on the landline but I could not get through” – Theo

I thought I had diverted those calls to my personal phone... Damnit

“My apologies, I’m not in the office right now. I just went to grab something to eat at the cafeteria” – Me

“Not a problem... Listen, I need you to do me a huge favour. I am only coming back next week Tuesday and I just remembered that the guys who are doing maintenance at my house are supposed to come in tomorrow to start doing some work. Do you mind moving to my house with your little one for the weekend?” – Theo

“I thought my weekends were not part of my working hours” – Me

“It’s a favour but of course I would pay you, should you be able to do that. I just need someone there to oversee the work done” – Theo

“No, it’s fine, you do not need to pay me. I will do it” – Me

“Thank you so much my dear... I owe you one” – Theo

“But where do I get the keys?” – Me

“My helper will be there, she usually does not work on weekends but I will ask her to stay until you get there” – Theo

“Okay then... I will keep in contact” – Me

I felt a bit annoyed by this. Why couldn't he ask his helper to do him this favour? It would have been more appropriate.

I also did not want to seem like I am not willing to go the extra mile so I had to agree. It was not like I had anything better to do over the weekend anyway.

“Don't tell me you got into trouble for not being at the office. You look really annoyed” – Gugu

“I am but it is not because of that. Theo has asked me to house-sit for the weekend” – Me

“As in like stay at his house for the weekend?” – Gugu

“Yes, something like that” – Me

“Wow he must really trust you because I can assure you none of us here in the office have been where he lives never mind staying for the weekend... Are you sure Theo is not crushing on you or something” - Gugu

“What? Don't be silly. I am his PA so I get to assist him with personal stuff too just as the word suggests” – Me

Okay that did not sound right but why was everybody trying to match me up with Theo anyway. He was gorgeous, kind and stable and everything a woman would want in a man but I was sure as hell not ready for any type of relationship and I was quite sure I was not his type anyway.

Chapter 37

Andiswa

Later on, I left with Aubrey, Gugu and Bhekza... We all decided to go to another place in Spruitview called White House, there were a couple of Metro FM deejays playing there. It was lit.

I had not had so much fun in a while and I realised how I had missed partying like this.

I was drinking water after every glass of champagne. I did not want to end up sloshed and not be able to drive home.

Before we knew it, the sun was out but people were still dancing and having fun. It must have been around five in the morning when we all decided to go our separate ways and get some rest.

I had no trouble walking in high heels but try spending the whole night dancing in those things. My feet were killing me.

It was only when I got inside the car and checked the time on my phone, that I saw Sizwe's missed calls. There were sixteen missed calls and six messages in total. I had honestly forgotten about Sizwe. I did not even think about calling to let him know I was alright and where I was.

I knew he was upset. Sizwe did not understand the nightlife and he believed that a woman's place was at home cooking and cleaning. I was not about that life and in all honesty, I did not see the need to sit at home staring into his serious face when I could be out here having fun.

I opened the messages just to calculate how angry he actually was.

Message no. 1 (18:30)

“Andiswa, Is everything okay? I hope you are safe. Love you”

Message no. 2 (20:18)

“Andy, I’m getting worried please call me just so I know that you are safe”

Message no. 3 (22:45)

“What’s going on Andiswa? This is so irresponsible. Why can’t you just call and tell me if you are alright?”

Message no. 4 (00:03)

“I am going out to look for you at the Jazz Lounge since you said you would be there because I’m worried sick now”

Message no. 5 (00:47)

“I’m at the jazz lounge and after asking around, I was told that you left with some guy named Aubrey. We will talk about this when you get home”

Oh great! Just what I need!

Aubrey had hopped into my car because we were avoiding going in too many cars for fear of not getting parking. He took a ride back with Gugu and Bhekza.

It must have been those bitter gold -digging whores that hung around Aubrey that told Sizwe that I left with him omitting giving him all the facts.

They were bitter about a lot of things, the main reason being that their cash cow had left with me.

I started the car and drove to Mcdonald's at Chris Hani Crossing and got myself a Big Mac meal and some ice cream, just so that the smell of alcohol in my system was not so overpowering, plus I was also starving. The mall was empty with no form of life except a few people travelling to work I presumed and a group of young people who looked as though they had partied all night and got stranded.

I ate in the car while I thought about how to handle the situation with Sizwe.

It really did not look good. I took time finishing off my meal but as soon as I was done, I drove home, not wanting to risk being judged by the churchgoers that would start filling the streets in their uniforms.

I took a look at myself in the rear - view mirror when I stopped at a traffic light and I looked horrible. My foundation was cracked and patchy, the mascara had run down my eyes and there was just a smudge of lipstick left on my lips.

I had no patience or time to fix it and it did not look like any damage control would be possible. I just had to wash the make – up off when I got home.

I arrived home at exactly six fifteen. Sizwe's car was parked behind the house and the door was locked so I struggled with the lock on the new security gate until it finally opened.

As soon as I was inside, I dashed to the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. I went into the bedroom and found Sizwe sleeping soundly.

He woke up as soon as I crawled into bed.

Damnit!

“Where have you been?” -Sizwe

“I was out, you know that” – Me

“What kind of response is that Andiswa? I know you were out and you went to the Jazz Lounge but you left that place before midnight and you are only coming home at this time?” – Sizwe

I slipped under the covers and rested my head on the pillow. It felt really heavy.

“We went to Spruitview when we left that place and I lost track of time because we were indoors” – Me

“With some guy called Aubrey?” – Sizwe

“With Aubrey and Gugu... If you want to call her and confirm you are more than welcome to. I will give you her number” – Me

“Nobody mentioned Gugu but they all said the same thing... you left with Aubrey. Anyway, it doesn't matter now but did you not think to call me at some point, just to tell me you're okay” – Sizwe

“It slipped my mind... My phone was in my handbag the whole time so I forgot”
– Me

“Because Aubrey was so entertaining, you forgot about your boring Sizwe at home” – Sizwe

“Sizwe I really don’t have time for this, I’m tired and I need to sleep. Can we talk about this when I wake up?” – Me

“What kind of self - respecting woman comes home drunk at this time? Look at you!” -Sizwe

“I am not drunk and I asked you let me sleep... Gosh,” I lost my temper and started shouting so he got out of bed and left the room.

I immediately passed out.

Mbali

When I drove into Theo’s house I was not surprised by its outer appearance and lavish garden. It was a huge house painted in grey with a hint of brown codes... The wooden window frames gave it a very warm feel. As for the garden, it was breathtakingly beautiful. It made me feel as though I had stepped into another world ... wonderland. There was a wall, with two female statues on either side, guiding cascading water that led onto a large, rectangular pool. I was in awe of the perfect balance between modern and old Tuscan styles. Whoever designed the house and garden had outdone themselves.

