

Naledi

They look shocked.

Do they not understand what being “arrested” means?

“We're sorry mah,”-Mbulelo

“Tell that to the magistrate, and the MEC and the police commissioner,” I say.

Silence.

“And your father,”

I hear gulps.

Silence.

I'm not taking them back to that house. I don't want to be woken in the wee hours of the morning again because obviously they are stupid.

“Use the guest bedroom. I'm going to call your father and tell him about this, you need a lawyer,”-me

Mqhe looks more worried than all of them. The others look scared more than anything.

“I'm supposed to start work on Monday,” I hear him say as they walk up the stairs.

He should have thought about that before deciding to be stupid.

I doubt I'll get any sleep now, it's already morning.

Should I call Qhawe? Or Hlomu?

It's a bit too early, I don't want to wake them from their multi-million sleep.

I'll call in the morning.

“He's going to kill us this time,” one says.

I can hear them talking in the other bedroom.

“He'll make us work at the rank again,” another says.

They make them work at the rank?

Lerato is starting to be too much now.

If it's not calls from her asking questions that have nothing to do with her, it's those forwarded inspirational quotes that I never read.

I've spoken to my dad only twice this week. I miss him a lot. I'm going home next weekend.

It's quiet in this house, I take it the party-animals are still sleeping.

I'm craving orange juice but I don't have it in this house.

I almost walk out of the bedroom with just the kanga, but then I remember I have guests.

The house smells fresh. It feels like a Tuesday when my helper comes over.

Oh. They're awake.

They're in the lounge, quiet.

They all stand up when they see me walking down the stairs.

Wow, even the furniture is shining.

The sink is dry and the floor is squeaky clean. They mopped? Wow.

“Hi Mah,”- Lwandle is the first to say.

Oh, I see, they are trying to make up for their sins.

“Hi,” I say looking at all of them.

They look down.

Sigh.

"Have you had breakfast?"

They shake their heads.

"I'm going to Spar to get orange juice, make yourselves some food," I say.

"I'll drive you," -Lwandle.

The generosity is too much now.

"Okay, take the keys," I say shaking my head.

If they think their generosity is going to soften me, they are wrong. I'm still thinking about suitable punishment.

I still haven't called the family.

"Mah," he says as we drive out of the gate.

I look at him.

"I'm sorry about what happened. We didn't mean to put you through all that," he says.

This child.

"You shouldn't have done that Lwandle, it was stupid and irresponsible of you. You were supposed to sleep over at that house and not throw a party,"

He's biting his nails.

"I know, we got carried away, it was supposed to be just the four of us but the next thing we knew there were people all over,"

Yeah right.

"And when did you plan this? Who do you know in Kimberley?"

"Nobody. We checked in on Facebook and the next thing we knew people were on their way," he says.

I don't believe that for a second! Who gave them the address?

"So you were partying with people you don't know?"

He nods.

They're more stupid than I thought. He knows who his family is and he did this? What if one of those people had been some enemy who wanted to hurt them?

"Mah, could you please not tell baba about this. We're already in trouble with him. I'm fine with it, he'll forgive me eventually but I'm worried about Zamani, he's paying for his studies and it's going to be a problem if he keeps disappointing him,"

He's asking me to lie to his parents now?

"You don't have to go to court, they didn't lay any charges. But one slip and I'm telling your father about this," I say getting out of the car.

I hope this won't get me into trouble but I also don't want to be responsible for Nkosana giving up on this Zamani child.

Spar is full and I generally don't like queues.

"Come on, we'll buy it here at Tops," I say

He follows me but I can see he's reluctant. He's walking very slowly.

We are greeted with a very wide smile.

"My man, how did it go? You almost cleaned this store out yesterday," this guy says.

He works here.

I look at Lwandle, he scratches his head. The guy notices what is going on and walks away quickly.

I'm going to slap this child!

Naledi

“Get the juice!” I snap
He rushes to the fridges.
We pay and leave.
I wonder how much they blew on alcohol.
To be young and foolish!
They eat their breakfast without me, fried eggs smell worse than a burning tyre.
I hear footsteps on the passage. They stop at my door.
Sigh.
I don't understand why they aren't knocking.
I open the door and all four of them are standing there.
“We think we should go now,”-Mqhe
Okay.
“All our stuff is still in Modder River, including the car,”-Zamani.
Oh by the way.....and I've just had the brightest idea.
“Okay, make sure you clean up that house before you leave,” I say.
They stand still.
“I'm not driving you, you will walk,” -me
Shock on their faces! It's called punishment you monkeys!
“They will open the gate for you. I don't have to call them because you are walking anyway. Mqhe, good luck on your new job. All of you, drive safe,” I say and close the door.
I expect to hear footsteps but nothing.
They're still standing at my door.
Two minutes later they are still at my door.
What now?
I open.
Silence.
I raise my eyebrows.
“We don't have money for petrol,” -Lwandle
Someone please shoot me now!!!

“Have you ever wondered how it is that Tlabane fell and hit his head, alone, in a single cell?”

Huh?

What is this now? Who is this?

I call the number back but it says it doesn't exist.

This is strange. This SMS just arrived now and already the phone is off?

And what do they mean “have I ever wondered”.

Eight months later?

Mnx!

Let me go to sleep.

Twenty-Two

Two weeks and it's still as painful as it was when I left that house with my bags that morning.

Tonight is Xolie's gala dinner. They didn't even call to ask if I was coming.

I'm sure right now they are busy preparing for the event while I'm here at home hoping my father will make time for me.

He looks great, better than I've ever seen him. It's like he's young again. He laughs and jokes more. He's just.....happy.

I saw him briefly in the morning before he left for some community meeting. He used to go to the Tribal Authority offices almost every week day but now he doesn't appear to be that committed anymore.

He left Mme-Mankwe here. I thought they'd go together, they're always together.

This house too, it feels more homely with her around.

She officially moved in after my dad paid lobola.

Imagine, a 60-year-old paying lobola for a 52-year old. Personally I don't think they should have a big wedding. But step-mother here is all about glam and glitter so I foresee a Top Billing situation.

Even now, she's in high heels. She's in the house and I don't think she's going somewhere but she's all dressed up.

I feel like there's tension between us today. Like she has something that she wants to say or ask but she's waiting for the right moment.

"Lerato tells me she came to visit you?"

Here we go. I was comfortable with the silence.

"Yes, she wasn't really visiting me, she was stopping by," me.

She nods and looks away.

Whew!

"I've noticed you've lost weight, shouldn't you be gaining?" she asks.

That's it, that's what she's been meaning to ask.

Yes, I have lost weight in the past two weeks. I'm depressed. I'm trying to deal with the status of my relationship while also trying to keep this person inside me alive. It's a battle and it's taken a toll on me.

That's why I decided to come home, for some peace.

Naledi

"How is your your husband?" she asks.

That's the last thing I want to talk about.

"He's fine. When is nstate coming back?"

She's still looking at me with that look I can't describe.

"Later. Why? Is there something you want to talk to him about?" she asks.

What's with the questions?

"Yes,"

"You can talk to me," she says.

I don't know her that well, but she seems like a wise woman. And if she's going to be my mother I might as well start warming up to her now.

"It's about Chawe, we broke up, the wedding is not happening anymore,"

Just saying it breaks my heart.

"Oh," she says.

Is that all she's going to say?

"Why?" she asks.

Does it matter?

"Just a few things we couldn't agree on,"-me

She points me to the lounge, I hope she's not about to go "bible study" on me.

She has a cup of tea. Typical middle-aged black woman, they are all addicted to tea and church and stokvels.

"Naledi, you don't end a relationship because you don't agree on things. Sometimes your father and I don't agree on things but we talk and get through it," she says.

Great, I'm in therapy now.

"It's more complicated than that. And besides, I didn't end the relationship, we both ended it,"

That's the truth really.

"Oh, so you sat and decided you were over?"

"No, I told him I wanted out and he said I could go,"

She raises her eyebrows.

"So you ended things. You initiated the break up," she says.

Everything is always my fault isn't it?

"I had my reasons,"

She sips her tea.

She can't expect me to tell her those reasons.

"Trust me I've seen it all, you can tell me," she says.

She's the first person I'm talking to about this. Tsietsi was not interested in the details, he's just glad I'm single again and back in his life.

"It's about his past, he has a dark past,"

She looks surprised.

"We all know that family has a dark past, everybody knows who their father was," she says.

"No, that is not the past I'm talking about. This has nothing to do with his father. It's what he did," I say.

Why am I telling this woman all this? What if she tells someone?

She places the cup on the table and folds her arms.

"It's fine, you don't have to tell me the details of what he did....."

Thank you!

"But, you say he has a dark past?" she asks.

Sigh.

"Yes,"

"I see. How is his future? does it look dark too?" she asks.

What kind of question is this?

"I don't know....?"-me

She looks into my eyes, for longer than my comfort.

"I'm thinking, you are in his present, and probably will be in his future seeing as you are carrying his child. So, I don't understand why you are worried about his past,"

Is she listening to herself?

"The thing Mme is I can't be with a man who is capable of doing the things he did,"

"Do you know why he did the things he did?"

Whose side is she on?

"No but....."

"Did you ask him why he did those things?"

"I didn't have to....."

"But you agreed to marry this man? You got pregnant with his child but you can't sit him down and ask him to explain his past to you? Did he give you an impression that he was perfect?"

I keep quiet.

"Are you perfect?"

What?

"No, but I'm not a crimi..."

She raises one hand and says: "No, I said I don't want to know the details. Whatever that man did in his past has nothing to do with you. Before you found out whatever he did, you believed he was a good man and that's because that's what he had been to you, a good man. You walked out of this house with him, defying your father....."

She knows about that?

"And now, you find out one thing about him and you don't love him anymore?"

"I do love him...."

"So why are you here?"

She's starting to sound a bit.....aggressive. I won't have that.

"This is my home and I'm here to talk to my father,"

She looks calmer now.

"How long has it been since you broke up?" she asks.

Urgh.

"Two weeks,"

"Two weeks and you are sure it's over? You're ready to tell your father?"

I nod.

She shakes her head.

Why is she being so judgmental?

"If that was the case you wouldn't be losing weight and looking like the world just collapsed on you,"

I'd look well kept but I had to bribe a cop to get some kids out of jail.

And this woman is starting to get on my nerves.

"Here is what is going to happen...you're not going to tell your father about this," she says.

"What?"

Who does she think she is?

"No no no listen to me, you're a grown woman and I'm not going to allow you to stress your father with your problems. You are the one that decided you wanted to be someone's wife. Your father is getting old, you know that. Right now he believes he has done his job as a father and he's starting to live his life for himself. For 37 years he has lived for the four of you, he gave up everything to raise all of you. He even left home to live in Mafikeng so he could keep you away from all the family squabbles...."

This has nothing to do with her really...

"If you tell him this he's going to start worrying again. He thinks you are off to start your own family with the people you chose. And now you are back here, pregnant and carrying problems? No!"

"He's my father....."

"Listen here, I've been with your father for 17 years! I've watched him be a mother and father to you. He has been giving and all you have been doing is taking. You run to him when you have problems but you all chose to live in different provinces, far away from him. Who do you think has been taking care of him? I'm the one that holds his hand at every doctor's appointment. He may be your father but he is my man and now is his turn to be happy. He's done his work, now it's time for you to grow up and solve your own problems. This is my house now, I have enough of my problems, you go to your house and deal with yours....."

She's going to regret this! My dad will never allow her to come between us.

"You will never come between me and my father,"

"That's not what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to talk to you woman to woman. Your father will not live forever and I want his life to be great from now on. Naledi do you understand how good a man your father is? Do you know how lucky you are to have him? Can't you put his happiness before yours? Just once...?" she stops.

But...I do care about my father. She's making it sound like we abandoned him. I'm not angry anymore, I'm hurt.

She notices.

"Okay look, I'm just saying that your father is.....he's just started to feel young again. He's doing stuff that shocks even me sometimes. I'm seeing a side of him I never saw when he had to worry about whether you were okay in Cuba, whether Tshedi was happy in her marriage and if Omphi was not being wild and if Lesedi was so detached from everyone because he did something wrong as a parent....."

This is news to me. I always thought ntate was fine and happy.

"I remember when you went to your matric dance and he was worried thinking the boy you were going with was going to take advantage of you, that's why he made you wear an ugly dress..."

Huh?

"I know it was an unfair thing to do but it came from a good place,"

Wow. She's been here all along.

“You may not know this, but I raised you. I wasn't here physically but I was always here. Your father came to me for everything. When it got tough for him as a man trying to raise four women, he always came to me. Sometimes I wanted to give up because I couldn't stand not being able to love him openly but he begged me every time and I ended up staying. He used to say:”Let me finish my job as a father first, let me make sure they can stand on their own first”.

“You have no idea what your father has had to do to protect the four of you, that is why you have no business judging that man,” she says.

She's the only one talking now, I'm just listening.

“He adores your husband, he thinks you're in good hands and he will be broken of he finds out what is happening. I'm not saying go back to him, if you think that you have reason to leave, do so, but that reason must not be his past because you are not in his past,”

She wouldn't be talking like this if she knew he threw me out of his house. Yes, I was horrible to him before he did but he shouldn't have treated me like that.

There's a car outside. My dad is back.

She stands up and goes to open the door for him.

A baby kiss! Oh Lord!

“Guess what I got you,” he says with his hands behind his back.

She blushes.

“This!” he says.

It's Nandos.

Someone shoot me now!

“Hi,” he says to me. He's not even looking at me.

Sigh.

At least one of us is happy.

We need to talk. I will contact you when you are back in Kimberley. Enjoy home.

Who is this now?

It's the same phone number that sent me an SMS last Sunday. It still says the number doesn't exist when I call it.

Qhawe would have known what to do, but I won't call him, I don't need him.

I'm flipping through channels because I have no life. The pensioners went out to dinner, they didn't even ask me if I wanted to come along.

I feel like I'm crowding their space.

Maybe step-mother was right, maybe I should leave my father alone to be happy.

My problems are mine and not his.

I'm dreading that long drive back to Kimberley tomorrow. I'm going to be honest and say I miss the life of being flown and being driven and being taken care of. Every time the baby kicks I think about him, about how we were supposed to be sharing these moments with him. I imagine him smiling and being excited when he feels the kick.

Sometimes I think that maybe he is as miserable as I am about all this. That he misses our life as much as I do but then I remember he is Qhawe Zulu and he is

not fat and pregnant, he can move on whenever he wants.

The thought of that girl from the restaurant that Hlomu said was his ex crosses my mind. What if he goes back to her? What if he forgets about me?

The thing is I'm throwing tantrums about his past but my heart is betraying me big time.

I love him.

Oh, and that.....?

It's the gala dinner, they're on TV.

That's Nkosana and Zandile, followed by Hlomu and Mqhele. They're all dressed up and looking elegant.

I hadn't even started shopping for an outfit. I was going to go to Lloyd and it would have had to be done on short notice because my body size keeps changing.

There is Mpande. He's with a girl? She looks nothing like Thando, she's a complete opposite of her. She's still dark but she doesn't look like a model at all. She looks out of place too, like she's not used to these types of things.

Oh, it's Sbani. He's with a girl too. I assume then that he's over that girl with a strange surname because he wouldn't dare bring her there.

There are other people going in that I don't know. It looks like the place is packed.

It's him, he's all alone. He rushes through the red carpet and ignores everyone around him. He looks different, he even has a beard.

"What's going on there?"

It's my dad, he's standing behind me. I wonder how long he's been here.

"Nothing, just a gala dinner hosted by Xolie," I say.

I don't want to turn around and look at him because I'm trying to hold back tears.

"Oh, you didn't want to go?" he asks.

I could say that.

"No I haven't been feeling well," I say.

"So where is Qhawe?"

By the way, he can pronounce the cliques too.

"He's there too,"

Can this conversation end already?

"I'm surprised he hasn't arrived here this weekend, he's always following you around. Maybe he still thinks I'm trying to marry you off,"

Really nate?

I shake my head.

"When I saw that car parked on the second street from here earlier I thought it was him, I almost walked over there to tell him to come in but I changed my mind. I realised it wasn't him when I found the car still parked when I came back later," he says.

He's getting old for sure.

"What kind of car was it?"

"I don't know, big car, dark windows. I came down here to get water...." he says and walks away.

I doubt Qhawe would be sending dark cars to park here. He's too busy doing his own things to be stalking me.

I'm going to leave early tomorrow, there's no point of me being here

anyway.

There's a car outside. At this time?

"I forgot to tell you Lerato was coming," my dad shouts from the kitchen.

Oh hell no! I'm really not in the mood.

"Hello hello," she shouts when she enters.

How am I going to get out of this one?