“Wow mommy... This house is so beautiful. Is it uncle Theo’s house?” –
Thapelo

“Yes, it’s Theo’s house... it is something isn’t it?” – Me

I realised that we had been wandering around the garden even before we went inside to greet and it seemed rude.

“Thapelo, let’s go inside and greet. We will come back out here a bit later” –
Me

“I cannot wait to swim in that pool,” Thapelo said as he followed me back to the pathway leading to the main entrance of the house.

There was an older lady waiting for us at the door, she introduced herself as Queen. We greeted her and she then showed us around the house and pointed out the areas that needed to be worked on by the maintenance guys. Theo’s house was equally as beautiful inside. It was not cluttered and most of the rooms were furnished in dark wood but he incorporated a lot of bright colours to give the place a warm, welcoming feel. I was especially impressed by the kitchen with its dark red, almost maroon, cupboards and humongous counters.

Queen showed us the bedrooms she had prepared for us and then went on to explain that she was rushing home because she had to attend a funeral the following day. That made sense, it was probably the reason why she was unable to stay over for the weekend. I offered to give her a ride to the taxi rank and she was quite happy to accept my offer and on the way there, she went on to tell me about the good things Theo had done for her in the past eleven years that she had worked for him.

“He is a good man... Which employer would care enough to build an old woman like me a big house in the township?” - Queen

“He did that for you? He sounds like a great man indeed” – Me

“He certainly is. I just wish that he could find a good woman like you and settle down instead of travelling all over the place and coming home to an empty house. Nobody ever visits him at the house, not even his girlfriends. I suppose he finds it difficult to do that after his divorce because after all it was a house he once shared with his family. But he is lonely, I can see the sadness in his eyes when he is around” – Queen

She was definitely telling me more than I wanted to hear but I did not mind. What was up with everybody matching us up though? She was the third person to do so.

“I’m sure he will find somebody suitable for him in due time” – Me

“I truly hope he does and that person should be as kind as he is not like his ex - wife... She was not a good person” – Queen

I was curious as to why Queen would say that but I did not want to seem as though I was digging for information so I did not respond to her statement.

I dropped her off at the taxi rank and Thapelo and I then drove back to Theo’s house.

The house just woke up to greet us as soon as we stepped in, so to speak. It had such a beautiful energy, I felt like I was home.

“Mom, I do not ever want to leave this house. Can you talk to uncle Theo to exchange houses with us” – Thapelo

It seemed I was not the only one who felt the good energy of the house.

“Certainly not,” I replied laughing.

“But we have the whole weekend to enjoy the house so let’s make the best of it.”

Chapter 38

Andiswa

I was woken up by a full bladder around three in the afternoon.

I walked to the bathroom and all I wanted to do was go back to bed but I was thirsty and hungry.

Having to face Sizwe again made me feel like just starving myself and hiding out in my bedroom but then I listened for some kind of noise that would indicate which room he was in... It was dead still.

That could only mean he was not in the house so I went to investigate and true to my suspicions, he was not there.

I opened the kitchen door and looked outside to see if he was somewhere in the yard but he wasn't and my car was also gone. He had taken it without even asking but I did not care much, I was just grateful that he was gone.

I had some leftovers with lots of chilli and some coke.

After having a meal, I felt much better. Luckily, I had stuck to drinking water throughout the night so I was not dehydrated which meant, I had no hangover. I was just tired so I went into the lounge and watched TV in my pjamas.

Sizwe came home around eight in the evening. He said nothing at all, instead he went straight to bed.

I had not cooked, I truly had no energy to do that but now that he was home, I felt bad. I decided that I would apologise for what happened the previous night. I was wrong for not calling and I understood why he was worried but I

had not done anything wrong except not calling to let him know that I was okay.

The following day, Sizwe left for work very early even before I woke up. I had planned to apologise to him but it was too late because he had left. I really screwed up but he was also acting very childish by avoiding me.

I was expecting the lady from Lesotho to come and start working that morning at nine.

It was a relief but at the same time I felt really annoyed at the thought of a stranger being in my house and going into my personal space.

She arrived a few minutes before nine but I was impressed because it was her first time coming to my house yet she found her way there and made it on time when I had only given her directions once.

“Hi mam... My name is Christina, I’m here to start working today” – Christina

I had honestly expected someone older. She looked very young. Christina could have been twenty - two. I preferred that anyway because the older ladies could be very stubborn and set in their ways.

“Hi Christina, do you mind if I ask how old you are?” -Me

“I’m twenty – eight, mam” – Christina

“Wow! you look much younger than that. Anyway, welcome and let me show you what you can start by doing for me...”

“Thank you mam, I hope my age is not a problem because some people do not want to have young helpers” – Christina

“I really don’t mind Christina” – Me

I led her to the bedroom and showed her where I keep everything and how I wanted her to pack our clothes. I did the same in the rest of the house and then let her get on with it while I worked on my computer.

She was actually quite a pleasant person and I hardly even noticed she was there even though she cleaned thoroughly like I had showed her.

She was respectful and quite shy which I liked because that meant I would not have problems of her talking back when I told her to do something. By five o’clock she was gone and the house was shining. It was spotless.

I made a mental note to call my client and thank her for introducing me to this girl.

I cooked dinner after she left and then caught up on some reading. Sizwe came home at the usual time but he had his dinner in silence. I tried to apologise to him but he did not respond. He just finished off his dinner and went straight to the bedroom.

This carried on for the rest of the week. It made me nervous at first but then I started being upset for his immature behaviour. Did he think this silent treatment was going to sort out the problem?

On Friday afternoon Gugu called me.

“Hey Andy... How are you doing? I haven’t spoken to you since last Sunday morning after White House” – Gugu

“Don’t even remind me ... I was dead tired” – Me

“I know, Bhekza ended up doing all the cooking while I slept all day” – Gugu

I envied Gugu... Bhekza was a cool guy who did not mind Gugu having a bit of fun. While I was stuck with this dinosaur named Sizwe.

“I did the same but Sizwe was not too happy with me in fact, he’s still not talking to me” – Me

“What the hell? You’re joking right?” – Gugu

“I wish I was” – Me

“That’s just crazy... I’m sorry” – Gugu

“I know right? Anyway, when are we doing it again?” – Me

“Actually, tonight Bhekza is leaving for Cape Town and I will be bored at my place, do you want to come through. We can have some seafood and lots of white wine while we carry on with our conversation about this man of yours, what’s his name? Sizwe right?” – Gugu

That sounded much more exciting than being stuck at home with a grumpy man.

“Yes, his name is Sizwe. I would love that... so what time should I come?” – Me

“I will be home around six... I will order the food and pick it up on my way home” – Gugu

“See you later then” – Me

I fixed myself up, left Sizwe a note and left for Gugu’s house.

Mbali

I had brought my acrylic paints, brushes and canvasses. I thought I would use the time to catch up on my face paintings.

What a brilliant space it was to do that! I thanked myself for it.