"You're still up? Great! I was worried I'd miss you. How are you feeling? How's the little one treating you?"

And so the questions begin.

"I'm good, how are you?"-me

She's already moved on to something else.

"Oh good, it's still on. I thought you'd be there too," she says sitting next to me.

She's talking about the gala dinner.

I should have changed the channel the moment she walked in.

"No, I didn't feel like going, I wanted to be with my dad,"

She looks at me briefly.

"Trust me they don't want to be with us at all. I have to come here if I want to see my mom and it's not like she pays attention to me at all when I visit..."

Yeah I know what she's talking about...

"Is that Sbani? Wow! She's with the Ngqulunga girl? My word!"

Huh?

"I'm not sure what she looks like...."

"I'm sure that's her. She's Gwaza's daughter. Bheki didn't have girls, just three boys. She was about five when he died. Dudula and his wife raised her....."

"Stop right there, and you know all this how?"

She stops talking and looks a little nervous.

"Actually.....they are well known people, for the political violence in the 90s and all that. So, how are your patients...?"

That was a quick change of subject. But then, her eyes are on the TV, it doesn't look like she wants to hear about my patients at all.

The Sbani and Thabitha story is one of forbidden love. Everyone has tried to keep them apart, both families have tried but they just won't budge. And so, we're just going to sit and watch.

Thabitha has moved to the Eastern Cape. It's fun now, but the problem will be when they decide to get married or get each other pregnant.

"Zandile is so beautiful...." she says.

I think she didn't mean to say that out loud.

Her interest in this family is a little disturbing.

"How long was she in jail again?" she asks.

I want to roll my eyes.

"17 years, her kids didn't even know she was in jail, they thought she left them," me

Why am I still talking to her? The plan was to complain about being tired and get out of here as soon as I can.

"They didn't tell them?" she asks.

Sigh.

"They wanted to protect them. It's a good thing Hlomu showed up and raised

them. This other time she told me about Lwandle being kidnapped when he was 7-years-old, on the day of her traditional wedding, and how since then they have had security around them all the time..."

She looks like she is thinking very hard...or counting in her head.

"How old is Lwandle now?" she asks.

"I'm not sure, over 20 I think,"

She's still counting in her head.

"Whoah!" she says.

I look at her, I'm lost.

"And then?"

She looks freaked out.

She smiles briefly.

"Nothing. Oh there is Sambulo and Xolie, they are my favourite couple," she says.

Someone shoot me now please!!

The camera goes to Qhawe, he's fiddling with his phone. He really looks different.

"There's your boo, you must tell him to shave that beard," she says smiling.

I'm not smiling.

I nod.

I hope she doesn't start asking me personal questions.

"It's late, I'm going to sleep," I say and leave her sitting there.

She doesn't care, her eyes are glued to the TV screen.

There's something wrong with this car. I don't know what it is but it kept making squirky sounds the whole trip.

I must have it checked out before it kills me.

Lerato left very early in the morning, I don't know why.

My father and his girlfriend, oh, it's wife now went to church early too, they didn't even wait for me to wake up.

All I got was a call from my dad telling me to drive safe when I was already halfway to Kimberley.

I don't know if I should still be driving in my condition. I'm six months far but this baby is big.

I should have gone past the shops to get supper but it's not like I can eat and keep anything in my stomach anyway.

I'm just happy I got here before dark.

"Mam, here is your mail," the security stops me just before I drive in.

It's a big white envelope written "Dr Monstho".

No address, nothing. Just "Dr Montsho".

"Who is it from?" I ask.

I know it's a dumb question because really, how would he know?

He shrugs.

"It was brought by a delivery company, they didn't ask me to sign for it," he says.

Oh well.

I leave it on the kitchen counter and go upstairs to shower.

I left my bedroom window open? Strange, I never do that.

The wardrobe is open, it must have been blown open by the wind coming through the window.

I've learned not to look at my phone all the time. It doesn't ring often lately, and when it does, sometimes I ignore it.

I have a missed call and new SMS.

"Now that you are back, I have a parcel waiting for you..."

It's that same number. I call it, and again it says it doesn't exist.

"I'm going to go to the police now"- I reply.

Nothing.

Five minutes later....

The response is five laughing faces and **"trust me, that's the last thing you want to do"**

It says it doesn't exist again.

Now I'm really scared. Who could this be?

Is Qhawe playing mind games with me? Is it him? But why would he do this? It's nothing like him.

I have to see what's in that envelope, now.

It's not heavy so it can't be bomb that will blow up in my face.

My hands are shaking as I open it.

What is this?

Pictures?

It's the captain, with Qhawe.

Yes I know they know each other, he told me the captain and his team were investigating truck hijackings in this area.

There's another one. It's Tlhabane's dead body, in a police cell. His face doesn't look like he died immediately though. It looks like there was a struggle of some sort. I know this face, I've confirmed too many deaths and read too many post-mortems in my career.

If he had suffered blunt force trauma there'd be blood coming out of his nose or ears and there'd be blood on the floor where he's lying.

There's no blood in this picture, just him lying on the floor, dead.

But what does this mean and why would he send me a picture of Qhawe and the captain?

There's no note, nothing, just this picture.

But the thing is, Qhawe was with me on the night Tlhabane died and we weren't even dating then.

So why would he kill him?

Besides, it was during that time where I left him hanging in Joburg and he left me hanging after finding Tsietsi in my house.

This person is playing games with me. I will not entertain this shit.

Tlhabane tried to rape me. He would have killed me if the captain hadn't showed up.

He's been dead for almost a year and yes, I'm over it. I don't care.

I throw the envelope in the dustbin.

Now I can take that shower.

It's so good to live alone because you can just walk around naked, not that

Qhawe wanted me to be in clothes anyway.

The tap is leaking.

And this?

It's a note, next to the tap.

R1 million. You probably have far more than that in your account.

You can have the rest of what I have after you pay.

What the heck is going on here? I'm being blackmailed now? For what?

And why would this person think I have R1 million?

I must call Tsietsi!

No, I can't.

I'll call the police, but what am I going to say to them?

I rush back to the kitchen and take that envelope out of the bin.

There must be something more to this than what I see if this person is demanding this much money from me. For what though?

"I'm going to the police" - I SMS

I hope there'll be a response.

Nothing.

I won't sleep tonight. I just know that.

Now I'm really scared of being in this house.

I have to do this.

"Is there a way I can sleep in the Modder River house? Just for tonight?" - I SMS him.

He probably won't respond.

He doesn't.

I'm going to Tsietsi's. I'll make up some story when I get there.

I didn't do any work today, I couldn't.

This could be a mistake but I don't think I have a choice here.

"I'm here to see Mpulo"

That's what was on his name badge if I'm not mistaken.

"Mpulo? He's on night shift. Is there something I can help you with?" he asks.

Nope, I'm not talking to anyone but him.

"It's fine, I'll wait for him here, it's almost 6pm anyway,"

He shrugs and points me to the bench with his eyes.

It's the same bench I sat on when I had to bail out those little brats.

It's busier than it was that night. People are coming in and out and there are cops all over.

I never thought I'd sit in a police station, like this, in my life.

I'm not even sure what I'm going to say to this guy when I see him. I mean, he is a corrupt cop so obviously I can't trust him. But seeing that we have a history of being corrupt together I trust that he'll be nice enough to help me.

I'm not sure what I want more, to have this person who is blackmailing me caught or to find out what really happened to Tlhabane and why I'm being blackmailed for it.

One thing I know for sure is that he did not die there in that cell. There is no way that it would look that clean, and he would look that clean if he had fell and

hit his head there.

I'm trying to block this off but now that I know Qhawe's history, a little voice inside me keeps telling me to go there. But then again? He had no reason to murder him, he didn't even know him. He wasn't even here.

And then there was that call from the captain about a constable who wanted to talk. But also, he gave me a good explanation for it.

I'm so scared and confused. Maybe I should leave Kimberley, maybe it's time now. What if something happens to me? I'm so far from home.

"You're looking for me?"

He's standing right in front of me. I was so lost in thought I didn't see him there.

"Yes," I say standing up.

"Can we talk somewhere?"-me

He looks at me from head to toe, I see a bit of fear in his eyes too.

I follow him to that same office.

I sit, he doesn't sit. He looks nervous, he's all over the place.

"I don't know if you can help, but I have a few questions...actually information that I need,"-me

He's still standing.

I'll keep talking.

"I knew Captain Phalane," I say

His eyes are wide. Why is he shocked?

He sits.

"I had a problem with an ex-boyfriend. Phalane helped me get a protection order against him and when he violated it and broke into my house, Phalane arrested him," I say.

He nods.

"He came here, to this police station, but he died on that same night..."

His eyes are all over the place. Now I'm beginning to think this was a bad idea.

"I never got to find out how he died, I was just told that he fell and hit his head, alone in a cell..."

He's looking me in the eye as I speak.

"I just want something, a post-mortem or something. Or maybe someone who was here that night to tell me what exactly happened. He was a police officer so I'm sure it should be easy to find out,"-me

I don't think this guy is going to help me. He has the same look he had on his face that night. I have a feeling he's about to ask me for money.

"I remember that case, I was not on the shift but when I came in the next morning they were still cleaning up the cell. Yes, he fell and hit his head. He was screaming and banging his on the walls all night. I think he lost his mind that night because he knew it was over for him. He was going to lose his job and trust me no cop wants to end up in jail with the criminals he arrested. If we hadn't taken his gun he was going to shoot himself. So he banged his head on walls instead and somewhere there he fell, hit the cement bench and landed on the floor. The only mistake we made was not to take pictures immediately. We didn't want his family to have to see blood all over, he was still our colleague after all. The only pictures available are those we took after we placed him down on the floor, on a clean spot," he says.

Naledi

As I listen to him speak it feels like a huge load is being lifted off my shoulders. Suddenly I feel very light.

“Oh, I understand. So it ended there and then?” I ask.

He nods.

“Yes, we wrote a report and that was it. His colleagues in Rustenburg said he had been acting strange anyway so they weren't surprised to hear the story,” he says.

I guess then this is where the chapter ends.

The person who is trying to blackmail me is playing games, whoever it is. I have the full story now and it's a happy story considering the circumstances. The best part is, it's all recorded on my phone. I wasn't going to take risks.

It's time to leave.

“Thank you very much, I just needed closure. Thank you for your time,” I say and leave.

He doesn't walk me out

Twenty-Three

There hasn't been another SMS, or a parcel delivered. It's been two weeks. I take it me threatening to go to the cops scared whoever that person was.

Qhawe never replied to my SMS.

I'm alone in this, I've made peace with that.

He kicks more and I feel him moving now and again.

He's the only thing that keeps me going really.

I've given up on waiting for that call, it's never going to come.

At some point I'm going to have to tell my dad before he starts asking about the next step.

I see Qhawe in the media sometimes. I hear him on radio talking about business.

The boys never returned the keys to the Modder River house so I concluded that was the end of the chapter. I don't know what is happening with the house, maybe it's been sold.

I'm going for another ultra-sound scan today, a 3D scan, alone.

I'm over six months pregnant and I'm all alone. The man who did this to me won't even call to check how his child is doing.

I know he doesn't care about me but I expected him to at least be supportive.

Yes, I did say I would call him when the baby is born but I didn't expect him to abandon me just like this.

I've been catching a lift with Tsietsi to work because my car broke down. I don't know what the problem is, they said something about the engine.

I plan to go shopping for a new one when Tshedi comes over next week.

She's been annoying me about working things out with Qhawe but why should I make the first move? He's the one that kicked me out of his house like I was thrash.

I'm not going to beg a man to come back to me, I'm not going to be that kind of woman. If he loved me he would swallow his pride and work things out between us.

Great, the cab is here.

"I'm going to Homestead Medicare," I say

He nods and drives.

I know the gynae is going to give me a lecture about my eating when I get

there. I'm losing weight. I'm slimmer than I've ever been in my life and so this belly is just popping out.

The truth is I can't stomach anything. I'm six months far but I'm still getting morning sickness.

It's full, but I had an appointment so I expect to be inside at exactly 12pm or I'll start throwing tantrums here, they must know that.

Some women here are with their partners looking all lovey-dovey. Me and a few others, we are all alone.

I have changed so much that people don't recognise me anymore. To think I was the talk of the town, a celebrity not so long ago. Now I'm just another pregnant woman who has to brace herself for single-motherhood.

I'm picked out from the crowd, good, we won't be having problems here today.

"Dr Montsho," he says.

I told him to call me Naledi but no, he insists.

"Dr Sooliman,"

"Have you been watching your diet? Because it doesn't look like it. You of all people should know how important it is. Have you been taking your vitamins...?"

Here we go.

"I've been doing all that," I snap.

Yes, my hormones are a little evil.

He looks at me briefly.

"You know the drill, the bed is right there," he says.

My feet are swollen.

He starts with checking my blood pressure, it's fine, I was worried.

I'm lying on my back and I can't see my feet, that's how big this belly is now.

"That's one big head," he says smiling.

I laugh. Not that I found that funny but I'm laughing because I'm happy, I'm seeing my baby's face.

"Is he eating his fingers?"-me

"Yes because you don't feed him enough," he says.

I'll take that as a joke.

He is so big!

"He looks like a real human being,"-me

"He is a real human being," he says.

And then I start crying.

I don't know if it's happy tears or a realisation that I'm going to have a lot to explain to this child when he comes to this world.

"Yes I know, it's always an emotional moment. Most of the time the fathers start crying before the mothers," he says.

Sigh. Fathers.

I know he wants to ask, but I won't give him the platform.

"Is he fine? Is everything perfect?" I ask.

He nods.

I wish he would open his eyes so I can see how big they are, but I don't think they do that while still in the stomach.

He switches it off. I still want to look at him more.

"On your next appointment we're going to have to discuss the birth details, are you planning on natural birth?" he asks.

I thought he was the one who should advise me on that.

I haven't even thought about where I'm going to give birth and who is going to be there with me. The best thing would be to go to Rustenburg or to Tshedi's house. She has experience, she can help me.

I'm not going to pin my hopes on step-mother, she doesn't have time for me. It's in situations like this where I wish I had my mother in my life.

There's an envelope on my floor, the same one as the last time.
Someone was here.

"Dr Montsho" is written on it.

It's the same envelope. I thought this person was gone.

What is this now?

There's a note.

"Meet me at BP garage behind the mall. I have something to give you since you think I'm bluffing," -it reads.

How does this person keep getting inside my house?

The envelope was slipped under the door this time, but how?

I'm not going anywhere!

I'm going to call Mpulo.

But no, I never told him about the blackmailing.

An SMS.

"8pm"

That's all it says.

I have two hours to think about this.

This person wants money from me, and he thinks I have it, so he probably won't kill me before he gets it.

I know this is me being stupid but I sure must put an end to this.

"No, 7pm, my house," I reply.

But since when am I this brave? It must be the hormones.

"Calling the cops would be a bad idea, I will go down with people you love, trust me, this doesn't have to end badly, I'm on my way," he replies.

I'm putting my life and my baby's life in danger by doing this. Right now I really wish I had Qhawe stalking me. He would have solved this problem a long time ago. But now he is past that, he moved on a long time ago, I'm on my own.

I'll leave the sliding door open in case I have to run out screaming.

What am I doing? What if this person is a hardened criminal?

I'm pregnant, I won't be able to fight back if he tries to hurt me.

There's a knock. My heart starts pounding.

I'm not opening that door!

He knocks again.

Security didn't call, how did he come in?

It's 7pm.

"Tshedi, if I don't call you by 8pm, call the cops,"- sent.

My phone rings immediately.

"Ledi!"

“Do what I said,” I say and hang up.
I know Tshedi, she's going to call the cops now.
I switch my phone off and open the door.
Relax Naledi.....

He rushes in and closes the door very quick.
He pushes me to the lounge and looks around the house frantically.
“There's nobody else here right?” he asks.

I nod.

I'm so scared I can't stop myself from shaking.

“Good, now sit down,” he says.

I think I've seen him before. I don't remember where or when but I've seen this face before.

He goes to the sliding door and closes it.

I'm in shit!

He sits across me.

He looks as nervous as I am.

I think he's younger than me, mid-20s or so.

“I'm not going to hurt you, so don't try anything because if I have to defend myself you will end up getting hurt. I'm not into hurting pregnant women,” he says.

Something about him makes him look desperate.

“I promised Phalane that I would destroy everything. He kept all this because he wanted to protect himself if shit came back to him. Now that he's gone, I can't do the things we used to do, which means I can't make any more money...”

Phalane? What does he have to do with this?

“This is not who I am, trust me on that. But I'm desperate and you are the only person that can help me. I'll drop the amount to half-a-million, I know that is nothing to you. I'll take half and give half to Phalane's wife...”

This guy is talking non-stop and I have no idea what he's talking about.

And now I remember where I know him from, he was one of the cops that were here that night Tlabane was arrested.

“Here,” he says taking something out of his pocket.

It's a memory stick.

I'm still confused.

“I have copies, so don't go to the police after this, I can still bring him down,” he says.

“Bring who down?” I ask.

“Watch what's in there and you'll know. I want the money by the end of the day tomorrow or I'm sending this to the Hawks, and the media. I wouldn't want such a powerful man to end up in a jail cell,” he says.

Powerful man? Qhawe?

He stops talking. He looks like he's just seen a.....

He tries to stand up....

“Sit down,” a voice says behind me.

He sits, very slowly.

Huh?

I turn around.

What the heck?

“Naledi, stand up, go outside, there's a car parked downstairs, get on the back seat and don't look at the driver. He will drive you, don't ask him where he's taking you....” he says, slowly.

It doesn't sound like a request, it's a non-negotiable instruction. But he's calm, too calm. He's not looking at me as he speaks, just him.

It's Sambulo.

How did he get here? When?

“What is going on?” I ask.

He looks at me this time and raises his eyebrows.

I look at this blackmailer guy.

“Naledi, step outside. Now,” Sambulo says, still too calm.

But it sounds more like a threat.

He's not that soft-looking Sambulo who is always cracking slow-jokes.

The look on his face says I shouldn't argue.

I grab my hand bag and laptop bag and run out the door. I still have the memory stick and phone in my hand.

It's that Jeep.

How the heck did Sambulo know what is happening?

I jump in and sit quietly like I was instructed to.

We drive off.

I'm lost and confused and.....

What has my life become?

The windows are dark. I can't see outside and I have no idea where I'm being taken.

No wait.

What if they know what this is about and they don't trust me to keep quiet?

The powerful man the guy was talking about must be Qhawe, I'm sure it's him.

What if they're taking me somewhere to kill me or something?

Qhawe doesn't care about this baby anymore. He doesn't care about me either.

No! I have to get out of here!

“Stop the car! Stop!” I scream.

He doesn't turn around or respond, he keeps driving.

When I scream louder a glass separating the front and back part of the car goes up.

I know he can't hear me now.

I'm getting out of here!

The doors won't open! The windows don't break!

What am I going to do?

My phone, it's still off.

I switch it on to call Tshedi but there's no signal. How is that possible?

It's 7.40pm.

In 20 minutes Tshedi will call the police. They will find Sambulo and that guy but how are they going to find me?

The car stops. I have no idea where.

I hear a sound of doors unlocking.

I grab my two bags and rush out.

It's the Modder River house, we're parked right at the door, it's already open.

“Go inside,” the person says.

I try to run away but he pulls me by the arm.

"Go inside mam," he says.

He looks and sounds scary.

He's already touched me. I know the rules, drivers and security don't touch the wives. It doesn't matter what we do, they don't put their hands on us. They also don't make conversation.

I take it the "precious wives" rules don't apply here, the man grabbed my arm. I'm in shit.

I slowly walk inside the house.

It's empty but the lights are all on.

I have never been this terrified in my life.

He stands outside, at the door.

I sit on the couch with both my handbag and laptop bag held to my chest.

I still have the memory stick in my hand.

If I'm going to get killed for this, I might as well find out what it is.

I already know his evil ways anyway so this won't make a difference.

How could Qhawe do this? How could he murder Tlabane?

He had no right!

To think I trusted him!

I remember what he said when I told him.

"mmmmmm" that's what he said, like it wasn't a big deal.

I'm going to have a child with a serial killer! That's what he is!

There is one file here.

It's titled "phone records".

I recognise one phone number.

Oh, it's Phalane's

It's SMSs mostly.

They're from different people.

Most are highlighted in red, they're from the same number, it's saved as 'courier'.

This must be the important ones because they are the only ones highlighted.

"chief, it's on the way,"-one from Phalane reads.

"Good, don't be late,"-response

There's another one about two hours later.

"We made it, it will be up by the morning,"-Phalane.

"Make sure,"- response

Another one, sent at 3am.

"It's gone,"

"Good,"-response from whoever courier is.

I check the date. They're from that night Tlabane was at my house, the night he died.

Let me just.....

I read the number under the name "courier".

It looks familiar.

No! I know this number by head!

No!

It's 8pm

"Tshedi! Don't call the cops! I'm fine! Don't call the cops!" I scream.

“I’ve already called them. They’re on their way to your house. What’s going on Ledi?”

Oh My God!!!

Sambulo’s phone is off!

I can’t believe this!

“Mam,” he’s running in shouting.

He almost touches me but stops when I raise my eyes.

“I’ll get you water,” he says and goes to the kitchen.

I’m sitting butt-flat on the floor. It can’t be, no, it can’t be true! It’s impossible.

I drink up the glass of water.

My phone rings, it’s Tshedi.

“Ledi, Where are you? What’s going on? I tried to call ntate...”

“No! Don’t call ntate! Nothing is going on. I found the window at my house broken when I came back so I thought there was someone there. I’m at the Modder River house now, don’t worry I’m fine,” I say, trying really hard to sound calm and less confused.

“You don’t sound fine though, should I call Tsietsi?”

Sigh.

“No, I’m fine, thanks for the cop thing, I’ll see you at the weekend,” I say and hang up.

There are more SMSs, even calls, they speak in codes but I understand what they are saying clearly.

There has to be a mistake here, this is impossible. It doesn’t even make sense.

I have to go!

“I need a blanket, and pain killers in that bathroom,” I say pointing to the door at the far end of the passage.

He walks there.

I stand up, grab the car keys from the kitchen counter and run outside.

How do I start this car?

There!

He comes out of the house running.

I’m gone!

“Naledi sit down please, you’re making noise,”

No! No! No! I want answers!

“Where is he? I want to speak to him! Where is he?”

“He’s coming down, he’s getting dressed. What’s going on? It’s 2am for crying out loud!”

I hear footsteps, he’s coming down.

I need him to tell me I’m imagining things! That this is all a mistake and I’m totally wrong! Yes...that’s what he’s going to tell me!

“What’s going on? Naledi? Are you okay? How did you get here?” he asks.

He’s the one who should be giving me answers.

“Ntate...” I say.

They both look at me.

Where do I start?

Naledi

"Did you know Tlabane?"

He gulps.

No!

And now his face is blank.

"What do you mean?" he asks.

He's not about to lie to me, not when I'm looking him in the eye! I'm his weakness, I'm my mother's image, he knows he can't win.

The look on his face is giving everything away.

"Can we please sit down?" Mme.

"No, don't touch me!" I scream.

I look at my dad.

He drops his eyes and walks to the lounge.

I need to sit. I feel like throwing up! I'm sweating!

"Here, drink some water,"-Mme

She already has a glass in her hand.

I don't want the bloody water!

She has her hand on my back and is pushing me to the lounge.

"Sit here," she says.

I think I'm losing my mind right now.

We are all sitting in silence.

I drink up the water.

"Ntate, what did you do?" I ask.

Silence.

I don't understand. Not my father, not the greatest man I know, the kindest man and best father in the world, not him! Never!

Oh, I forgot.

"Mme, could you excuse us for a few minutes, I need to talk to my father in private," I say.

She doesn't move, instead she sits back and folds her arms.

She doesn't understand does she? This is not something she wants to hear about the man she loves.

I look at her.

"She knows Naledi,"-ntate

What?

I frown.

"She knows everything," he says.

What does he mean everything?

"Did you do it ntate? Am I not imagining things here? Please tell me it's all lies, please tell me I've got it all wrong,"

Silence.

Wow. My father is a killer too. It's not just the father of my child, my father too.

Everything I thought I knew and believed was a lie. My whole life has been a lie. I thought I knew who I am, how I was raised and who raised me, but no, I'm a clueless little girl, that's what I am.

How am I going to look at him, at all of them, after this?

He should have lied to me. He should have said I'm imagining things instead of putting me through this.

"How did you find out?"-Ntate.

Does it matter?

"Who else knows ntate?" I ask.

"Nobody," he says.

I wish he would deny it, say this all a joke and he is the man that I thought he was.

"You weren't supposed to find out, it's a long story...."

"I've been blackmailed ntate, someone has been blackmailing me for weeks. He was at my house last night demanding....."

"What?"

That's not important now.

"Who? Who did that? Did he hurt you?"

Urg! Please man!

"Why? You want to kill him too?" I scream.

"Naledi!"-mme

She must shut up! This has nothing to do with her! She's not part of this family!

"Don't speak to your father like that," she says.

I've had it up to here with this woman!

"Mankwe, you're not my mother, you can't tell me what to do. Was this your idea? Did you put him up to this?" I scream.

I can't control myself.

"Naledi this is my wife and you're not going to talk to her like that. She didn't put me up to anything. First of all you hid what this boy was doing to you from me for years. I had to find out through people,"

I'm going to find out who those people are and I'm going to deal with them.

"I had to do something. If I hadn't done something he would have killed you, and I wasn't going to lose my daughter like that. I had to do something," he says.

He speaks with such....he sounds sincere, like he needs me to understand and take his side.

But how am I going to take his side when he took somebody's life? Just like that.

"Ntate, he was somebody's father, he had a family, he had two kids,"-me

He shakes his head.

"You are somebody's child. You are my child. He should have thought about his children before he did what he did to mine. I was thinking about my child when I decided to do what I did," he says.

There is no justification for killing someone. I don't care how bad they are, there is no justification at all.

"What happened? How did it all happen? Who did it? Was it Phalane?"-me

He shakes his head again.

"You don't have to know the details. You don't have to tell your sisters too. I'm sorry you found out, you weren't meant to. And just so you know, I don't regret doing what I did, I'd do anything to protect what's important to me, anything," he says and stands up.

This is the worst thing that's ever happened to me!

"Now, go get some sleep," he says and leaves us sitting there. Mme stands up and follows him.

Where do I go from here?

It's 1pm? I can't believe it, I slept until 1pm?

My phone is off, battery is dead.

Shit! Reality. I'm at home.

Shit! Reality. My dad is a killer.

Shit! Reality. I'm pregnant and I'm on my own.

I stole a car last night from a scary looking man.

I left two men in my house last night and I'm sure one of them is dead.

I shouldn't have woken up, I should have slept for two more days.

But I'm hungry, the person inside me is hungry, he's kicking me.

"I'm sorry baby," I whisper and brush my belly.

I slept in my clothes, the same clothes I was wearing when I left my house for work yesterday morning.

Oh crap! Work! I should be at work!

I'll call and explain later, after I come up with a lie.

I put my phone on the charger and go downstairs.

Oh, the love-birds are in the dining room, looking in love and united in murdering people.

They stop talking when they see me walking down the stairs.

They're having lunch.

"There's food on the stove," mme

How could I say no?

"Thanks," I say

There's grilled meat and mash and gravy. It smells nice. Strange, I hate red meat lately.

I dish up and go to sit with them at the table. They look shocked, like they didn't expect me to.

"Ntate aren't you going to the Tribal Council today?" I ask.

They still look shocked.

"No, I'm taking a day off," he says.

I see.

"Thanks for the food," I say

I haven't looked them in the eye since I sat here, both of them. I can't.

It's just the sound of cutlery, nothing else, no speaking and no looking at each other.

We're going to be that kind of family from now on. I just know it.

"Tshedi has been calling, I told her you're fine and you'll call her back when you're awake, she's worried," -mme

Tshedi called her?

"That boy too, your friend. He said he'll tell your bosses you aren't feeling well,"-ntate

I can't wait to go on maternity leave.

I don't have much to say to them so I'm just going to continue eating, in silence.

I have to figure out what to do, where to go from here.

Saying I'm lost would be an understatement, I'm at my lowest.

"I think you should stay for a few days Naledi, just until you're fine. You need to rest a bit, and eat," she says with a smile.

Sigh.

Sometimes I'm not sure if it's hormones or the stress I'm dealing with, I just can't be nice to anyone lately.

"No I have to go back to work," I say.

My dad keeps glancing at me, I think there's something he wants to say but he's trying to find a way to raise it. I hope he doesn't want to talk about the Tlabane issue because I'm doone with it, it's done and dusted. I want to forget about it.

"I won't tell anyone ntate," I say.

He looks me in the eye.

"I know," he says.

What's that supposed to mean? How does he know? I'm the only person with a conscience here, he must know that.

"Let's take a walk," he says.

He's talking to me? I thought he was talking to his wife.

I want to say no.

He stands up.

Mme is looking at me like she's begging.

Let me just do it, maybe it will make me feel better. I doubt it though.

I'm full now, my baby is sleeping.

I follow him out the door.

This car. Sigh. I wonder what happened to that driver. I wonder what happened to Sambulo.

He puts his arm around mine. He used to do this a lot when we took walks together.

When I was little he'd hold my hand every time we walked together.

I looked up to him, he was my hero, my idea of a perfect human being.

"This car, is it your husband's?" he asks.

The honest truth is I don't know the story of this car.

"Yes I think, but someone else drives it, a driver. He uses it when he's in Kimberley, sometimes,"

He looks at me briefly.

"It's the same car that was parked here the other weekend when you were here. The one I told you about, two streets away," he says.

What?

"No, it can't be..."

"It is, I remember the number-plate," he says.

I don't believe he'd memorise a car number-plate just like that.

"What's going on? Between you and your husband, what's going on?"

That's one subject I'd rather not discuss.

"We're having some problems," -me

He nods.

This nodding of his!

"Is there still going to be a wedding?"

Urgh!

"No, we're over,"

Please don't ask me why! Please!

"And you left? You have problems, and just like that you end things?"

Why can't anyone take my side? Just for once.

"But nate why do you assume I'm the one that left?"

He looks into my eyes briefly again.

"Because Naledi that man loves you. He'd do anything for you," he says.

And he knows that how?

Not so long ago he was beating him up, and now he thinks he knows him?

"It's complicated nate, he's still my baby's father but it's complicated,"

I know he's not taking what I'm saying seriously, I can just see it in his eyes. He still thinks I'm at fault here.

"That's what your mother said when I asked her why she was leaving me, with four children. She said it was complicated," he says.

This is the first time I hear him mention my mother. The first time ever. And I don't know this face that I'm seeing now, I've never seen it before.

"It's been two months nate, I haven't seen or spoken to him in two months. He doesn't even call to check how his baby is doing. I'm carrying his child but he doesn't even care...."

He shakes his head.

"No man would do that, no man would go to sleep not knowing if the woman carrying his child is fine or not, especially not that man," he says.

Is he just going to dismiss everything I say? I'm the one experiencing this, I'm the one doing this alone.

"Naledi, I think that maybe this is my fault. Maybe I was so obsessed with being the perfect father that I raised you to believe you are too important to look beyond yourself. It's not always going to be about you, life doesn't work like that. If you accept someone into your life, and give them full access to you and say you love them, you have to see beyond yourself where they are concerned...."

What does he mean?

"I waited for your mother for 13 years. When I met Mankwe, I was still waiting for her. It was too long, I waited for too long but I only realised that later. Even if your mother walked through the door today, now, I wouldn't care,"

"That man has been waiting for you for two months. You're the one that walked out, I know that because I know you. I raised you like that. I raised you to be firm and to stand up for what you believe in, but that's not the only way to approach life. Sometimes your beliefs are not going to be the other person's beliefs and you're going to have to accept that. It can't be your way or the highway, not when you're hurting another person's feelings while at it..."

We've been walking for a while now, I don't know where we're going.

And what does he mean I hurt Qhawe's feelings?

"I know that your anger at him has nothing to do with him not checking on the baby, it has everything to do with him not checking on you, not coming to beg you to come back to him like you expected him to...."

I frown.

He raises one had.

"No no no, don't deny it. You were used to him following you around and doing things for you and treating you like you're glass. The man was willing to

buy a game-farm just so he could have you, and my blessing,” he says.

That was then, things are different now...

“Would you be with someone you know is capable of doing bad things to other people nstate? Just like that?” I ask.

He bites his top lip.

“Have you never done bad things to other people?”-him.

“You know now that I've done bad things, a bad thing. But do you love me any less now? Am I no longer your father?” he asks.

I'd be lying if I said I loved him less now.

His phone rings.

“We have to go back, I have to go to the Tribal Council, someone stole someone's goats...” he says after hanging up.

Working with crazy people is far better than his job.

I'm going to take a nap after I eat again.

I have missed calls and voice messages from Tsietsi and Tshedi and Lesedi and Omphi.

I have none from Qhawe.

Twenty-Four

I knock once and push the door open.

There are new curtains.

Who the fuck is this???

She's sitting with her feet on the couch, remote control in her hand, a chocolate cake on a plate on the coffee table.

What the fuck?

"Hi," she says.