We spent all weekend enjoying the facilities in the house. He even had a steam room and a small gym in there.

Thapelo spent most of his time in the game room which he had discovered while looking for a toilet closer to the living area.

We had made ourselves right at home knowing that Theo would not be back for a couple of days but we did not intrude on his privacy by going into the main bedroom.

The maintenance guys must have been there for just three hours that Saturday morning and they were done but I just could not bring myself to pack up and

leave. I also realised how much pain our own house still brought us because it looked exactly as it looked before Sizwe left and every now and then, Thapelo would say, “Don’t touch that, it’s daddy’s... or remember when daddy did this or that over here... or I wish daddy was still here”. I understood that he missed him but it opened up wounds every time we were reminded of him and in that house, it was inevitable. How were we going to heal if we had constant reminders of our time as a family?

I saw how free and happier Thapelo was in Theo’s house and I started thinking that maybe it was time I thought about selling the house and purchasing another one or to renovate and change the furniture but that would cost me an arm and a leg but it was definitely something to consider.

I ironed Thapelo’s uniform deciding that we would stay for another night. Queen had left some cottage pie in the oven for us before she left and we had that for dinner, two nights in a row. We had nothing for Sunday lunch and dinner, so I decided to raid the fridge and cook something.

It was not my favourite thing to do but I had gotten a lot of practice. I found some pork chops in the freezer so I decided to make that with stuffed butternut, vegetable stir – fry and Greek -salad with lots of feta, avocado and olives.

I was happy with the results but we had already stuffed our faces with chicken we had found in the fridge so I decided to roast the meat later, for dinner. I was enjoying the house too much to leave that afternoon so the following morning, I would drop off Thapelo at school and then go straight to work. We would only go back home on Monday afternoon.

Theo would only be back on Tuesday anyway and Queen had said she would be back on Monday afternoon so it made perfect sense. Nobody would know that we were just hanging around with no reason.

Now that I had finished what I needed to do, I took my canvasses of half - done acrylic paintings and all my equipment, threw on my painting t- shirt which was oversized with smudges of paint all over and made myself comfortable in the garden while Thapelo splashed around in the shallow end of the pool.

It was a perfect afternoon... The sun was shining in all it's might and even the chilly autumn breeze, that had started making its presence felt, was absent.

I got lost in my artwork until I heard a voice behind me saying, "That is exquisite, you should honestly consider doing something about this talent."

I almost fell out of my chair because I was not expecting Theo to be back so soon. And how would I explain still hanging around in his house when the work I had been sent for was done?

"Theo! You gave me such a fright" – Me

"I'm so sorry, but please carry on and don't let me disturb you" - Theo

"Uncle Theo! You are back! Maybe you can play video games with me tonight because mommy is too busy to do that" – Thapelo

I could have killed Thapelo because he almost gave away the fact that it was not in our plans to leave.

"Of - course I will, I have quite a huge selection so we can play for hours if your mommy agrees" – Theo

"No Thapelo, we have to leave today" – Me

"Mommy but you said we would only leave tomorrow morning. Why are you going back on your word now?" – Thapelo

That child and his big mouth! I felt like dying right there and then.

“Please mommy... Don’t let my presence change your plans. You are more than welcome to stay, I came back early because the meeting that would have kept me there longer was cancelled, so I changed my flight booking” - Theo

“Why didn’t you call me? I could have arranged that for you” – Me

“I did but there was no answer” – Theo

It was only then that I realised that I had not bothered to check my phone since Friday evening... that is how much I had enjoyed my stay at that house.

“I’m so sorry Theo, I honestly just got carried away by the tranquillity of this place. As for your offer to stay, we really don’t want to impose. We should have actually been gone by now” – Me

“Have you seen how big this house is? How can you possibly be in my way? Besides having company would be wonderful, I really don’t want to be alone right now” - Theo

“Well, in that case... we will stay” – Me

“Great! Thank you Mbali” – Theo

I just smiled in return.

“Young man! Let me just get out of this suit then you and I are on. I will meet you in the game room. Let’s give mommy space to focus on her lovely work, okay?” – Theo

“Yay! It’s a deal” – Thapelo

He immediately got out of the pool, grabbed a towel and ran behind Theo while I stayed in my chair watching in awe.

Chapter 39

Andiswa

Gugu had a flat in Boksburg but spent most of her time at Bhekza's house in Spruitview. She would always invite me over when we used to hang out often but I mostly had excuses for not going. This time I went and I had a lot of fun with her. She was very talkative and entertaining. We had sushi, wine and did a lot of chatting about men. I also told her the story about me and Sizwe, leaving out what happened at the chalet and Sindi's affair with Sizwe. I had promised myself that I would never reveal the events of that night to anyone.

All she said in response after I told her the story was, "Yoh friend... Do you think this guy will not go back to his wife though? Men like Sizwe are unreliable".

There was one thing I knew about Gugu, she did not buy face. She always said exactly what she thinks without beating around the bush.

This time she told me something that annoyed me though. Why would she even say that? Did she not think I was woman enough to keep Sizwe?

I ignored what she said and changed the topic. I could see she did not approve at all so she was also relieved when the conversation changed to another subject.

I ended up leaving Gugu's house after midnight... quite intoxicated.

I played some hip - hop music as I drove home, which was the type of music I never really listened to but there were a few songs I liked.

I drove on, singing along and feeling on top of the world until I saw a red light flashing in the middle of the road.

By the time I realised what it actually was, it was too late... Traffic officers.

I parked next to the road.

“Mam... Can I have your license please?” – Officer

I gave it to him avoiding eye contact and not saying anything so I could not give myself away.

He checked the car all around and then came back...

“Could you step out of the vehicle please mam?” – Officer

For some reason, I kept losing my balance as I stepped out of the car. I honestly looked drunk and the more I tried to hide it, the further I exposed myself.

“Have you been drinking?” – Officer

“No” – Me

Even though I was obviously wreaking of alcohol.

“I am going to ask you to take an alcohol test,” he said without giving me space to start protesting.

“Come with me please” – Officer

I followed him.

“Sir please, can we talk... maybe I can give you something so you can forget that this ever happened...” – Me

“Are you trying to bribe a police officer mam? If I were you I would not say anything more because that’s a big offence” – Officer

I kept quiet and after doing the test, it was obvious what he had found.

“You are way above limit... Please step into that car and I will take yours. We are going to the police station. Please write down your residential address and a phone number of someone you would like us to call, here,” he said handing me a piece of paper and a pen.

I could not believe what was happening but I did as I was told. He then drove off in my car and the traffic officer in the car I was in, followed him.

I was too embarrassed to even say anything because it felt like every time I opened my mouth the stench of alcohol grew worse in the police car.

Instead, I closed my eyes and started saying a prayer. I was actually being arrested for drunken driving!

We drove off in the dark streets and at this point I was in tears. Sizwe was going to kill me. He had warned me about driving drunk but I did not listen.