I'm going to pop this baby! Right here! Right now!

Calm down Naledi...whooooosaaaaaaaa...No! It's not happening!

"You have five minutes! Five minutes to pack your shit and get out of here!" I say.

What's that look on her face? Didn't she hear me?

He's rushing down the stairs.

He sees me, stops, and starts walking again, slowly.

I look at this girl, she's still sitting.

"I'm counting," I say looking at her.

She frowns.

"And you are?" she asks with such attitude.

Why do people like testing me?

"Naledi," he says.

The kick.

Calm down Ledi....breathe in...out....

"Qhawe who is this?" she asks.

She knows exactly who I am!

He stands still, hands in pockets.

"My wife," he says.

She looks confused.

"I said five minutes, pack your shit and leave, now,"-me

I'm about to do something I'll regret later. This girl must not push me, she must not!

Qhawe looks at her, and then at me, and then at her again.

"She's a bit crazy, trust me, she'll rough you up," he says to the girl.

She stands up slowly, grabs her car keys on the kitchen counter and walks out.

Yes bitch, walk.....

We stand still for seconds, looking into each other's eyes. He's standing at the bottom of the stairs, I'm standing in the kitchen.

"Hi," he says.

I don't speak.

"Long time no see," he says.

I'm trying to calm myself down, that's why I'm quiet.

I didn't come here to fight. I'm not sure what I came to do.

He takes two steps forward and stops, I stand still.

I'm trying to read his face, it's not hard but it's not soft either, I don't know what he's thinking.

It feels like that day a long time ago, the day I stood here and screamed at him for leaving me in Kimberley.

He starts walking again, I don't move but I can feel him getting heavy around me, the scent and the power, it's consuming.

He's standing in front of me. My eyes are on his chest but I can feel his eyes over my head. I can't look up, I don't want to look up.

"You found your way back home?" he asks.

I keep quiet.

My body is about to betray me, I'm fighting the urge to move my hands and touch him.

I can hear him breathing over my head.

"It's not what you think," he says.

I'm thinking a lot of things right now.

"What is it?" I ask.

He places his forehead over my head. He's too close, I can hear his heart-beat.

"I love you," he says.

He hasn't answered me. I didn't expect to find what I found, but I still want answers.

"What is it Chawe?"

I'm getting angry all over again.

"She's Nkosana's P.A.," -him

He's going to have to come up with something better than this.

"You've moved on?" I ask.

I'd really like this conversation to stay on this level, this peaceful level.

"I haven't moved at all, not an inch," he says.

I shouldn't have come here unannounced.

And if it's Nkosana's PA, she would know who I am.

"We were waiting for a car to take us to the airport, I'm going to Durban, business," he says.

It didn't look like that.

I want to scream and throw a tantrum, but a part of me tells me I have no right. We are broken up after all.

He grabs something on top of the counter, it's an envelope.

He gives it to me.

He doesn't say anything but I know he wants me to open it.

I do.

It's two flight tickets, one for a Mr Qhawe Zulu and another for a Miss Nandi Zulu.

Naledi

Oh.

"When are you leaving?"-me

"I'm not," he says, his forehead still on the top of my head.

I'd have expected her to know who I am.

"You look different," he says.

Is he reading my mind now?

He's right, I look nothing like the Naledi I was four months ago. I look different, horribly different.

Now what?

I don't know what to say to him.

"Did the scan go well yesterday?" he asks.

Huh?

How did he know?

"You don't have to fix that car, we'll sell it," he says.

I want to sit.

"I need to sit,"-me

I try to move but he wraps his arms around me and pulls me close to him, it's a bit of a struggle, my belly is big.

The kick. He feels it. He pushes me off and puts his hands on my shoulders.

"He just kicked you," I say.

The look on his face, I don't understand it.

He pulls me to his chest and holds me tight again.

The kick, again.

He holds me tighter.

"I'm hungry,"-me

Have we even started talking about why I'm here? I don't think so.

"Come on, sit, I'll make you food," he says pulling me by hand to the couch.

I look around the house. It feels like it's been years since I sat here.

I don't want to think about that day I left, I was sure I was never coming back.

And here I am now, back.

He makes a quick sandwich with rye bread, avocado and white cheese I think. I forgot he was a bourgeois.

"I need peanut butter,"

He frowns.

"And tomato sauce,"

He frowns, and then smiles. I never forgot his smile.

"You're going to eat peanut butter with avocado? And tomato sauce?"

I nod.

He laughs.

I missed this laugh.

It's strange how he seems so....comfortable, like I never left, like I've been here with him the whole time. But I feel the space, the time we spent apart, I feel it, I'm struggling to connect.

"Please bring me Coke as well,"

He frowns and shakes his head.

"No, you're drinking water," he says.

He brings a sealed bottle, with peanut butter.

"I don't have tomato sauce, I don't even eat tomato sauce and the last time I

checked you didn't either," he says.

"That was before you got me pregnant,"

I don't know where that came from.

His phone rings.

"Bafo," he says.

It's one of his brothers.

"I'm not going anymore, get Mqoqi to go," he says and hangs up.

I hope it wasn't an important business trip.

I'm still puzzled though as to why Nkosana's P.A would go with him, where is his P.A?

I know they're not sleeping together or anything but it's still confusing.

He sits back and watches me eat.

I'm enjoying the food, it's been long since I did.

I catch him staring. I stare back thinking he'll look away, he doesn't. There's a slight smile on his face.

I need to talk to him, I know he'll know what to do. I have to tell him everything, but first I have to ask.

"Chawe, what happened to Sambulo? Is he okay?"

The expression on his face doesn't change.

"We'll talk in the morning," he says.

His eyes are still on me.

Maybe we shouldn't talk tonight, maybe he's right.

He hasn't asked why I came back, it's like he expected me to.

Oh I almost forgot.

"I left your car in North West,"

He frown-smiles.

"I know, it's still parked on your father's yard,"

I borrowed Mme's car, that Jeep gives me creeps.

I have another question.

"What happened to the driver?"

"He's fired,"

What?

I stop chewing.

"He knows the rules, he broke them, he's gone," he says.

Just like that? But I'm the one who tricked him, and I tried to run that's why he grabbed my arm.

I don't think I'll get proper answers to this one so I might as well leave it here.

I'm done eating. He takes the plate and goes to the kitchen. He comes back with an apple and places it in front of me.

I'm gonna eat it to.

But...

"How did Sambulo....?"

"We'll talk tomorrow," he says before I can finish asking.

He's serious about this talking tomorrow thing.

Okay.

I'm the first to stand up.

He walks very close behind me up the stairs. I have to hold on to the rails because I can see the floor under them and it's making me dizzy.

This bedroom, the last morning I spent here I'd rather not think about.
I don't have clothes. I didn't bring any bags. It's like dejavu.

"I'll run you a bath..."

"No I can't use the bath, once I sit in it it's difficult to get up. I'll use the shower,"

He seems lost for a second.

I close the bathroom door behind me.

Everything is still the same, exactly like I left it.

I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, it doesn't look like me at all, even my face is "thin".

The door opens. His face peeps in.

"We're getting married in four months," he says.

What?

"Yes, so that the next time you want to dump me, you have to go to court to do it," he says and shuts the door.

I'm laughing. It feels weird.

And I don't remember saying we were back together.

He's still asleep? This is new.

It's 7am.

I want to pee. I want to throw up. I want to eat.

I untangle myself from him, I don't know when he put his arm around me.

I try to sneak out of bed very slowly and carefully, but I feel a hand on my arm just as I'm about push off the duvet.

"I have to pee," I say.

His eyes are half-open.

"Are you going to come back?"

Really?

"Yes I just need to pee,"

He lets go.

It's weird that he's still in bed, normally by this time he's up and showered and ready for the day.

Urgh...reality.

I'm not even thinking about work, or my house or the shit that I find myself in. I just want to get through the day, I want to get through the next three months and I'll be fine, I'll figure it all out then.

"Are you okay?" he asks from outside the bedroom.

He's up.

He must be patient, I'm still throwing up.

"I'm fine don't worry,"

"I'll get you water," he says.

I'm in the bathroom, there are six taps here.

"I'm done, I'll shower now,"

I don't want to come out smelling like puke, and besides, it's hot.

He doesn't respond, maybe he's already left.

I'm nervous about the "talk" that we're supposed to have anytime from now.

The thing is, when I woke up from my nap yesterday afternoon and decided there and then to get in the car and drive here, I had no plan. I had no idea what I was coming here to say but I knew it was something I should have done a long time ago.

I expected him to be complicated. I expected to be thrown out or to be asked what I'm doing here.

But when I saw that girl I just lost it, I felt like something inside me was boiling. And Qhawe, he's been too cool, it's like I never left.

When we were in bed last night I shifted far from him, I left the space because really I had no clue what I had to do.

He shifted closer, and the baby kicked, I think it can feel his presence.

I feel lighter too, like everything that has happened in the past two months is in the past.

I feel like things are going to be okay, I don't know how.

But then again, why did that guy send me his picture? What's the connection? I think I'm going to have to tell him about my father. I know he won't judge him because he's done the same thing before.

The two men I love with all my heart versus my morals, is there even competition between the two?

I'm wearing his robe, I have no clothes in this house. He packed everything, even my hair-clip when he kicked me out.

I wonder if he feels bad at all about that, I'm over it.

He's made breakfast?

Oh, it's oats, urgh.

"HI," he says kissing me on the lips.

He's weird.

I take the bowl and go outside. The lake, I missed it. We sat right here the first time we had breakfast together, the first time I woke his penis from sleep.

I feel him behind me. He hugs me from behind.

Qhawe though, how can he be like this? Like nothing happened?

He kisses the back of my head.

"Did you talk to your father?" he asks.

I guess we are having that talk now.

I'm poking the food with the spoon.

But why is he asking me about my father? Does he know what's in that memory stick?

"Where is that memory stick? You have to destroy it, I've destroyed everything else," he says.

What???

Oh shit!

"You know?" I ask, horror written all over my face

"That's not important, what's important is..."

I raise my hand.

"Chawe! No, you knew about this? You knew all along? What about that cop? Did you know he was tormenting me?"

Don't raise your voice Naledi.....count to three...breathe.....

"Calm down..."

No!

“That cop was harmless, he was just desperate for money....”

Why is he taking this so lightly?

“I sent you an SMS one night wanting to go to the Modder River house because I was scared, you never responded,”

He waves his hand like that was nothing important.

“I knew you’d be fine,” he says.

What is wrong with this guy? Does he even understand what I’ve been going through?

“I could tell you everything, but I’m scared you might just walk out that door again,” he says.

“Naledi, there are things you don’t have to know, like this one. You didn’t have to go digging. A daughter is not supposed to know things like this about her father. He did what he had to do, it was his duty....”

The fuck?

“How did you find out?”

Silence.

He must start talking.

“Why do you always want to know everything?”

I thought he knew me by now.

“Because I like to know exactly where I am and who I’m dealing with,”-me

He shakes his head.

“You father did a clumsy job, I had to clean up,” he says.

He’s not making sense.

“Did my father personally.....?”

He raises one hand.

“No, Phalane was in charge of everything. I made calls that morning after you told me the guy had fell and hit his head and died. I knew there was something there so I made calls. The job was a disaster so....”

He calls killing “the job”?

“So I got people to clean up so it doesn’t come back to your father,” he says.

Where the hell am I?

“But Phalane kept things, and worse shared them with that little cop boy, and now he thinks he can blackmail my wife?” he says shaking his head.

I haven’t touched the oats, suddenly I don’t feel like eating.

“Eat,” he says.

I forgot he’s a mind-reader too, not just a shady character.

“He’s kicking, I think he’s hungry,” I say.

That was not planned, it just came out of my mouth.

His face lights up.

“Really, he can communicate with you?” he asks. The fascination on his face!

“He’s inside me Chawe, when I’m hungry, it means he’s hungry. When I’m stressed or sad he feels it, everything I go through, he goes through it with me,”

His face changes, there’s no longer fascination, there’s concern now.

“Are you serious? That’s what happens?” he asks.

I nod.

Okay maybe I’m exaggerating a bit but....

Now, back to the subject at hand.

“What did you do to him? The cop, what did you do?”

He rubs his hands together.

“Don’t worry about that,” he says.

He’s not going to tell me.

I could ask more questions, like ask if he’s been watching my every move this whole time and if he had people following me, but I already know the answers.

I should have figured it out very early that he was never going to let me go just like that, not with his child.

“I went to see this cop the other day after I received an envelope with a picture of you and Phalane. I went to ask what really happened, he gave me a story that made a lot of sense, that’s why I almost went crazy when I found out.....”

He frowns.

“What cop?”

He doesn’t know about that?

“The cop who arrested Lwandle and the boys that time.....”

“What??” he asks.

He’s shocked. He didn’t know about that???

Oh shit! I promised not to tell.

“What happened? Who arrested Lwandle and why?”

Sigh. What did I just do?

He raises his eyebrows, that means “speak”.

“When the boys were in Kimberley, they threw a party at the Modder River house, made noise all night and got arrested. The police commissioner lives in the same neighbourhood, his daughter was at the party too, drinking,”

Geez, he really didn’t know, his face says so.

“So how did they get out of it?”

Now the worst part.

“I was called by the police saying my sons were in jail and they were not going to release them until after they go to court that Monday. I rushed there, spoke to the cop and ended up giving him R1 500 for the whole thing to go away,”

I’m looking in his eyes as I say this.

But I don’t see much reaction. He’s just looking at me, quietly, like he’s sees me differently all of a sudden.

“What time was it when they woke you up,” he asks.

“I don’t remember, about 3am,”

He nods.

“By the time I’m done with these boys.....”

“Chawe no, I already punished them. I made them walk from my house to Modder River,”-me.

Silence.

And then we both break into laughter.

Why did we break up again?

He switches to serious very quickly.

“Don’t do that again. Bribing cops, don’t do it,” he says.

I’m lost, if I had not done it his son would have stayed in jail all weekend.

There’s still so much we need to iron out.

“Why didn’t you come Chawe? Why didn’t you try to get me back?”

I asked myself this question every day.

He stares at me for a while.

"I couldn't Naledi, not this time. Not when you left me for the reason you left me for. It was tough but you had to come back because you want to, not because I made you," he says.

I hear him.

He takes a deep breath.

"I'm here, this is me, nothing more and nothing less. Yes, I've done things, bad things and I knew they'd complicate my life in future but I can't change anything about my past, so you might as well take me as I am,"

To be honest I don't even care about his past anymore.

"I hear you. I'm not going to ask you to give me details of what you did to whom, but I need you to assure me that it's over, for our future and for this child I'm carrying. I don't want to have to worry about you coming home alive, or going to jail or...."

He raises one hand.

"I'm done with that life, I promise,"

I believe him.

"Chawe, does ntate know? Does he know that you know and that you were part of it,"-me

He shakes his head.

"No, and don't tell him I know. It will make him lose his power over me, I don't want that," he says.

Sometimes I think he cares more about my family than I do.

"It was very early in our relationship Chawe, this Tlabane thing, it happened before we even started officially dating, did you care that much already?"

He doesn't answer me. I think the answer is yes.

Good. I have it in my handbag.

"Do you have your laptop? I left mine in the Jeep,"

He stands up and goes inside the house.

"Here," he says when he comes back.

He looks tense, I think he thinks I want to show him what's in that memory stick.

But I have a different memory stick with me.

"Come sit next to me," I say.

He pulls a chair quickly.

His eyes go wide when the video starts playing.

"He's eating his fingers," I say.

He looks....

"Is this him?" he asks.

"Yes, it's your boy. He's big,"

He pulls the laptop close to his face. I can't see the screen now.

I see a smile...

"He has your big forehead," he says.

What?

"I don't have a big forehead,"

He looks at me briefly and smiles.

"Yes you do," he says.

I smile and shake my head.

I missed him.

He's replaying the video over and over again.

"We can go do another scan if you want, so that you can see him,"

He's not paying any attention to me.

"I'm going upstairs,"

He doesn't respond.

Okay.

The dilemma of having no clothes to wear is upon me again. I also have to figure out how I'm going to take Mme's car back and get his Jeep here. He doesn't care at all about that problem though.

I wonder if he's told everyone that I'm back here and what they think. How am I even going to reconnect with them? They must all be mad at me for judging them and leaving just like that. I don't think they'll ever trust me again.

I promised loyalty but when the first test came I ran like a child.

Now I understand why loyalty is important here.

He walks in just as I search his wardrobe for something that will fit me. It's a fruitless exercise. He has the laptop under his arm.

"I'm trying to get something to wear," I say.

He puts the laptop on the single couch and comes to me.

I think he's going to hug me but no, he unties the robe.

He brushes my tummy. The kick.