I wiped off the tears on my face with the sleeve of my jersey.

The traffic officer started going on and on about the risks of driving drunk and how selfish people who did that truly were but I could not hear a thing he was saying. All I kept picturing was a cold, stinky cell full of low lives and criminals.

How would I survive in there and what if Sizwe did not come to bail me out since he was not talking to me?

Three days later...

My name was finally called...

“Andiswa, you are going home” – policeman

Those words were like music to my ears. I had never been as happy as I was that morning except when I got my dream car.

I stood up and followed him. I looked like hell and felt like it too. Nobody had been to court to bail me out. I did not manage to get a hold of anyone and Sizwe flat out refused... That cold bastard!

I was subjected to doing my business in the toilet in front of seven other women. It was humiliating. The food was horrible. Everything about that place was just atrocious and I never wanted to experience that again, ever!

“Did someone come and pay my bail?” – Me

“Yes... A man called Sizwe. He said he was a friend of yours” – Policeman

“Okay... Do I get to take my car home or is it still impounded?” – Me

He started ignoring my questions and I got the message. I was asking too much.

I was given all my things back and asked to sign a release form and let go.

At the reception area, I spotted Sizwe in his grey suit... typing something on his phone. I felt so small at that moment.

He saw me and stood up to exit through the wide door without even waiting for me to get to him.

He waited outside the car. Thank God, they had given him my car back.

He greeted me coldly and opened the door for me while looking the other way as though I was some piece of trash.

I felt anger rising inside of me. How could he have left me to sit in that holding cell for almost four days. He was cruel!

The first thing he said when he got inside the car was, “I hope you learnt a lesson”.

I was too drained to even respond... The bastard!

I wondered if he would have ever treated Mbali this way. He would have never let her spend so much time in a holding cell. I was sure of tha

Mbali

I was so embarrassed that Theo had caught us out.

It took time for me to get my focus back onto my painting but once I did, I got lost in it all over again. I must have been sitting there for hours because when I felt Theo putting a jacket over my shoulders and pushing my weave out of the way, I realised it had started getting dark. I was startled out of my daze.

“Theo! Oh, my word, I’m so sorry. I have wanted to finish this painting for so long and now I was just flowing. I completely forgot where I was and... I forgot to feed you guys. Now I left you to deal with Thapelo for so long, please forgive me.”

I was babbling.

“The food was delicious... We left some for you and I could not have had a better afternoon, that boy is really something... Relax” - Theo

I could not believe how comfortable I had been leaving Thapelo with Theo for so long. What amazed me even more was that Thapelo had not even come to ask me for anything. He was so attached to me and he always needed to know where I was, but he was obviously comfortable enough with Theo to even forget I was there.

“Thank you so much” – Me

“For what? I just came to call you inside because it’s getting a bit chilly out here. You will catch a cold” – Theo

“I’m almost done...” – Me

“Please come with me, I want to show you something before you carry on” – Theo

I followed him inside the house with his jacket and my t-shirt hanging over my micro shorts, it actually looked as though I wasn’t wearing anything underneath... The guy was still my boss so I felt a bit self - conscious.

“I really don’t mind” – Theo

“You don’t mind what?” - Me

So, he was a mind reader too.

“The outfit... you look like you belong here and with legs like that you shouldn’t mind either. I saw how you were looking at yourself and figured you were uncomfortable” – Theo

I certainly did not see that coming.

“Well, thank you for the compliment” – Me

“Don’t worry Thapelo is not playing video games anymore... I introduced him to my own hobby of assembling radio - controlled airplanes so he will be busy for a while and you can carry on with what you were doing. I will pick out a movie for us to watch later if you’re okay with that” – Theo

“I would love that,” I said feeling grateful.

He led me upstairs to a loft. It was completely empty with just a desk at the corner. I did not understand why he was showing me that room.

“You can come and paint in here”

“I really do not want to make a mess inside” – Me

“Trust me I don’t mind... You can make a mess all you want. Aunty Queen will clean it up tomorrow. I’m sure she won’t mind. She seems to like you a lot” – Theo

“You spoke to her?”- Me

“Yes, I called her to find out if you had arrived when I couldn’t get hold of you. She told me you took her to the taxis and she was very impressed with you. She thinks you are a beautiful person inside and out” – Theo

“Wow, thank her for me but I did not spend so much time with her” – Me

“Those things are very easy to pick up especially for experienced people like aunty Queen. She immediately picked up that my ex was trouble when she first moved in here but I didn’t listen to her. I wish I had because it turned out, she was right” – Theo

“Do you mind me asking why things did not work out between you and her? I know it’s a personal question but it seems to be something that keeps popping up so I am a bit curious” – Me

“Well, she was very sweet in the beginning but as soon as I married her, she changed. She already had a five - year old boy but she lived with him in Tanzania because that is where she is from. When we got married she moved here but she started mistreating aunty Queen and everyone who was a friend of mine. Eventually people stopped visiting because of her and I sort of got used to that. But then she started drifting away from me too. We were like housemates more than husband and wife. At one point we did not speak to each other at all. When I left for work at some point, I came back and she was gone. She had gone back to Tanzania and a couple of months later, I received divorce papers from a lawyer and soon after that was finalised, she got remarried” – Theo

“Wow, Theo... I’m so sorry. It couldn’t have been easy but what about your son?” – Me

“He left with her because he is not really my biological son but I took him as mine and I still do” – Theo

He had a big heart.

“Anyway, I have accepted it and moved on. I even go there from time to time to see my son and I’m okay with her now. Since I told you about my failed marriage, please tell me about yours” – Theo

I told him the whole story about Sizwe, Andiswa and Sindi. I just referred to Sindi as some woman because I did not want him to judge her. She had helped me find a job so I was not about to throw her under the bus just because I was now okay.

It was the first time that I had opened up to anybody about the cause of my divorce but I must admit, I was comfortable enough to talk to Theo about it for some reason.

He did not say anything. He just looked at me with empathy filled eyes.

“I saw your pain when I first interviewed you. Your eyes tell a story, they betray you even when you are trying to act like you are okay” – Theo

It was not the first time someone told me this.

“But today I saw something else in your eyes. Your eyes were shining just like the day when I saw you at the shelter. You had the same look in your eyes” – Theo

“Wow... actually that might be because I was doing the two things that I love most” – Me

“True... Anyway, let me help you get your stuff in here and I will let you get on with it while I check how the little man is doing down there” – Theo

“Okay... Thank you” – Me

I watched him as he left the room and took in a deep breath.

I felt something while talking to Theo, something very powerful that I just could not explain... some chemistry... some deep connection.

I just did not want to allow myself to feel that. He was my boss!

I couldn't help but wonder if he felt it too... something told me he did.

Chapter 40

Andiswa

Three weeks later...

The situation in my house went from bad to worse. Sizwe and I fought like cat and dog. We were constantly at each other's throats about everything and anything. I was bitter about him leaving me in a holding cell and he felt that I deserved it because I was too stubborn and out of control. I was angry and I just could not forgive him. If we were not fighting then we were not talking to each other at all.

It got very toxic in the house and I ended up going out every single weekend just to get away from him. I would take an Uber if I was going out at night because I did not want to risk getting arrested again.

I would sometimes not come back home and sleep over at a friend's house just to avoid Sizwe.

I stopped cooking for him and sex was just something we did not do anymore.

We had a helper so she was the one doing the cooking at his request, he had offered to pay her extra.

I was not bothered by the "no -sex" part because I had gone through a lot of dry spells in my time, I knew he had too because according to Mbali there were a lot. Except he probably had Sindi to make up for it.

It did not seem like he was getting any though because he spent a lot more time at home. Come to think of it, he was home a whole lot more than he used to be. I thought it was just so he could irritate me. He even took leave from

work. Luckily, my business required me to be on the road making deliveries and fetching stock so I did not have to deal with him all day.

He had even stopped giving me money, he would buy the groceries himself.

I did not know how to deal with this situation. I wanted to make things work with Sizwe, I truly did because if we split we would be the laughing stock in the whole of East-rand. After all the 'love lives here posts' I had on Facebook and people finally accepting our relationship, or so it seemed, losing Sizwe was no option so I would stick it out until this turmoil passed. Besides, I still wanted my dream wedding and I still wanted the big mansion in the suburbs.

I was just not going to be the one doing the apologising.

Sizwe had a lot to apologise for. He was the one who went and promised another woman marriage while he was with me, he turned his back on me when we got caught, he was the one that started throwing accusations at me when I was doing nothing wrong, just having fun and he left me to sit in a holding cell and then rubbed it in my face after I had done my best to make him feel like a man. All I had done was enjoy my life. I never cheated and I certainly never turned my back on him. Who should be apologising to who?

I had my pride and I was not going to let him treat me like he treated all his other women. He had to learn to stop expecting royal treatment even when he did not deserve it. He had to learn to humble himself.

Instead he was getting cockier than ever.

The poor woman that had been helping out in the house had been subjected to a lot of screaming matches and negative energy but I appreciated her presence because she was doing a stellar job at keeping the house in top condition.

That Friday morning was a day like any other. Sizwe had woken up and gone to work and I was putting my orders together. Christina, our helper, arrived early because she wanted to wash the blankets.

I had a business conference to attend which I had told Sizwe about weeks ago and reminded him again that Monday evening. I would then see where the night took me. I was getting a lot of invitations since I had revamped myself, so I knew something would come up. I had a new outfit to show off that had just been couriered to me the previous day.

I decided that I would come home and get dressed in the afternoon after the conference.

Sizwe had taken my car for the day because he had a networking session he was attending and he wanted to stand out and impress. I did not mind because he hardly ever used it anyway. I had to use my old car which I had started hating because that was a true downgrade as compared to my Audi.

I made sure I parked very far at the conference to avoid people seeing me coming out of that small car.

I was there almost all day and I was happy I had gone because it was very informative. I learnt new ways to improve my business and much more.

I got home and the first thing I noticed was that both Sizwe's car and mine were not there. How could he have driven out in two cars? Could the car have been stolen?

I panicked and called him immediately before I went inside to check if he knew anything about that but his phone was on voicemail.

It was strange because he always had his phone with him and he was not even at work since he was on leave.

I went inside the house to ask Christina if she knew anything about the missing car but there was nobody home. What was going on? Could it have been that

woman that stole Sizwe's car? How could the car disappear at the same time as she did?

Mbali

'Why? Why now?' I asked myself.

I am not ready for all these feelings. I don't need this in my life and wouldn't I be making the same mistake again if I acted on them? Wouldn't I be jumping from one relationship to the next? I needed to find fulfilment on my own first before I even thought about a relationship. I needed to work through my feelings.

Thapelo came running up the stairs shouting, "Mommy! Mommy! You must see the plane that Uncle Theo and I just assembled.

"I will come and see it just now my angel" – Me

"Mommy are we really leaving tomorrow?" – Thapelo

"Yes, we are" – Me

The look of disappointment in his eyes shook me to the core and I knew how he felt. I also did not want to go back to that house we called home. It was storing too much pain.

“This sucks,” Thapelo said as he turned to leave, looking completely different than he had looked when he came running up the stairs a minute ago.

As I turned to watch him leave. I realised Theo was standing by the staircase with my case of paints and canvasses. He heard my little conversation with Thapelo.

He looked straight into my eyes as Thapelo left and said something that shocked me!

“Why don’t you and Thapelo move in with?”

I thought I heard wrong... Maybe my ears were playing tricks on me.

“Pardon me?” – Me

“Move in with me,” – He said again.

This had to be a joke... I mean we were not dating, not even friends instead he was my BOSS and he was asking me to move in with him. What the hell?

The look in my eyes must have given me away again.

“I know this comes as a shock to you but when I arrived and saw you and Thapelo in the garden, you both looked as though you were right where you belong and you looked so happy. I did not see the robotic Mbali that I boss around in the office, you were in your element... peaceful and happy.

I caught that same look in your eyes again when I came to give you a jacket, your lips were even twitching upwards as though you were about to break into

a smile even though I don't think you were aware of it yourself. I stood there for quite a while and you did not even notice me.

Mbali, when I had nothing, somebody gave me a chance and yet again when I got into a field that was not really "me" somebody else gave me a chance. I would not be so content with myself, so happy... if those people had not taken a risk on me. The most important thing though is for the person who is given an opportunity to make the decision to take the plunge" – Theo

"Theo... How would moving in here with you be an opportunity? We are not even dating and you are my boss. How would that work?" – Me

"Well you see Mbali, I've been thinking about this all afternoon. As much as you are brilliant at what you do as my PA, you are not happy" – Theo

"A lot of people are working because they have to and not because they enjoy it" – Me

"My point exactly... Does it make it right? No... but when you do something with passion, it's a different story. I would like to give you that opportunity to live the life you want to live. I saw the two things that make you most happy... The children's home and your art. One of those is something we have in common. I have always wanted to start a children's home but I don't have the time to do it but you can. I have the money and you have the time and passion. You can run it for me and I will pay you what I am paying you now if you do that for me. That will also allow you to work on your art, your other true love" - Theo

I could not believe what Theo was saying to me. Everything I was missing suddenly became clear to me. He discovered exactly what it is I truly wanted and he did not even know me that well and I had spent my life trying to figure out that exact thing. But why would he give me such an opportunity though?

What was in it for him? If there was one thing I knew, it was that nothing in life came free.