"He's greeting you," I say.

He smiles.

"Hello Mageba," he says.

The kick again.

His hands are warm, his touch is tender.

My body is getting warm.

He kisses my belly. I think he's going to get up but he goes down and kisses my thighs.

I feel tingles all over my body.

He's up in my face.

"I missed you," he says.

I missed him too.

I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him.

He knows what I want, but I think he's scared.

"It's okay, but you have to be really gentle now," I whisper in his ear.

"I will be," he says.

He drops the robe on the floor.

I pull him to the bed.

I'm not sure I know how we're going to do this.

I'm thinking he's going to try to lie on top of me and just do this because I have no time for foreplay, I need him, now.

But he pushes my legs apart and goes down.

I'm going to come, here, now!

I pull him up when it gets too much. His eyes are smaller, he wants to come in but he doesn't know how to do it.

"You have to come in from the back," I say lying on my side.

He gets it.

I hear the first "mmmmmmmm"

"It's nice, where did you buy it from?"

"I don't know, some shop at The Glen, they looked at me funny," he says.

I'm not surprised. And no, it's not nice, it makes me look like a granny.

We're taking the car back tomorrow.

I expected him to say he was going to send someone to deliver it and come back with the Jeep but no, he insisted that we take it back ourselves.

Problem is, even at home I have no clothes, so we're going to have to stop somewhere so I can shop.

I haven't left the house at all today.

My dad doesn't know I'm here, he thinks I went to Tshedi.

Oh...I didn't know we were going to have visitors.

There's a car parking outside.

I look at him, he doesn't say anything but goes to open the door.

Xolie walks in. Whoah! That stomach is big!

"Girl what are you wearing? Is that a maternity dress? Where on earth did you get this? Nobody wears these anymore," she says.

When she's loud, she's really loud!

"Hi," I say reservedly.

It's been a long time.

"HI," she says hugging me.

Sambulo is right behind her.

Our eyes meet, he smiles briefly and goes to talk to his brother.

"Are you okay? You look different but at least you're not ballooning like me," she says.

I laugh. I feel a little awkward, like I owe them an explanation or something.

"I'm hungry," she says going to the fridge.

Now I get it, Qhawe went to that store and asked for a dress for a pregnant woman, and they gave him this.

I didn't know they were coming so I didn't prepare anything.

There's another car.

"Chawe,"

"Mmmmm," he says.

I signal for him to come to me.

"I'm going to order pizza and have it delivered,"

He nods.

He doesn't think this is a crisis at all. I'm panicking.

The smile is the first thing I see. And then a frown.

"That...is horrible," she says.

Sigh. I'll never hear the end of it.

"I told her the same thing,"-Xolie.

"People, please leave my wife alone, that dress looks good on her,"-Qhawe.

He'd better defend me because this is his fault.

"Are you okay?" Hlomu asks hugging me.

I think I owe her an apology more than all of them.

“MaMontsho,”-Mqhele.

He sees nothing wrong with my dress, I know that.

I smile and greet him back. He goes to join his brothers.

Now I’m expecting Gugu and Zandile.

I wasn’t prepared for this.

I thought Qhawe would let me settle in before inviting them over, but a part of me believes they don’t have to be invited, they just show up.

The last time I saw all of them was the night of Zandile’s wedding. Well, except Sambulo who just showed up at my house that night.

I still don’t know what he did with that cop.

“I’ve ordered pizza, it will be here shortly,”-me

They don’t seem to mind.

“How’s the baby? Do you have ultrasound pictures yet?”-Hlomu

It’s like nothing happened, like I never judged them and left.

I nod.

The guys are talking and laughing.

It’s a familiar scene. I realise now how much I missed this, this family thing.

In comes Gugu and Nqoba.

We’re going to have a full house.

She looks at me from head to toe.

“Jesus fix this,” she says.

It’s about the dress again.

“I know, I don’t have any clothes,”

Silence. They’re all looking at me.

“It’s a nice dress,”-Mqhele

Really?

“In fact, you should all start dressing like this, MaMontsho is a good example,”-Mqhele.

Hlomu shakes her head.

“This is why I want to donate him to charity sometimes,” she says.

We all laugh.

“How are the big eyes doing,” Gugu asks poking my tummy.

I’m going to show them the video, just for fun.

“Come and see him,”

They follow me up the stairs.

The guys are left downstairs laughing about something.

Hlomu is the last to come in and close the bedroom door.

“Two months? Damn girl give me a high five,”Gugu says.

Huh?

“You Naledi, are a legend,”-Xolie

What? I’m confused.

“Gugu held the record of two weeks. I never really left but I did kick him out of the house,”-Xolie.

This is not what I expected at all.

“I left for eight hours, only eight hours,”-Hlomu

They’re treating this as some kind of a joke, better than being put in a court.

“Seriously though, are you guys okay now?”-Xolie

Just when I thought we weren't going to go there.

"The kids were asking about you,"-Gugu

Now I don't know what to say.

They're all looking at me expecting answers.

"I'm fine, we're fine now. It's just that I panicked and...I was shocked and scared, that's all," I say.

I hope they understand. I'm sure they had the same reaction when they found out who their husbands are.

A part of me believes they don't know anything about the Tlabane thing, which would be great because I don't want it to ever come out.

"You wanted to show us the pictures?"-Hlomu

Yes, that.

"It's a 3D scan," I say turning the laptop to them.

Qhawe left the memory stick still connected.

"Ncoooooh,"-Hlomu

She's the career mommy after all.

"He looks exactly like Shlangu on his 3D scan,"-Gugu

"Now I'm broody,"-Gugu

I'm just sitting here watching them be excited. It feels so strange that just two days ago I thought they had moved on from me.

It's also weird that they are not angry or treating me like an outcast. Maybe I should have talked to them before I decided to leave. I should have asked how they are able to live, to be this family with everything they know.

I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss them.

"Where is Zandile,"-me

I expected her to be here by now.

"We don't know. They're all over the country. They came back for the gala dinner and left again,"-Hlomu

Huh?

They can see that I'm lost.

"After the wedding in Mbuba, Nkosana called all of us and announced that he was officially retiring, from that day. They've been on honeymoon since then. Sometimes we can't even reach them on their phones,"-Xolie

I'm smiling. I think it was nice of Nkosana to do that. They need all the time there is in this world to catch up.

"Zandile sent pictures of them riding quad bikes somewhere yesterday,"-Gugu

I'm imagining Nkosana on a quad-bike, it's a funny picture. Zandile must be making him do all kinds of things.

I haven't seen the younger brothers either.

"Oh, by the way, we have a new member. She's from Mbuba,"-Hlomu

New member?

"New member?"-me

"Yes, Mpande has had one girlfriend for two months, she's promising. They met at Zandile's traditional wedding. Her father is one of our drivers,"

Oh, that's....unexpected.

It must be that girl I saw him on TV with then, the one he took to the gala dinner.

There's a knock.

“The food is here,” he says from outside.

We’re having pizza for dinner.

Gugu and Xolie stand up and leave.

Hlomu stays put.

I stand up.

She sits still.

“Do you remember that talk we had?” she asks.

My stomach turns. She’s not as sweet as she was when she walked in this house.

“Yes,” I say.

I know what talk she’s referring to and I know where she’s going with this.

“What did you say to me? What did you promise me?”

Oh shit!

“I’m back Hlomu, I came back,”

“I know that, but I trusted you Naledi. I let you in because I trusted you wouldn’t do what you did,”

She’s going to force me to explain myself, I don’t even know what my explanation is.

“But Hlomu you have to understand that I didn’t expect...when you said I should be loyal I didn’t know you meant turning a blind eye to things,”

She stops me.

“What things? You don’t know anything about things around here. You read a letter and that’s it, just a few paragraphs of a letter, you don’t even know the person that wrote it but you made up your mind there and then,”

“Naledi, you cannot be at a place where you can wake up tomorrow morning and say you want an aeroplane, and get it before the end of the day. You cannot be at a place like that and think it doesn’t have its perks. I’m sorry that you found out the way you did but what was in that letter has nothing to do with you, and you had no right to judge anyone,”

I keep hearing these words.

There’s a knock. The door opens.

“Is everything okay?”-Qhawe

“Yes, everything is fine,”-me

We both stand up and follow each other out.

“I’m glad we talked,”-Hlomu

The look on her face says this chapter is closed.

I don’t want to get on her bad side, ever.

“You know, my dad doesn’t know we were broken up,”

“I know, he would have come here to shoot me if you had told him,” he says.

I laugh. He’ll always be scared of him.

“He likes you,” I say.

He smile-frowns.

“I’m serious Mme told me that he likes you, he thinks I’m in good hands that’s why he’s abandoned me to live his own life. You should see them together, they’re like teenagers,”

He laughs.

“You sound like you’re jealous of your step-mother,”

Yeah right. This is not the first time he accuses me of this. I think a part of me is jealous of her, she’s totally kicked me out of the “daddy’s princess” position.

“No, I think I like her now. We can leave later in the day tomorrow, we can even sleep over if we want,”-me

It’s Wednesday tomorrow, I think my dad will be busy in the morning, his Wednesdays are usually spent in meetings about community projects.

And by the way.....

“Aren’t you supposed to be at work tomorrow?” I ask.

“I’m on rank duty, except for a few association meetings I have to attend this month, I don’t have many commitments. I can just make a call, the drivers know what to do,”

I see.

He kisses the top of my head.

I missed lying in his arms like this, although it’s a bit difficult now with the load I’m carrying.

“I have to decide where I’m going to give birth,”

He’s confused.

“Why? We use one hospital for all our children, except Niya who was born in a bedroom but...”

That story about Niya is amazing.

“I mean I have to decide whether I’m going to be at home in the North West or with Tshedi.....”

He stops me.

“Naledi, it’s not happening. My child will be born here, from hospital he will come here, to his home,”

He’s back!

“Okay,”-me

He’s surprised that I’m not arguing.

I’m gonna have to count on Hlomu to help me because I have no idea what’s in store for me.

“We can go for another 3D scan next week,” me

He brushes my back.

“Next week?” he asks.

I nod.

“You can tell Mqhele to send the truck,” I say.

He’s confused.

“I’m not going back Chawe,”

He turns my face to look at him, but doesn’t say anything.

He just looks into my eyes.

Twenty-Five

Whoah! Did I miss something?
“Zulu,” he says.
“Ntate,”-Qhawe.

They shake hands and follow each other to the lounge.
I look at Mme, she smiles.

This is great.

“Come,” she says.

Oh wow! She's cooked up a feast.

“I prepared lunch for mogwenyana, I hope he like likes it. Does he like meat? I made pap too...”

She's anxious.

“It's fine mme, he'll love it. He'll love that you cooked for him even more,”

She smiles.

I almost bought food on the way, I had no idea she'd do this. I expected to find them cuddling somewhere in this house like they always do.

They're talking in the lounge, I wonder what they're talking about.

“Naledi, give them something to drink. There's a jug of juice in the fridge, with ice. Put everything on a tray, and a clean cloth next to it so they can wipe their hands,”

Ghosh.....

Are we really going to be like this? Qhawe drinks water, from a bottle.

“They're fine mme, Chawe had something to drink when...”

She side-eyes me.

“This is mogwenyana, you must treat him with care. Here, take this to the lounge,” she says shoving the tray to me.

Sigh.

They stop talking and look at me when I walk in.

Since when are they buddies?

We came here to get the car and leave, why does Qhawe look so comfortable on that couch now?

Mme is behind me.

“Please come to the dining room so we can have lunch,” she says. I don't know if this is respect or submission I hear in her tone.

But then...her man in a chief, maybe this is how she's supposed to address

him.

They stand up immediately and go to settle at the table.

"Come," Mme says slapping my arm when I attempt to sit with them.

I suppose I have to go up and down with trays and table cloths like her now. Do people even care that I'm pregnant?

"Take this to them, give them the cloth to wipe their hands and come back," Sigh.

Qhawe looks a bit puzzled, I've never made him wash his hands before giving him food, I do use a tray though because I've heard all kinds of things about Zulu men and their obsession with being treated like kings.

She's dished up in plates. It looks great, colours and all.

She takes food to my father first, I figure I have to follow with Qhawe's tray.

My plate doesn't look as well presented as the men's, but who am I?

I sit next to Qhawe.

"Let's pray," ntate

Qhawe looks at me. We don't really pray before we eat in the Zulu house.

My dad says a short prayer.

We all say "amen" together.

"I'm glad we didn't open our eyes to find a strange man standing here," -ntate says, laughing.

Qhawe laughs reservedly, he looks embarrassed.

"Thank you Mme, the food is great,"-Qhawe.

He can be a gentleman sometimes. I never have to worry about him embarrassing me. No, on second thought, I do. He has his moments.

He's eating like this is the first time he's tasting food.

Mme keeps glancing at me.

I know after this she's going to accuse me of not cooking for the man, I just know it.

"Ntate, I've decided to move to Joburg,"

Qhawe looks at me and frowns briefly.

Errrrr.....am I wrong to announce that now?

"Really? Where are you going to stay now?"-ntate.

Oh shit! Now I get it.

"I could open a practice in Joburg...after I give birth,"

That was not the plan at all.

"We were thinking of having the wedding just after the baby is born, and having umembeso and umbondo in the next two months,"-Qhawe

What? I don't know anything about that!

My dad raises his eyebrows.

I also think that's a bit hectic, two months? We hadn't even talked about it.

"Do you have dates yet?"-ntate

"The last Saturday of this month,"-Qhawe

He has all this worked out I see.

I want to pinch him but I know he'll flinch and everyone will notice.

"You can have more meat," mme says.

He nods and gives me his plate.

Qhawe can eat until Jesus comes back I tell you!

I don't blame him though, the food is really nice.

They're all laughing when I come back from the kitchen with more food on his plate.

"Agape has been raving about the bike you sent her,"-ntate

What?

Qhawe smiles.

What bike?

"She says: 'it has a helmet mogolo'"

"We'll never hear the end of it,"-mme

Okay, I'm the only one who's lost here.

Qhawe bought Agape a bike? When? Where?

I want to ask but ntate doesn't know all the details about the two months break-up so I'm just gonna sit here and be lost.

Oh it was Agape's birthday last month, by the way. I didn't call her, I completely forgot about it. And Qhawe remembered? I'm embarrassed.

"How is the Namane Project going?"

Wrong question Qhawe! We're not leaving this house any time soon, not after you raise the Namane Project.

"I'm going there after this, I haven't been there in days,"-ntate

Urgh. It's just cows.

"I'd love to see it,"

Really Qhawe?

My dad's face lights up.

"Well then, you're coming with me,"-ntate.

I catch Mme looking at me and smiling.

I should be happy that they're getting along, but I'm a little uncomfortable instead because they are similar, very similar.

Forget that they helped each other kill my ex, they're also very firm and persistent and particular about what they want. They're both good men too.

Ntate is the first to stand up.

"I'll keep dessert, you'll have it when you come back,"-mme

She made dessert?

And just like that, we are dumped for cows.

She calls Dikeledi to clean up. I guess the submissive wife sherade is over.

I need to talk to her.

"See, I told you," she says smiling. She looks pleased with herself.

"Look at you now, back in your house and happy,"

Oh, that's what she's talking about?

I still can't get over that she knew all along what my father did and she's okay with it.

I'm not about to discuss my relationship though.

"Mme, I've been meaning to talk to you about something,"

She sits back and folds her arms.

Good. Because this could either build or destroy us.

"There are things I want to get past before I get married. I don't want to get into it with all these issues that I still have,"

I know she's not sure where I'm going with this.

"I don't want to do this without you knowing so....I'll understand if you have a problem with it, it's just that I think it has a lot to do with the way I am, the way I

handle things, including my relationships..."

I'm rambling aren't I?

She's still sitting quietly.

"When I first met Chawe, I told him about my mother,"

No reaction. Okay.

"He...he made some calls. He said he had found out something but he wasn't sure if it was enough. He also doesn't know if she's dead or alive,"

I don't know if the look on her face means she's happy or angry.

"So I'm thinking, instead of having this thing at the back of my mind all the time, I'm thinking about going through with it, meeting her and just...I don't know, I want closure. I want to get it over and done with before my child is born and before I get married..."

She clears her throat before she speaks.

"Did you tell your sisters?" she asks.

I'm gonna be honest.

"Yes, we all agreed that we want to see her, but we were going to tell ntate first. But, on the day we were going to tell him, he told us about you so we decided to leave it like that. I know ntate doesn't care about her anymore, he moved on a long time ago, but she's still our mother and we need answers more than anything. We don't need her to mother us, we just want to get answers and move on..."

I haven't discussed this with my sisters, or Qhawe, or ntate.

"You father never talks about your mother," she says.

She's right, he never does.

But I still don't know how she feels about this.

"Are you okay with that? Because if you're not....."

"No, it's fine. She's your mother,"

I don't want to bring complications here.

My phone.

He hasn't murdered me yet, I'm okay

Qhawe though!

"Now that you're new best friends....."-I reply.

"I miss you"-him

I miss him too.

"Don't stay too long there, we still have to drive a long way"

I doubt he's going to listen to what I say, my father will make him stay there for as long as he can.

In the meantime, let me email my resignation.

I decided, well, we decided to turn that other bedroom to a nursery, the one that was all white when I arrived.

I haven't started shopping yet but because we already know it's a boy it should be easy.

Qhawe is excited, too excited. He says he wants to be in the ward when the baby is delivered but I won't let that happen. Childbirth is not for men.

I've delivered babies is my career but the whole thing of a human coming out of

another human through a very small hole still freaks me out.

Speaking of freaking out, that's what Tsietsi did when he heard I had resigned and when I told him I was not coming back to Kimberley.

He went as far as calling me stupid.

A truck was sent, it came back with all my clothes but not the furniture and everything else that's in the house.

I haven't decided on whether to sell or keep it. In fact, I want to keep it, it's the only property I own, the only thing I have to my name.

I hadn't started accumulating things yet. The plan was to enjoy my success and spend money on whatever I want on my 20s, and then after I turned 30 I was going to start focusing on bigger things, on the future. But, I'm 30 now and I have a bank card with over a million in it and a baby worth millions inside me.

I've gained weight in the two weeks that I've been here. That's probably because I sit and eat and get driven to lunch and the spa and Qhawe treats me like an egg that could break anytime.

The only exercise I get is the sex that he wants all the time. When I joked about it the other day he said it was because he had to live without it for two months. I had no come back to that.

He pops in at least once during the day but always comes back late in the evening, because he's on rank duty.

The part I don't understand is why they have to be so hands-on. Why can't they just sit at home and hire people to do everything for them like all rich people?

Baby, there's a problem with our meeting venue, we're going to have to do it at the house

Huh?

What house?

I call him back.

"Baby,"

"Hi, house?"-me

"Yes, we'll be there at 2pm, it shouldn't take long, just a couple of hours," he says.

I'm lost...

"But, where in the house Chawe? Do we even have....?"

"It's just 15 of us, it's the taxi association. I didn't want to just rock up with people without telling you. I have to go now, love you..." he says and he's gone.

Taxi association people?

Maybe I must give them space, go somewhere and come back when they're gone. Or maybe just lock myself in the bedroom.

It's 11am now, I have to tidy up at least. And where are they going to sit? We don't have 15 chairs, we have eight.

Qhawe didn't sound like he expected me to do something, why am I worrying myself?

But, what are they going to eat?

I have to do something.

"Omphi, what do they eat?"

She calls.

"What does who eat?"

"The Zulu people, what must I cook for them?"

"You've been with those people for so many months and you still don't know what

they eat?"

Urg! What's wrong with her?

"I'm not talking about the family, I'm talking about other Zulu people, specifically taxi people,"-me

She's quiet for a while.

"Ledi, when are you giving birth? Your state of mind starting to be questionable..."

Really Omphi?

"Look, the taxi association people are coming here to hold their meeting, Chawe just called. I don't know what's expected of me but I think I should cook something, or prepare drinks or...."

"Do you have meat? Taxi rank people eat meat, red meat and chicken. No pork please they all go to the Shembe church, and no fish," she says.

I don't know about all of them going to the Shembe church but there is meat in this house.

"Yes, but I don't think it's enough for 15 people. I'll go to the shops,"

I should have figured this out myself, there was really no need to call Omphi.

"Take pictures and send them to me," she says laughing.

She can be silly sometimes. We have a lunch date on Friday. I need to talk to her about this mom thing.

The driver is not here, calling him will delay me even more. I have four hours to put this thing together. Whatever it is.

I haven't cooked in a while simply because certain types of food smell horrible. I even hate rice. Qhawe normally just brings dinner or pick me up after work to eat out.

I don't know when I'll figure this wife thing out, I'm failing dismally.

I'll buy ready-made salad. No, on second thought, I don't think they are the salad type.

"Hi, I need meat enough for 15 people, men," I say to the butcher guy.

"Men? Actually you need meat enough for 30 people. Which one?" he asks.

No pork.

"Errr lamb, chicken cut in quarters and steak,"

Yes, that will work. But, what are they going to eat it with.

"Are you having a braai?" he asks.

I wish I was having a braai.

"No, my husband's business partners are coming to my house for a meeting, it was short notice and..."

He has a smirk on his face. He's a young guy, probably doing this temporarily while he waits for his big break. He kind of reminds me of my Wimpy days, but that wasn't as hectic as Foodlovers Market, this place is always busy.

"My advice is rather buy the meat that is already marinated, that way you can just throw it in the oven and do other things,"

He has a point.

"Do you have pap that's already cooked?"

He laughs.

"No, but if you go to South Gate there's a shop behind the garage there that sells ready-to-eat steamed bread. It will work well with the meat and a couple of salads. Make some gravy too," he says.

He's nice.

I've noticed since I got pregnant that people, especially men are always willing to help me.

The price is rather alarming but hey, my days of counting change are over.

I'm going to need drinks too, and fruit which I'm pretty sure they won't eat.

Now, South Gate. I've only been here once. Why does it always have to be so full?

"Mama, how are you?" this guy says with a very wide smile on his face.

I greet him back. He's looking at me like he knows me, I don't know him.

"Have a great day," he says opening the door of a taxi parked next to me.

Oh. The taxi is written "Sbopho Transport" on the door. I should have been more nicer to him.

There's a queue. Sigh.

It's mostly men, they are rowdy and loud and...some are sitting in here with mountainous plates eating all kinds of unhealthy food. It feels like being in a taxi rank, deep inside Bree or Noord.

Everything is being done quick, the dishing, the eating the paying.....

"Suster, move with the queue, what do you want?" the guy behind the counter.

Manner of approach?

"Steamed bread please," I say

I am so out of place here.

"How many?" he asks

"For 15 people,"

He widens his eyes at me and goes to the back.

Do people here have to be so loud?

He comes back with six disposable food containers.

The man behind me is looking at me funny.

"Is she buying all the food?" he shouts.

I shake my head and pull out my bank card.

"Hhayi suster, we don't swipe here, this is not Steers,"

Sigh.

I don't think I have enough cash.

R180, I have R150.

"I have R150,"-me

He tosses one container aside, he's not even feeling sorry for me.

"How much do you need?" someone asks behind me.

It's that taxi driver I saw earlier.

"R30," the counter guy says before I can answer.

He gives him the R30.

"Thank you,"-me

He nods.

Whew!

"This is the boss's wife," he shouts.

Really man? Did he really have to?

I have to go, now all these people are looking at me and calling me "makoti".

They're still watching when I drive away, it must be the Maserati fascinating them.

I guess then being the wife of a taxi owner comes with perks. I didn't even ask this guy how he's going to get his R30 back. I must tell Qhawe about this, he'll know

which of the drivers the guy is.

Now, where are these people going to sit? I have only three hours left.

I have to make a plan, even if it means borrowing or hiring chairs. I should have called Gugu, I hear she's the master of outsourcing. She can go as far as outsourcing people to make her breakfast.

I'm going to try my luck on Goolgle. Yes, chairs for hire in Johannesburg South.

"Hi, I need 15 chairs,"

I have no time to greet and be nice.

"Only 15? For when?" she asks.

She sounds annoyed, isn't she supposed to have that "customer service" attitude?

"Today, at 1.30pm,"-me

I still sense attitude in her breathing.

"Are you serious, we work with bookings here, we can't just..."

"I need 15 chairs delivered to Qhawe Zulu's house at 1.30pm today, will that be possible?"

Silence.

"Tiffany chairs of wimbledon chairs mam?" she asks

Oh, I'm "mam" now?

"Tiffany chairs, here is the address, bring an invoice and speed-point with you.

Oh and I'm going to need table-cloths too. I will email you the address," I say and hang up.

This rich housewife life is not so bad after all.

Now, let me start cooking, painful as it is going to be. Forget that I'm just gonna be throwing stuff in the oven, there's that gravy thing too.

"I love you. How's my son?"-an SMS from him.

He sends these random messages often.

"I love you more. Son is fine, only three kicks today so far, including the one that woke you,"- sent.

"He's going to kick when I get home. How's my property?"

He's starting.

"Aren't you supposed to be busy working?"-me

"I'd rather be working you right now,"

What is wrong with him?

"Why are you so horny?"-me

"Can you blame me? Your thing is hot, is it because you're pregnant?"

Is that why it's so hot?"

Oh My God!!!

I'm blushing and smiling to myself. What is wrong with me?

"I'll let you have it if you bring me Aero,"-me

I'm just playing with him.

"Go to the bar and look inside the small cupboard,"-him

He is such a.....

"How long has it been here?"-me

"Long enough. I want to find you naked and waiting when I get home,"

He's such an idiot.

I have to shower and look fresh before the chair people arrive. After that I'll have only 30 minutes before the whole taxi rank invades my house.

The butcher guy was right, the meat he gave me made my job very easy. I think I have everything now. The table, the chairs, yes tiffany chairs. I know Qhawe is going to wonder where the heck they came from and how they got in his house.

The taxi association people, I know they don't know these are tiffany chairs and that they cots R35 to hire each.

The food is ready and so am I. I even covered my head, I hear it's the right thing to do when you have guests, especially the ones I'm about to have.

Great, they're here.

They came in a taxi?

Oh, it's one taxi and about eight cars.

Qhawe is among the first group approaching the door.

I look around the house one last time, it's spotless.

He opens the door, his eyes go all over the house and he frowns.

It must be the chairs.

"Hi," he says.

There are men behind him before I can respond.

I greet them, they greet me back, some shake my hand.

"You can come in, I've prepared that table," I say directing them to the dining area.

Why does Qhawe look so confused?

Errrr...Brentwood, leather jackets, those sandals that we all know and soccer jerseys, that's the dress code here.

Even Qhawe fits right in with that tracksuit he's wearing.

Some look elderly and others could be Qhawe's age. The elderly ones all have thick beards. They have notepads and pens with them. It must be a serious meeting.

They all fit in the table.

I don't think they care at all that I'm here. It's like they expected me to be. Only Qhawe's big eyes are all over the place, I knew he was going to be hell confused.

I've put bottled water on the table.

This is my cue to leave, I'm going to sit in the cinema and watch whatever is there to watch.

"Call me when the meeting is over," I SMS him.

He doesn't reply.

Oh, the gravy, I almost forgot. I have to leave it on the stove so that it doesn't get cold. So it's back to the kitchen for me. I can hear they are disagreeing about something. Some old man is doing all the talking about routes and how some people are trying to take over. My Zulu is not perfect but I know that when you call other people "izinja" you are swearing at them.

"We're going to deal with them, they must know who is in charge here," Qhawe says.

His tone is rather...threatening.

I'm listening to the conversation and I know that he is totally different from the Qhawe I know. He's not the crispy white shirt expensive perfume smelling business man I know right now, he is cursing and threatening.

The other men are equally militant.

The sooner I get out of here the better, I have a feeling it's about to get to the part where it's revealed how those people are going to be "dealt with".

It looks like someone was here watching something, the sound system is on.

I hope it's a movie.

No it's not. It's pictures. A slide-show of pictures of me. I don't know when and how they were taken but I know some of them were taken on the two months that I was away.

The slide show ends and a video starts playing. That place looks familiar, it's my house, my bedroom.

I already know Qhawe was watching my every move during that time. I figured that out on the night Sambulo showed up at my house. But this here is just wrong, did he have people follow me?

The scent and heavy presence behind me. I feel him coming closer. The kick.

He takes the remote from my hand and switches the screen off.

He probably thinks I'm going to throw a fit, I won't.

"Is the meeting over?" me

He shakes his head.

"I just came to check on you," he says.

I stand up.

I see a bit of fear in his eyes.

"There aren't any pictures of me naked right?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

I won't ask who took them, it won't make any difference. I'm not even angry.

"You're the only person who had access to this right?" I ask.

He knows what I'm talking about.

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay," he says.

By planting cameras in my house and watching me 24-hours?

"I prepared lunch, call me when you're done," I say.

He blocks me with one arm when I try to walk to the door.

I stop. But he doesn't say anything.

I try to walk but he blocks me again.

He puts one arm around me and places his forehead on top of my head.

Why doesn't he just talk, just say what he wants to say?

Sometimes I think I understand Qhawe and then he does something to prove me wrong. He's not this person that just keeps quiet like this when he knows he's done something wrong.

"I'm not upset Chawe,"

Silence.

"You have to go back to the meeting," -me

Those people are loud. I don't understand much of what they're saying because they're speaking serious Zulu.

"We're almost done," he says.

Great, I'll go to the kitchen and start preparing to serve them.

"Let's go," I say. He follows, I'm pulling him by hand.

They stop talking and stare at us when we appear. I let go of his hand very quickly.

He joins them at the table and they start talking again.

How do I do this? Buffet. But is it proper? I'm not good at these things. I was raised by a man after all.

There are papers and documents all over the table. They're still talking. I'm just gonna be here waiting.

Oh, they're standing up.

"My wife prepared us lunch, please stay,"-Qhawe.

They look very happy, looks like I didn't waste my time after all.

Now what?

Oh, water to wash their hands and dishcloth to wipe them.

Omphi would freak if she saw me doing this. But Qhawe looks impressed so here I go, Dr Montsho domesticated.

I hear "thank you makoti" here and there. Okay.

I put everything on the table and go back to my designated kitchen. They're still loud.

I'm going upstairs.

It's almost an hour before the noise dies down.

I hear him coming up the stairs, he's rushing.

He opens the door and stops.

"I thought you were asleep," he says.

I sleep a lot these days.

He's still a little too cautious.

"This air-conditioner is going to block your nose,"

Sigh. I have two daddies now.

"It's hot Chawe,"

He must understand that the heat is two times worse with me, I'm technically two people. He's still standing at the door.

"We're going swimming," he says.

Is he serious?

"It's not safe for me, I can't get in the pool,"

I'd expected him to know this.

"I'll be there with you, come on, let's go,"

I shake my head.

"Please, I promise I won't let you fall,"

I know he won't let me fall. He'd never let me fall but...

He pulls out my bikini. I don't think I'll fit in it.

"Put it on," he says. He seems excited all of a sudden.

How can I say no now?

The bikini top is small, my boobs are spilling out. He doesn't seem to notice.

Walking up the stairs has become far better than walking down. I have to hold on to the rails and make sure I don't look down just to survive the ordeal.

He puts his arm around my waist when he sees me struggling.

"Maybe we should move to the bedroom downstairs," he says.

It's too early for that. I have another two-and-a-half months to go.

"It's fine I can still manage baby,"

He's wearing shorts and carrying all the towels, I have one around me.

"You can take that off, this is your home you can walk around naked anytime," he says with a smirk.

I forgot he's been horny all day.

I'm scared, what of I slip and fall? I haven't been in this pool in a while.

He gets in first and opens his arms for me.

"Watch the steps," he says.

It's only four steps but I could slip anytime.

He stands on the bottom one and holds me by my arms. I walk down slowly.

He holds me from behind.

I can't swim, he can't swim, so we're just standing inside the pool with the water almost as high as our shoulders, him leaning against its wall and me leaning on him.

He's brushing my belly.

"I can't wait to meet him," he says.

Me too.

"I can just imagine the big eyes and big head,"

He laughs.

"And your big forehead,"-he says.

I still maintain I don't have a big forehead. I have never been accused of having a big forehead, until now.

"You know he'll look nothing like me. And I still find the genes in your family very freaky. How is it that you can all look exactly the same? It's like one person being born over and over again..."

"We all look like Sbopho," he says.

Sometimes they do that, call their father by name. It's their way of trying to detach themselves from him, I think they're still angry at him for some reason.

"Did he have a family? As in, do you have relatives at all?"

I don't know if asking these questions is a good idea, I don't know all the boundaries yet but he's always been open on the subject.

"I remember an uncle when we were kids, but by the time my parents died we had not seen him in years. By the time he died it was just him and us, but we were happy kids, we had a happy home. I think that's why when everything changed we...." he stops.

"You're a good man Chawe. You're going to be a good husband and a great father, I know that,"

He's quiet, but he kisses my shoulder.

"Thank you for today. You're becoming a real Mbuba makoti,"

I laugh. Mbuba makoti? I don't think I'll ever get anywhere near meeting the Zulu rural makoti requirements.

"Did they like the food?"

He laughs.

"Yes they did, and the Tswana makoti,"

"Okay, I bought the steamed bread,"

He laughs. I'm sure he didn't think I cooked it myself.