“I don’t know what to say... this all just sounds so absurd and too good to be true” – Me

“Weird... right?” – Theo

“That too... Actually, that’s an understatement” – Me

“All I want you to know is that, what I am offering you is coming straight from my heart with no strings attached. There is something about you, something that is drawing me in and it is pushing me to help you live the life you were meant to live... both you and that special boy. My only selfish motive is that I will have someone here to enjoy this house because I hardly ever do since I travel a lot. That makes me feel guilty. I saw how you and Thapelo love it here and you fit in perfectly. This loft could be your art studio, you can turn it into whatever you want. I have a house that’s currently standing free that I had bought to turn into a shelter but it’s been years and nothing has happened. This is an opportunity for us to see that dream come true” – Theo

It just could not be true... This scared me.

Who was this man and why was he doing this to me?

Chapter 41

Andiswa

My heart started pumping twice as hard.

I knew something had gone horribly wrong and I was frustrated because nobody was available to provide me with answers.

Everything in the house seemed to be in place so nothing had been stolen but after passing the lounge, I backtracked. The shelf I had bought to accommodate Sizwe's mountain of books was empty. I looked a bit more carefully this time and noted that everything that belonged to Sizwe in that room was not there. I ran to our bedroom and opened the closet only to find that all his clothes, shoes and underwear... everything was gone. I went into the bathroom in disbelief, my knees shaking, only to find that none of his toiletries were in sight.

As reality hit me, I sank to the floor and wept.

I cried like a baby, I was inconsolable. He took everything... both cars were missing meaning my Audi was gone.

I realised that I had actually been fooled because he had told me that he could not buy the Audi in my name since it was financed by the bank, it actually still belonged to the bank but it was in his name. It did not belong to me in the first place. What a fool I was... I had agreed to this because I thought that Sizwe and I would always be together and we were headed for the aisle but he left me. He left me as he had found me except now my reputation would be in tatters.

I would be the joke of the season both on social media and in my community and hangout spots.

I must have lay on the carpet for hours, all energy sucked out of me. He was not even decent enough to tell me he was leaving me.

When I finally gathered the strength to get up, I noticed a big white envelope on my dresser with my name on it.

I braced myself for what was inside but my spirit told me it was confirmation of what I already knew.

I opened the envelope and inside was a typed - out letter...

Dear Andiswa

I write this letter with a heavy heart as by now you might have already discovered that I have left but I do hope that it will give you clarity on my reasons for doing so.

I blame myself for a lot of things, please read with understanding as I point out for you in detail my list of regrets. Please note that this is not me pointing a finger at you but instead it is a detailed analysis of my deepest regrets;

1. I let lust rule me and it won

The day I ruined my life was the day I let the fantasies I had of you cloud my judgment and I came over to your house to seduce you. I admire your fighting spirit, positive energy and hardworking nature. There are a lot of other things I admire about you Andiswa and that will never change but I desired your body even more than I admired you as a person. I came to you being pushed by lust. I took a chance and you let me in and that was my biggest downfall.

2. I left my wife for my mistress

You might argue that Mbali was the one that left me and not the other way around but you would be wrong. I left her the day I jumped into bed with you because the truth of the matter is that I committed adultery and that permits her to exit the marriage, even in the bible it states this. Not only that but I betrayed her by sleeping with her best friend. Who could possibly blame her for doing what would shield her heart by leaving that situation. What hurts me most is that I alienated the only child I had because after confirmation that I am indeed infertile, even though it was not always the case. I lost the second chance I had of being a father. It was not the first time, Sindi lost a child that was supposed to be my first and only child but I lost her when she exited the womb of her mother before time as a result of my infidelity. I should have learnt my lesson then but I did it again and now the love of my life and the child I considered my son are gone from me.

3. I compromised myself to please you

Andiswa look into the internal mirror and honestly ask yourself if you truly loved me. I will tell you the answer now without a doubt. You never loved me. You loved the life that I would give you and you fell in love with the idea of me and not with me. Please read that sentence again till you understand it. You cared more about the luxury cars, the fancy clothes and the idea of marriage because you are a people pleaser. Everything you do is to show off and prove to people that you can. That has made so selfish, so much so that you do not even recognise another person's feelings if they stand in the way of your Instagram dream. What happened to you Andiswa?

Did you even care where the money that bought all those fancy things came from? You did not even ask yourself how a lawyer that is just

starting out in the industry could afford all those things. Maybe I gave birth to this material obsessed monster that possessed you and I then carried on to feed it but I have a feeling that you need to revisit your childhood and assess where the problem started because if we sweep things underneath the rug, they will always resurface.

I am now paying the price for falling into the same trap that you did of being a people pleaser but I was only trying to please one person and she became my downfall in more ways than one. I cannot go into detail about this but read between the lines.

You never loved me Andiswa, amongst other things, it was your jealousy and envy of Mbali's life that pushed you over the edge. You wanted to prove to yourself and to the world that you were better than her and you could take her man. Guess what, you are not even half the woman she is. Fix your life.

4. I lied to you and to myself

Yes Andiswa, I was never in love with you. I was in lust.

The lines became blurred and I now find myself without neither of the two. I blame you for indulging me. I am not going to lie to myself anymore. What I did was despicable and same goes for you. None of us is better than the other. I am ruled by flesh and I will change that. The only difference between you and I is that I have acknowledged my mistakes and therefore I will be able to fix them. If there is anybody that can get through to you, it is me because you and I are cut from the same cloth. I ask you to please acknowledge your faults and fix them. Start by finding your mother because I believe that is where it all began.

been able to make it work with a woman who felt that I was a chore that needed to be done to get to a simple life.

You were right when you said I should have gone for a woman that does not drink if I have a problem with excessive drinking. I took your advice and she came to me, I did not look for. In fact, you brought her to me, her name is Christina. When you were out "enjoying life" she cooked for me and made sure that I was clean and well taken care of when I was going to fight for our bread and butter. If you had been present enough you would have noticed. She does

not demand designer clothes and fast cars from me. She does not deprive me of sex when I do not give her what she wants. She is grateful for what I give her and so I have decided to keep her which is why she was not at your house when you came home. She is with me. I came to my senses Andy that is why I'm gone.

Enjoy Life Andiswa... Now you are free to do so.

Yours sincerely

Your Best Friend's Husband

(That's how I would like you to remember me)

Mbali

Something happened in my spirit after the weekend I spent at Theo's house. There was some divine intervention that had met me there. I was different from the person that entered, I had seen beyond my circumstances. Even if Theo was not serious about what he had offered me. His words had healed me. I found my purpose in our conversation. It was what I had been searching for my entire life but Theo put it into words and laid it out bare without any coverings.

I was unsure if it was his offer that scared me or the secret he had uncovered but I was not ready to face neither of the two.

I had always convinced myself that I would never be able to live out my dream of being a philanthropist. How was it even possible in the world that we lived in when there were bills to pay and families to look after. I had made peace

with just dreaming about it but when Theo told me exactly what I had always knew but had no confirmation of, I was in awe but the difference was, he made it real. It was no longer just a crazy dream but it became a possibility.