"Where?"

"Southgate, at some shop full of taxi drivers. I was R30 short and this driver, one of yours, he recognised me and gave me the R30,"

"R30 short? Are you serious?"

He's about to laugh at me I know.

"I had my card with me, I thought they had a speed-point,"

He laughs out loud, I knew this was going to happen.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with your Model-C ass,"

Oh he's gonna be like that now?

"And I love your rural, car stealing crazy ass,"

"I stopped stealing,"

"No you didn't you stole my heart and turned me into a crazy woman,"

He laughs.

"I'm glad you acknowledge that you're crazy. Oh and Nandi is still scared of you,"

I'm still embarrassed by that incident.

"I freaked out, but yes, I'd beat any girl who comes near you. You're my man and mine alone,"

He tightens his arms around me.

"I am,"

He will never understand how deeply I love him, I can't explain it in words, they're just not enough.

"So is this it? What I did today? Is it what you expect of me?" I ask.

I need to know these things. He takes a deep breath.

"I expect you to be who you are. But also, I expect you to be make our home warm, to know your duties and to come through for me and the family, like you did today,"

I guess I did right then.

"You hired chairs?" he asks.

Oh that...

"Yep, we have only eight chairs in this house,"-me

Not that it's a problem, there are only two of us living here.

"I wish the Modder River house was here,"-me

I've been thinking a lot about this.

"Why?"-him

"Because it's a normal house, a proper house to raise a child in,"

He nods.

"We can start tomorrow," he says.

Huh? I turn to face him.

"House hunting. Budget is unlimited, anything you want, you'll get," he says.

I'm excited, strange, normally I'd argue.

I don't know what it is exactly, but I've started to see things differently. His wealth is blood money, but then, he did work hard for it.

"Okay, I'll start on the internet,"

He smiles. He's impressed with himself.

"Hlomu said I must spend the money, that it makes you all happy,"-me

There's suddenly a serious look on his face.

"It does. Because at the end of the day, there's only so much you can buy with money. I want to sit back and watch you be happy and be spoilt and comfortable so that I can say it was all worth it, the hard work and the time,"

This thing is deeper than I thought.

"Do you think we should tell him? When he's older, do you think we should tell him about his brother?" I ask.

We don't talk much about that.

He shakes his head.

"I don't think it's necessary, he's enough, just him,"

I'm happy to hear him say that. I didn't think he was over it.

"I want three more," he says

Never!

"Mageba, listen to me. The first thing I do when I wake up is to throw up. Most of the time I have heartburn, my feet are always swollen, I eat peanut butter and tomato sauce, in two months' time I will be walking like a penguin, I have a person kicking me every chance he gets and right now, as we stand here, I want bread and polony, that's what I'm craving. Does that sound like something you'd want to experience four times in your lifetime?"

He's trying to stop himself from laughing.

"That's what happens when you like sex," he says.

I pinch him.

"I'm going to tell your father that you abuse me," he says.

I forgot they are friends now, they even call each other and talk about buffalos and this nature stuff that they both love so much. I think my father has found a son he never had in Qhawe. He admires him and Qhawe respects him, a lot.

"My love, I have a few things I want to get out of the way before the baby comes and before I change my surname, I want us to start our family on a clean slate, I don't want to bring baggage," -me

He's quiet, that kiss on my shoulder again.

"She's alive," he says.

He's just read my mind. I must do this, I'm ready to do it.

"I want to meet her," I say.

Just saying it gives me that feeling in my stomach.

"I'm not sure if that's a good idea," he says.

Huh?

"Why?"

He shakes his head.

I'm not sure how I'm feeling right now. Just hearing that she is alive is shocking on its own. She's always been some kind of a myth to me, something that exists, only I have never seen it with my own eyes.

"I don't know baby, maybe after the baby comes. I don't know if it's..."

"I want to do all this before the baby comes Chawe, I don't want him to find me with all this baggage. I want a new start,"

Why do I get a feeling that there's something he's not telling me.

"Did you speak to your father?" he asks. Should I?

"No, I spoke to Mme, I know she told him. My father doesn't want to talk about this issue and I respect that, but this is as much about me as it is about him, I want to do this for myself,"

That kiss on my shoulder again. The sun has set, the water is getting cold.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he says.

My thoughts exactly.

"We'll go after umembeso," he says.

That's in two weeks.

Twenty-Six

No I'll be here, outside," he says and pulls the door closed. The noise is deafening. I haven't turned around but I just know they are all over the place.

"Mama can we please go to the lake?" one asks, I'm not sure which one it is between Mvelo and Mabutho.

"No, homework,"-Phakeme

The command that this child has!

He turned 12 last weekend and I promise you, two months ago he wasn't this tall.

"We've just come back from school Phakeme, now we have to do homework?"-

Mabutho, he just generally doesn't understand what this life and discipline thing is all about, and he is not trying to.

He always has a comeback, say something to him and I promise you, you will get a response.

But as always, he has a point.

"You can't play at the lake, but you can go to the cinema," I say.

"But we want to play outside,"-Msebe

He has Nqoba's voice, him and Mabutho. I heard their grandfather had the same hoarse voice.

"Okay go, but to the backyard, away from the pool,"-me

They all run out at once. Phakeme stays on the couch. He has an iPad and a smartphone. Xolie told me that the plan was to buy him a cellphone when he starts high school, but somehow he negotiated his way into owning an iPhone at 12-years-old.

It worries Xolie, she doesn't want her kids to grow up believing they can have anything they want, when they want it. But I just think she's being unrealistic because this is the only life they know. And besides, they take Phakeme with them when they have to work on weekends. I think they are grooming him.

Back to the issue at hand, I don't know why the kids are here, nobody told me they were coming here after school, and nobody asked me if I'd be home, not even Qhawe. I just saw the car parking outside and small people running to my front door.

Niya and Shlangu are the only two missing. I'm not complaining, they both demand too much attention. Shlangu is worse, he needs policing.

"Mama they don't want me to watch cartoons,"-Mvelo, he's the youngest here.

I don't know how to resolve children's disputes, that's why I'm standing here

trying to think up an answer.

"Come and watch this one," Phakeme says pointing at the TV in front of him.

Great, even he is better than me at this.

"Are you hungry?" I ask.

That's all I have to offer, food, otherwise I have no idea what to do with them.

"No thank you mama," they both say at the same time.

They all know when to say "thank you" and "please". They're not exactly normal kids but they are respectful kids.

I'm tempted to ask Phakeme why they are here but that would be shady of me, he's just a kid. So I'll wait.

The security guy is still outside. I wonder if he stands like this and waits for them at school all day.

"Mama, Phakeme is chatting to girls on his phone,"- Sisekelo walks in and says. I didn't see him coming.

Phakeme looks at him once and goes back to his phone.

I laugh. I mean, what girls? He's only 12.

"You can sit mama, I'll do that,"-Sisekelo says taking the broom from me. He touches my arm, the baby kicks.

I really do need to sit.

He's as bad at sweeping as I am. I can't wait for Esther to come and clean this house tomorrow. I'm a neat freak by nature but these days I have no problem sitting in a dirty house, I just can't function.

"Here," I say putting three big packets of chips and biscuits on the table.

Mvelo is the first to jump from his seat. I thought they weren't hungry.

"I'm going to order pizza,"

They look excited. It's strange, I thought they were used to these things.

My phone. It's Hlomu.

"Girl," she says.

She likes calling everyone "gal".

"How are the rascals treating you?" she asks.

She calls them that.

"They're good, is everything okay?" I ask. I'm always worried because there's always something going on in this family.

"I think you might have to keep them overnight, I'll call you later to confirm," she says.

Huh? Why?

"Can I call you back? Chawe is calling...."

She hangs up before I finish.

"Babe," he says,

He sounds like...

"Are you okay?"-me

"Yes, Gugu's mother is gone. She died two hours ago,"

Oh my God!!

"Noooo! How is Gugu? My God! Did you tell her? Does she know yet? Where is she?"

This is bad.

"We're trying to fly her home. Hlomu might go with her so the kids are going to be there for a while..."

“It’s fine baby. Where are you?”-me

I don’t even know why I’m asking. It doesn’t matter really.

“Okay, I’ll see you later,” I say.

He sounds distressed.

My God...poor Gugu.

She didn’t come to my membeso because her mother was sick. She’d been in and out of hospital lately.

She was her only child, but there was a brother her father had from his cheating. They were close, very close. She wasn’t a fan of Nqoba but she tried to be civil with him.

I don’t know what it’s like to lose a mother because I’ve never had one but I know that I’d probably end up in a coma if I received a phone call saying my father is dead. Just thinking about it makes me cringe.

I told him that he was having a grandson, the first grandson and he’s been excited from that day on.

He’s only ever been surrounded by girls and he knows exactly how to handle us females. I’m not sure how he’s going to deal with not being the only man in the family anymore, not that my child is going to be a full-time Montsho family member. I just don’t see it happening. My dad will be lucky if he’s allowed to contribute at all, even with a middle name, at least.

“You’re sleeping here tonight, homework at 6pm,” I say.

I might as well start practising.

The only experience I’ve had with kids has been during Christmas holidays when my sisters were back home. Tshedi would leave me with the girls all day and disappear to Lord knows where.

Now that I know her shady ways, she was probably entertaining Maradona in a bus somewhere.

She’s my maid of honour, and yes, she thinks it’s her wedding.

I want to ask Lerato to be one of the bridesmaids but I’m not sure because she always makes excuses to not show up at our family functions. She cancelled attending my umembeso at last minute.

“Mama, the pizza guy is here,”-Phakeme

Do I even have cash?

I don’t hear a knock. Oh, he’s still in the driveway. But...wow...he’s being searched by the security guy. He’s even searching the bag.

I look at Phakeme. He’s watching this too.

“It happens all the time,” he says, does that Qhawe frown-smile and walks back to the lounge.

This poor guy, he must be wondering what this is all about.

I’m waiting for him to knock but he doesn’t, instead the security guy pushes the door and gives me five boxes of pizza.

“The money...?”

He shakes his head and pulls the door closed.

Oh well, that’s weird.

“Call the others,”- I say to Phakeme.

He gets up very slowly, his eyes on the phone. Now I know why Xolie doesn’t want him to have gadgets.

“Baby, how is it going?” I SMS him.

“It’s going, I’m trying to reach Nkosana and Zandile, I’m not sure which part of the world they’re in,”-him

I want to ask how Gugu is, but the answer is obvious.

“I’ll try to be back early,” he says.

It’s already going for 6pm.

The little smurfs come barging in, noise and all.

They’re going to eat from boxes, I’m not washing dishes tonight.

“Phakeme this is yours, it’s chicken and mushroom”-Langa says. I know it’s him because he has a normal voice.

“I want that one too,”-Mabutho

“No you eat red meat, Phakeme doesn’t,”-Langa

I did say these kids were remarkable.

“Mama, why do you have a big stomach like Mamiza?”-Mvelo. Lord!

“There’s a baby in the stomach,”-Mabutho

“Why is...?”

I’m going to leave them to it, I’m nine months pregnant and this chaos is not what I should be dealing with. Kids will drive you crazy I tell you.

“Homework right after you finish eating,” I say.

They ignore me. They’re all still in school uniform.

I’m off to the bedroom.

I have to tell my family about Gugu’s mother. I know my dad will ask me “which one is Gugu again?” He only knows Hlomu. His face still lights up when he sees her. Mqhele finds it funny, which is strange because he is the possessive type and would probably skin alive any man who tries his luck with Hlomu.

“Shhhhh, I didn’t mean to wake you,”

I didn’t hear him come in.

“You’re back? How’s Gugu?”

I gave up and went to bed when he still wasn’t back home at 10pm.

“She went home with Hlomu. Go to sleep we’ll talk in the morning,” he says.

I’m already awake.

“The kids don’t have uniform for school tomorrow. I must...”

“No it’s fine I brought them uniform. I’ll drive them to school tomorrow,” he says patting my back.

He really doesn’t want to talk tonight.

“I didn’t make dinner, I bought pizza,”

“It’s fine I ate at Sambulo’s house,” he says.

That’s where he was?

I need to pee.

“Where are you going?”-him

“To the loo,”

He switches on the side-lamp as I try to find my way in the dark. I feel a bit heavy. My left side of the body is a little painful.

“Are you okay?”-him

“Yes, I have a bit of pain here...”

I’m limping actually. The doctor did say the baby was too big.

He's next to me...

He has one arm around me.

"I think he moved today. I think his head is here," I say touching the left side of my belly.

I don't think he understands at all, he's just worried.

It's too early for his head to be there, I must call my gynae in the morning.

He stands in front of me even when I'm sitting on the toilet.

How am I supposed to pee now?

Oh well, I'm peeing. I can't hold it back. He's watching. Sigh.

"I'll flush," he says.

Is he crazy?

I limp all the way back to the bed.

"Shouldn't we call the doctor?"-him

I shake my head. I'm not exactly sick.

He still looks worried.

I'm more interested in what's going on with Gugu than what's happening to me now.

"How did Gugu get home? Did you get a flight for her?"

His hand is on my tummy.

"We got the last flight to Durban, they'll drive to Ulundi from there. Don't you want to sleep on your back?"

Sigh.

"No baby, sleeping on my side is fine,"

The kick. He feels it.

"He's alright, I don't know why he's not sleeping. I'll call the doctor in the morning but don't worry, everything is fine,"-me

Sometimes I think he forgets I'm a doctor too.

He's still not convinced. I put my hand over his, on my tummy, and close my eyes. I know I won't fall asleep anytime soon. It's after midnight.

Does it mean I have to wake up early in the morning and get the kids ready for school? There are six of them. Where am I even going to begin? And where are the other two?

"Chawe..."

He doesn't respond. He's fallen asleep.

This morning before he left for work we talked about finding a wedding venue.

We don't have a date yet but we know it's going to be soon after the baby comes. I need at least three months to lose some weight but he wants it to be sooner than that. As to how I'm supposed to plan a wedding with a new born baby? I don't know. But Zulu wants what he wants and Zulu is not used to not getting what he wants.

I need nine bridesmaids because apparently it is tradition in this family that when one gets married, all the brothers are groomsmen. This includes Sbani and Lwandle.

I might have to hire some of my sisters' friends and some distant cousins, whom I'm not even close to.

We are basically having three weddings, one in the North West because well, I'm royalty. Next will be the white wedding which I still have to negotiate for with my dad because he's convinced it's going to be in the North West, while the man I'm

marrying is talking about Mooi River and Pietermaritzburg. And come to think of it, that's the only thing he has contributed to the wedding planning, venue suggestions, no actually, area suggestions.

He's more interested in the traditional wedding which will be in Mbuba and where I'll officially become Naledi Zulu.

I have a picture of what my wedding will look like on my mind, it's a recent picture. They say every girl dreams about her wedding day all her life but that was not the case with me, I never thought I'd be someone's bride or wife. I used to tell Tsietsi that all the time in between puffing cigarettes and drinking on weekdays, and he agreed with me.

We don't communicate at all. I think he was more pissed about me leaving my job for a man than me getting back together with Qhawe. I was never the housewife type, that was never my plan in life.

He shifts closer and puts one leg over me. Does this man know how long his legs are? He's fast asleep, if I remove it he'll wake up. Let me just suffer.

Oh shit! I didn't hear the alarm clock!

He's already dressed.

"Are they ready for school?"

He turns around.

"You're awake. How are you? Are you still feeling pain?" he asks.

Not really.

I jump out of bed. I have to make them breakfast!

"I just woke them now, they're showering. Are you still in pain?"

"No," I say putting on a robe.

I still feel heavy though. I have to open my legs when I walk. He looks worried.

"I'm fine Chawe," I say walking out of the bedroom.

I can hear the noise in the other bedroom. I think Mvelo still needs to be helped with getting dressed.

"No Msebe those are my shoes!" someone is shouting. It's the other twin. They are the same height and same size so the clothes dispute is expected.

Phakeme is already dressed, blazer and tie and all.

Mvelo is in pre-school so his uniform is different, but they all wear hats.

"Mama where is my cricket kit?"-Sisekelo.

Cricket kit?

I didn't even hear a good-morning. It's chaos all over.

"I'll ask baba," I say.

Phakeme is helping Mvelo get dressed, I'm going to put together breakfast.

Just walking down the stairs is a mission! We really need to get a new house because this glass cave is not going to work with a new born baby.

Cereal, yes, that's breakfast.

I'm still putting out the bowls when the first three come running down the stairs with backpacks.

"Baba which car are we using?" one shouts.

"The Jeep, it's open," Qhawe shouts from upstairs. They run to the garage.

I don't know how other women do this every morning.

I hand them the bowls when they walk back in.