What gave me doubt though was the ridiculousness of taking my son from the house that he called home and moving into a man's house... a stranger that claimed he wanted nothing more from me apart from my skills and passion so we could fulfil a dream together.

How was I not to be institutionalised for even considering this?

I had felt the chill of the house that no longer felt like home when we arrived back from Theo's house. Thapelo was even worse than me because he immediately closed himself in his room and only came out for dinner, looking sad and defeated.

In spite of it all I realised something... I had found a place of forgiveness in my heart somehow. I had realised that Sizwe was never meant to be mine and so I forgave him and Andiswa too. I never received an apology from her but still I knew that one day she would come to her senses.

As the months flew by, in a state of confusion. I could not shake off the events of that afternoon. The constant reminder from Theo did not help matters either. He was back to his normal distant self but he would still flash me a smile and have conversations with me when time allowed even though I could tell he was disappointed. I had promised to think about his offer and get back to him.

At the time I had decided it was just a crazy idea and I would forget about it and carry on with my life as it was but with time it did not seem so crazy anymore. I felt I needed to talk to someone and there was no better person to speak to than Sindi whom I had not seen for months and I felt really bad about that. I had been meaning to call her but never got around to doing it. The more I postponed was the more I felt bad and I eventually just scrapped it out.

But I had to see her so I finally called.

It was crazy how I met Sindi as my husband's mistress and she ended up being the person that helped to get my life back on track. It was not by coincidence.

"Sindi can I meet with you tonight if it is at all possible?" – Me

"I actually have an off day today so I would love to do dinner. Bring Thapelo" – Sindi

As if I had a choice. I loved my son but that too was getting to me. I could not go anywhere without him after school because there was nobody to look after him and it somehow limited my social life. I knew something had to give.

"I will, but then we should go somewhere with a play - area otherwise he gets bored and restless" – Me

"I know just the place. I will send you the address" – Sindi

Later that evening I met Sindi with Thapelo in tow.

I apologised for going AWOL on her and got that out of the way. Sindi just laughed at my apology because she did not even see the need for it. She understood a working woman's life could be hectic especially with the added responsibility of parenting.

Eventually I started asking her about Theo. She told me what she knew which was not much and what she had told me the last time was about all she could tell me but one thing that stuck that she said was, "I can lay my life on this, Theo is a man of his word".

That was all I got from her but it was good enough.

I still did not get the answer I was looking for though.

We spent the rest of the night catching up and she told me how well things were going in her career. She also shared with me that she was content being single and it was not because of Sizwe but because she felt happier that way. She certainly did look happy and I accepted that because happiness for one person does not mean the same for the other and not everyone was meant for marriage. Everyone had their own path.

She then told me something that did not shock me much but kind of made me feel vindicated. She had found all this out from one of her father's good friends who served as a state attorney so it was from a reliable source.

Apparently Sizwe was fired from work and he could no longer serve as a lawyer anywhere in South Africa or internationally for that matter. He had allegedly scammed money from a client and was found out. He had since disappeared and nobody knew where he was. To hide his crime, he bought a whole lot of things including cars and a house. He changed most assets to other people's names until the heat died down. Then he made a run for it.

As I went to bed that night, I realised I had forgiven Sizwe because that evening I prayed for him instead of celebrating his down fall.

I wanted him nowhere near me but I did not feel anger anymore when I thought about him... The same went for Andiswa.

The following Monday at work. I was having lunch with Gugu as we normally did. We did not have much to talk about so she was on her phone scrolling through her facebook newsfeed and I was reading a novel since I had distanced myself from social media.

Then suddenly she started laughing and started telling this story about a friend of hers that had been flaunting expensive things and a flashy car all over.

It was nothing new so I paid no attention until she told me how she was posting daily about a man that she had stolen from her best friend. That caught my attention because it was so similar to my story.

“I just remembered her because I saw someone comment on one of the pictures she posted months ago” – Gugu

“So, is she still with this man? And what happened to the guy’s wife?” – Me

“I don’t know because they were obviously not talking anymore and apparently the wife or ex- wife is a very private person but I hope she found her peace. As for Andiswa, she sold her house and went to stay with her mother in Cape Town and changed all her contact details so nobody can get a hold of her including me. The man left her for the helper. Can you imagine? That man needs prayer, I say they both got what they deserved because apparently the guy is also wanted for fraud” – Gugu

“Wait... Did you say Andiswa? Curvy Andiswa with short hair from Dawn Park?” – Me

“That very same Andiswa... How do you know her?” – Gugu

“Wait... Mbalentle... Mbali... Mbals... Don’t tell me you are that Mbali?” – Gugu

I was speechless.

“Yes... That is my ex-best friend and my ex-husband that you were just talking about” – Me

She looked at me, shocked.

“Mbali, you must share the anxiety pills that you are taking... this cannot be real” – Gugu

“At some stage I wish I had been taking those” – Me

She stood up and dramatically did a soldier’s salute.

“You are boss shem! I would never have guessed you were going through so much when you first arrived here to sign your contract and even after that. You were all kinds of flames” – Gugu

“On the outside and on the inside too” – Me

“This world is too small...” she exclaimed matching her statement with an exaggerated look of disbelief.

“Since we are talking, I have always wanted to ask you this... what is going on between you and our boss?” - Gugu

I laughed out loud.

“Nothing... why would you think anything is going on?” – Me

“Mbali, I may look a like I’m all about hair and make-up but I’m actually much wiser than that. I have been through the most and I can see these things from afar. If nothing is going on then something should happen” – Gugu

“Gugu, I just came out of a very hard situation. The last thing I need is to complicate my life” – Me

“You know Mbali sometimes things we pray for do not come in the packages that we expect and then we get confused. People pray for miracles and scream in church about trusting God and then when God gives them the miracle that they had been praying for they don’t believe it’s real.

How can you say you trust in God and when he hands you something you have been asking him for, you start doubting the blessing and start second guessing its origin because it did not come as you expected... Aren’t you then a hypocrite? Look at me and Bhekza... We are like the North pole and the Sahara, totally different and very different upbringing but God gave me Bhekza as the “knight in shining armour” I had been praying for. I could have stuck my nose up in the air and said I don’t date ghetto guys like him and missed my blessing. But because I believed God when he gave me what I was pestering him for, I am flourishing in my blessing even though I want to punch my blessing’s face in at times, I am blessed,” she added as we both started laughing.

Her words were so profound.

She told me exactly what I needed to hear and it came from the last place I had expected.

“You are glowing hey... Miss bride to be. I have my outfit ready for the wedding by the way,” I said trying to lighten up the moment as I digested what she had said.

“You best be ready because it will be the wedding of the year and there is only two weeks left” – Gugu

For some reason I felt I should open up to Gugu about what had been gnawing at me for months. I told her what had happened with Theo and I also told her about my feelings towards the whole situation. I thought she would laugh and joke about it, tell me how crazy we both are but to my surprise she became dead serious.

“Look at it this way Mbali... Sometimes you dig through the earth looking for your piece of gold and you find shiny stones that look like it and make the mistake of thinking they are the real thing but once you weigh them for value, you find that the stones you found are not gold. Some people will just be content with something that looks just like it but some will carry on digging because they know they deserve the real thing. But as you go back and dig you will eventually find your piece of gold and you will know that it is real, immediately, because you have gone through the process and fell for the fake before. You will know for instance that gold does not necessarily come shining but it is much heavier in weight, I hope you are hearing me through the ear of the spirit” - Mbali

“Go ahead” – Me

“You will know that it doesn’t just appear shining but it needs to be polished but you will have patience because you will know without a doubt that it is your piece of gold that you have been searching for. That whole process of mistaking shiny objects for your piece of gold will then be clear to you. You had to go through that so that you would not get confused when you eventually found the real thing. I will leave it at that. Take a moment and take it in” – Gugu

I did not realise how wise and spiritually connected Gugu was. It is true when they say God uses the most unlikely people for his work.

I heard the message loud and clear.

Acknowledging that it was okay to accept my real feelings for Theo, brought in the missing puzzle in the picture. As much as it did not make sense, it felt right in my spirit.

“Wow Gugu... You have made it all so clear” – Me

“Maybe that is where Theo is at... He has found his piece of gold and why should he waste time? He knows its genuine even though it is not shiny” – Gugu

When I got back to my office, I immediately e-mailed Theo.

“Does the offer still stand?” – Me

“I am still waiting on you to make a decision” – Theo

“In that case, expect Thapelo and I to move in this weekend” – Me

“I will tell Queen to prepare your bedrooms” – Theo

“Only Thapelo’s bedroom... I’m sharing with you” – Me

There was no response after that and I felt like such a fool for being so forward. I had scared him off. He was not interested in me... he only wanted to help me. What was I thinking?

About an hour before we knocked off, the receptionist called my office and told me there was a guy who said he was sent by Theo to see me.

“Send him through” I said absently while typing a document I had put off drafting.

The guy came in and he looked more like a construction worker.

“Afternoon sir, can I help you?”

“Yes, are you Miss Mbalentle?” – Guy

“Yes, I am” – Me

“I was sent by Mr Mokoena to come and collect the keys to your house. We are a small company that helps people move and we even do the packing for them. Mr Mokoena asked me to come and get you so you could show us what you would like to take with and what you will be living behind” – Guy

The smile on my face was without any effort...

After that man said those words my spirit rejoiced in a way that I had never experienced before. I knew then that I had found my heavy piece of gold... The real thing.

I could not wait to see Thapelo’s face when I told him the good news.

That day was the beginning of the rest of my life polishing my piece as we worked to change the world one shelter at a time. I had walked into my purpose full on and without any effort. It was by grace...

Epilogue

Andiswa

6 years later...

As I knelt down on my mother's grave after a morning spent removing the dead grass that had threatened to invade her tombstone... I thanked her for giving me love in her last years of life. Love that I had craved for and never received in my childhood. I remembered seeing her for the first time in over a decade, lying on her deathbed looking frail. That image would never leave me... it was a far cry from the picture I always remembered of a vivacious, beautiful woman that had spent her life in fancy hotels and bars. I remembered watching her putting on her make – up and curling her hair as she prepared to paint the town red. I envied her, she always looked so happy, totally free and I aspired to have that too one day. I wanted to be just like her because I thought maybe then I would be just as loved as she was by all the people around me.

When I found her again after many years, she painted a different picture than the one I had always had in my mind.

“Andiswa, those people never loved me, they only cared about what I brought to the table and that came at a very high price. The people that loved me were the ones I left at home, depriving them of my love and affection. You have no idea how I regret not spending time with you and giving you the love that you so desperately needed from me. I got caught up in my love for shiny things and look at me now. Look where I ended up... All those people are gone and I lost

the one person that loved me no matter what... you. I lost you because I was too foolish. All the fancy things I lived my life chasing do not matter to me anymore and they are no use to me now. What mark did I leave on this earth? Did I contribute anything positive? No... And I don't want you to make the same mistakes as I did. Please do not be like me. There is more to life."

I would never forget those words. To think that I spent my entire life secretly craving to have the kind of life that she had and to be just like her and there she was telling me what she told me. And the most painful thing was that I had gone in exactly the same path and almost lost myself so I knew that it was true.

I left her grave with peace in my heart. She had left me a home and given me love in the last five years after I came back to her, that was more than enough. I spent most of my time nursing her back to health but eventually she succumbed to her illness.

The time spent nurturing my mother taught me a lot. I cringed when I thought back at the person I became before I came home. It took Sizwe's letter for me to wake up and do some introspection and so I decided right there and then that it was enough. I looked for my mother as he had suggested because I realised how right he was. When I eventually found her, she was all alone in a big beautiful house with a stranger she had hired to look after her. I put my house on the market, packed all my things and moved in with her.

That was the best decision I ever made.

I still had most of the money from my house sale but I had taken a break and I was still trying to figure out exactly what it was I wanted to do with my life.

I spent a full year in fear of calling Mbali but eventually I did, what surprised me was that before I could start saying the speech I had rehearsed in my head all this time, she immediately said, "I have forgiven you and I wish you well".

That was all I needed to hear.

As for Sizwe, the time I spent with him was more of a blur to me now. He was right, I never loved him because I did not miss him and I hardly ever thought

about him, all he was and will ever be in my mind was My Best Friend's Husband that played a role, no matter how twisted it was, in changing my life.

Mbali

6 years later...

I called out to Thapelo to help me carry the last batch of scones into the shelter. He was no longer a little boy but he had grown into a responsible teenager even though he drove me crazy sometimes, I understood that it was just hormones.

It was a hot day and my feet were swollen... I could not wait to give birth to the baby girl I was carrying and I still had another four weeks to go.

"Mommy can I go to the park with Thapelo?" – Luthando asked as she tugged on my dress.

"Of - course you can..."

"Thank you," she said as she darted off to join his brother who was carrying a full bucket of scones on his head.

She was our little miracle. She was conceived on the first night that Thapelo and I spent at Theo's house after I had made the craziest decision that ended up changing my life in a way I had never imagined.

It took that one decision to turn everything around.

We had managed to open three shelters that housed one hundred and fifty children in total. My other house had been turned into an art school.

Theo had legally adopted Thapelo but he advised me to allow Zaba to see him. He never showed up to any of the arranged visits and eventually changed his number, so we closed that book.

As for Sizwe, he was still nowhere to be found.

We now had two beautiful children and one on the way. My husband Theo was exactly what I imagined he would be, loving, caring and my piece of gold.

In God We Trust