Phakeme and Mvelo are the last to come downstairs.

“My cricket kit,” - Sisekelo.

“I’ll bring it to school later, hurry up we’re going to be late,” -Qhawe

Some are sitting, others are standing and eating.

Qhawe doesn’t like cereal.

“I’ll grab something in the office canteen,” he says.

He always complains about canteen food being awful, but, this is not a normal morning.

“I’ll drop them off, go to the office briefly and come back. Okay?” he says and kisses me briefly.

“Let’s go!” he says.

Cereal bowls are left all over the place and I’m immediately all alone.

I must call Gugu. But no, maybe not. I’ll call Hlomu instead, or Xolie.

I forgot to ask if they found Zandile and Nkosana. I haven’t seen them in a while.

Last week Zandile sent pictures of them riding elephants. Imagine Nkosana riding an elephant!

It’s Tuesday today, the funeral will probably be this Saturday seeing as Gugu doesn’t have to wait for funeral policies to pay out and all that stuff.

I’m not sure if I should go, but if I don’t that would mean Qhawe can’t go as well because he will never leave me alone for the whole weekend.

I’m going to suggest spending the weekend at Omphi’s so he can go to the funeral and not worry about me being alone.

It’s Hlomu, I was about to call her.

“Girl, are you okay? I forgot to brief you about what they need for school today,” she says.

She doesn’t sound stressed at all so I take it things are not too bad.

“It’s okay, how’s Gugu?”

“She’s bad, really bad and her family drama is not helping either,”

Oh. But her mother passed away yesterday afternoon, and there’s already family drama?”

“Is it wise to call her?” -me

“No, not now, maybe later in the week. She cries more than she talks,”

It makes sense.

“Niya and Shlangu are with Xolie. You’ll keep the older ones throughout the week because I’m not coming back until after the funeral, at least they can take care of themselves. I also need you to contact some of Gugu’s friends, I’ll send you their numbers,”

“I’ll see you on Friday,” she says.

I’m not sure but I don’t tell her that.

I don’t know any of Gugu’s friends, I’ll just send SMSs when I get their numbers. Esther is here.

She looks around the house and frowns.

“The kids were here,” I say.

She doesn’t talk much and I have a feeling she doesn’t like me very much. But Qhawe likes her, apparently she’s been with him for years and has cleaned every house he’s lived in. He won’t tell me how much he pays her, and there’s no way of finding out because her salary comes from the company. She has a payslip and medical-aid. It must be nice working for the Zulus.

She probably thought I was going to change things around here and push her out of her job, especially when I told her to keep out of the main bedroom.
Also, I have a feeling she was used to Qhawe living alone and her not having to take instructions from anyone but him.
I'm going to take a nap. I slept at 3am.

I need water and chips and a chicken burger.

"Hi, I was about to come upstairs," Qhawe says when he sees me walking down the stairs.

I want my burger.

They're both here, him and Mqhele.

"Where's my burger? You didn't bring it?"-me

He frowns. Why is he frowning?

"Chawe, you forgot? What am I going to eat now?"

"But you..." he stops talking and looks at Mqhele who's just nudged him on the arm.

I'm crying. I'm not sure how this is happening.

How could he forget? I can't eat anything else I want a burger!

"Naledi..."

Mqhele slaps his arm.

"Mqoqi is on his way, he has the burger, we bought it but we had to change cars and..."

Whew! I almost went crazy!

Qhawe looks confused.

"Okay I'll wait for it," I say walking out the sliding door.

"What burger?" I hear Qhawe whispering.

"Shhhhhhhh, call Mqoqi, tell him to get here now before she kills us," Mqhele

I can hear them but they probably don't know that.

"But..."Qhawe

"Bafo, she's pregnant and crazy, trust me I have experience, get that burger here! Now!"-Mqhele

Oh wow! I'm crazy now?

They freeze when I walk back in.

I fold my arms and stare at them.

"Mqoqi will be here just now....with the burger," Qhawe

He'd better be! And why do they look so scared?

They step back when I walk towards them.

They look shocked when I take mayonnaise out of the fridge and start eating it, from the container.

I need chips with this.

"When's the funeral?" I ask.

Silence.

They're still staring.

I raise my eyebrows.

"Saturday," Mqhele

"Okay," I say putting the mayonnaise back in the fridge.

"I'm going to check on Esther, she's on the other side of the house. Please put my

burger in the fridge so it doesn't get cold," I say climbing the stairs.
They look at each other.
One simple thing! A burger! They couldn't do that one simple thing!
Oh wow! She's watching Africa Magic, with the broom next to her!
She jumps up when she sees me walking in.
"I'm done here, I'm going to do ironing now," she says walking past me.
It must be nice.
I'm going to comb my hair and put on some perfume seeing as we have a guest,
and another one coming, and six more coming later this afternoon.
I'm going to have to cook too.
It's too quiet. Are they gone?
No they're not. They're still downstairs, standing where I left them.
Mqoqi is with them.
"Here," Qhawe says as I approach. He has a KFC box. It's my burger.
"Thank you," I say taking it.
I take one bite...nope...I can't!
I turn to look at them, they're still standing, staring at me.
"I want wings," I say.
I see big eyes widening.
They stand still.
Are they trying to ruin my life?
"Sambulo is on his way with the wings," Mqhele
That's great.
"Thank you," I say smiling.
He's so considerate.
They walk out to the veranda.
"I'm getting out of here," one says.
"Me too,"-Mqhele
"Don't leave me alone here with her,"-Qhawe.
They must learn to whisper properly because I can hear everything they're saying.
I want my wings now. I don't know what I was thinking telling him to bring me a
chicken burger.
I almost forgot to SMS the friends.
Someone is here. It's Sambulo, that was quick.
"I had to turn around at the gate to go queue at Chicken Licken for stupid wings!
What is wrong with you people?" he shouts when he walks in.
Qhawe is the first to rush back inside.
"Thank you bafo," he says taking the wings from him.
He hands them to me, in a box.
Sambulo looks at him, and then me, and then at all of them.
"I was joking. I didn't have to turn back at the gate, I bought them on my way
here," he says.
I don't care.
"Is it one of those days where she tries to murder you?"-Sambulo says as they
walk out the door.
They laugh.
Mnx!
These wings are very nice.

The kids are back.

My plan didn't really work out. So yes, I'm on a flight to Ulundi.

Qhawe didn't want to leave me at all, not even with Omphi.

I tried to negotiate and explain to him that travelling in my condition was risky but he said leaving me alone in Joburg was even more risky.

We, Xolie and I, even though she is a month behind me had to go to our gynae to make sure that we were okay to fly.

They wanted to pay them to travel with us but they obviously said no. I'm a doctor myself, and I know I will never allow myself to be someone's babysitter just because they can pay me ten times more than I earn.

We took the private jet, with the kids and MaMnguni. We are staying in Richardsbay. A lodge has been booked exclusively for the Zulus because...well, I've tried a few times to count how many we are but I always give up along the way. But, the real reason we booked a lodge instead of a hotel was that the kids will need to play, outdoors, while we are away at the funeral. No, don't start blaming the men, this came from the women.

I've spoken to Gugu only once this week. I spoke, she responded with one-word answers, so I realised she needed space more than anything. And besides, I really didn't know what to say to her.

Nqoba has been in Ulundi the whole week. Qhawe says Gugu's family was frustrating him that's why Mqoqi had to go there and join him, just to make sure he doesn't lose it and turn things into a disaster.

There's a debate over whether we should go to Mbuba after the funeral because we haven't been there in a while. Mpande, however, is there every other weekend, for obvious reasons.

His girlfriend, Ndoni, lives in Durban but is from Mbuba. I've seen her father a few times at family functions. Apparently when she started dating Mpande they had to hide things from her father because although he works for them, they still have no right to be humping his daughter.

And so, when Mpande decided he was serious, the delegation led by Nqoba, because we don't know where Nkosana lives anymore, went to the father and explained things. They take respect very seriously.

We all thought they met at Zandile's traditional wedding. Xolie said the moment she walked in Mpande froze. But later we found out that Mpande had been pursuing her for over a year, she's hear none of it until that day

I've met her only once and it was brief. All I can tell you is that she is nothing like I expected. Nothing like Thando. She's soft-spoken, very humble and very reserved. She's basically everything I'm not. Well, I can blame it on the hormones for now, like I did with that chicken burger and chicken wings episode. It turned out I never asked Qhawe to bring me a burger. I don't even know where I got the idea that I did.

He laughed when I apologised later. Today, when I walked in here Mqhele made some stupid joke about it.

My feet are swollen and I can't wait to get out of this plane so I can lay on my back and let Qhawe massage them. That's become his full-time job, massaging and helping me up the stairs and helping me out of bed. He wants to stop going to

work but I insist on it, I love him but my hormones are a bit evil.

"Mamiza, where are we going?"-Mabutho.

He's sitting next to her. They've become so close it's hard to believe she once wanted to strangle the poor child.

"We're going on holiday, to watch animals,"-Xolie

There's always a good reason for lying to kids.

"Lions?"-him

"No, rabbits,"-Xolie

I hope that's not going to be followed by another question. No? Thank you.

We've landed.

The usual cars are outside, big, black and tinted windows. The kids are used to this. They all look like that Jeep I once stole in Kimberley.

The kids are all put in one car with Mpande and Mqhele.

Qhawe, me, Xolie and Sambulo and MaMnguni are in the other car.

I hope we're not driving far because I need to stretch my legs.

"Are you tired?" he asks when I rest my head on his shoulder.

I'm always tired.

"Yes, I think it's the flight,"

He brushes my arm.

"I thought it would be better than driving. The lodge is 15 minutes away," he says and kisses my forehead.

We had something to eat on the flight but I know I'll be hungry again in the next few hours, it's only 8pm.

The noble thing would be to go to Gugu's tonight just to see her before the funeral but I doubt Qhawe would say yes to that. Besides, it's another long drive from here.

Zandile is already there, they came straight to KwaZulu-Natal from the Victoria Falls.

"We're here," he says.

I'm glad.

We're sleeping in the bush. Great.

"It's a lovely place,"

"I can't wait until we are able to travel to these types of places, when the baby can walk," he says.

I smile and nod but I don't think we're going to have time for that.

It really is a nice place. The room is beautiful but I have no time to stand here and admire it. I throw myself on the bed.

He sits and puts my one foot on his thigh.

"What shoe size do you wear now?" he asks with a smile-frown.

I give him a look.

He laughs.

"I had no idea pregnancy was this tough, otherwise I would have done it when I was younger," -me

He frowns.

"With whom?" he asks.

Oh Lord!

"If you weren't going around kissing frogs I don't know, I would have done it with you,"

He laughs and takes my other foot.

He's good at this massaging thing.

"I can't wait to meet him," he says after a long silence.

Me too.

"Just three weeks to go and you will officially be a daddy,"

He looks excited.

"You can still change your mind you know. I still don't think you should be in the delivery room, childbirth is hectic, it's not for men Chawe,"

He shakes his head. I've been trying to make him change his mind since he mentioned it but he's hell-bent on experiencing everything.

"I want to be the first to see him and to hold him and to kiss him," he says.

He's going to be such a good father, I just know that.

I've decided on natural birth. The doctor suggested C-section because the baby is big but I want to push him out, I'm a tough girl like that.

The nursery is ready. We went shopping together. He didn't know what half the stuff we bought was for but he was happy to pay for whatever I picked.

He goes to the nursery every night before we sleep. I go there too sometimes and I never leave the room without thinking that there should be two cot-beds in it. I think that's because I'm still pregnant, that maybe when the baby is born the void will be filled and I will learn to appreciate that this was the only one I was meant to have.

I wonder what Nkosana will name him.

"You're going to be a great father Chawe, you already are," I say.

He really is. He's even a good father to Agape.

"You think?" he asks.

Surely he knows this.

"Yes, you're going to teach him good values and humbleness and the importance of knowing self-worth..."

He's blushing.

"And I know that even though he'll grow up knowing he can have anything money can buy, with you around, he'll still know the value of hard work and the importance of giving to those that don't have much," I say.

He's still blushing.

"And you, you are going to teach him to be fierce and smart not to take shit from anyone," he says smiling.

Now it's my turn to blush.

"I find your feistiness attractive. It borders on mentally unstable, but you wouldn't be my Naledi, the one I fell in love with if you weren't a bit crazy,"

Oh, he's starting I see.

"Oh and the fact that you left, for two whole months. It was painful and there were times where I got really depressed because I thought "what if she never comes back", but, I held on to hope. You know, I've been with a lot of women in my life, some I thought I really had a chance to make things work with but it always boiled down to one thing, this," he says waving his hand in the air.

I know what he means by "this". He's talking about the wealth.

"Except for Oleta, I've always had the feeling that every woman I've been with saw me as a "rich guy", a dream, a solution to their problems and not just Qhawe Zulu who makes stupid mistakes sometimes. There was this girl once, we were

supposed to meet somewhere for lunch and she came with her friends. I was with the drivers having drinks. The drivers left as soon as they arrived and when we were seated, one of her friends asked who those were and she waved her hand and said: "they're just taxi drivers, I don't know why you hang out with them Qhawe, they must know their place,"

Whoah!

"I stood up left," he says.

Yoh! I know how important their employees are to them, especially the rank staff. They even pay for some of their children's schooling.

"I have to say, I was a bit overwhelmed at first by all this. I was worried because obviously you could have any woman you want, I couldn't understand why you wanted me, especially after I found out who you were and..."

It seems like a long time ago.

"There's something about you that I just couldn't resist. It drives me crazy," he says.

I smile.

"I met one of your skank exes,"

He raises his eyebrows.

"Yes I was having lunch with Hlomu and the girls this other day and she was there looking at me and talking about me with her friends. Hlomu got her kicked out of the restaurant,"

He frown-smiles.

"I don't even want to know. I take it Hlomu told you who she was?"

I nod.

"Thanks to Hlomu I didn't end up with cops on my doorstep looking for 'you know who'...." he says laughing.

Good, he knows I'm ghetto.

"I can't guarantee it won't happen in future. I'll slap anyone who tries to steal my baby-daddy," he laughs.

"I don't want to be stolen from you, trust me,"-him.

Good.

What's he doing?

"It's not gonna happen, you might as well go to sleep," I say.

"Just a little, I promise I'll be gentle," he says slipping his hand under my panties.

The kick.

I laugh.

"He doesn't want anything coming in there," I say.

"Hey hey hey this is my wife and this is mine," he says looking at my belly.

I'm still laughing.

"I think he's been listening to us,"-me

"Don't listen to adult conversations Sbopho," he says.

Whaaat???

Twenty-Seven

The first and last time I went to a family funeral, we were burying Zandile's father.

I never got over the fact that it started at 10am and ended after 3pm. Where I come from, by this time the yard is empty and people are packing away already washed pots and plates.

But here, the coffin is still inside the house and we are waiting for the hearse to arrive and transport it to the church.

I haven't seen Gugu, but I saw Hlomu and Zandile briefly when we drove in, wearing aprons.

We met Nkosana and Ntsika at breakfast this morning. I didn't know they slept at the lodge too.

Ntsika flew all the way from London just for the funeral. Now I know they're serious when they say family comes before everything.

I thought about not coming but I was worried that Qhawe would want to stay behind too, so I put on my pumps, braved the two-hour drive and dragged my whole self to this very hot dry place.

I've always had this feeling that Gugu came from humble beginnings. Well, it's not exactly the bottom of the poverty barrel but I grew up privileged so I notice these things.

"I just want my wife now," Mqhele says.

He's been like this all week. "Hlomu withdrawal symptoms," they call it.

"But you saw her last night,"-Mpande.

He gives him a look.

Apparently he drove all the way here last night just to see Hlomu and drove back to Richardsbay again.

"She's in the kitchen. Cooking. For the funeral," Qhawe.

"Mnx!" -Mqhele.

We're sitting in the tent waiting for things to start happening.

Nqoba appears. He doesn't look happy at all. He and Mqoqi have been staying at a Holiday Inn around here.

"Where the fuck is that hearse now?" he asks.

Okay. Wrong question to wrong people. We just got here.

The décor in this tent definitely does not scream "funeral". It's too fancy and expensive. There are even flowers on tables. But, it has Gugu written all over it. I

guess she wanted to give her mother a fitting funeral.

What???

I look at Qhawe. He doesn't look surprised.

"Is the funeral over?" he asks.

"No it hasn't started," Qhawe says standing up to shake his hand.

They all stand up and shake his hand.

"This is KwaZulu-Natal kgosi, we take our time,"-Nkosana says in SeTswana.

Why didn't anyone tell me my father was coming?

He sits next to me.

"You look like Tshedi when she was pregnant. When is my grandson coming?" he asks.

This old man!

"I didn't know you were coming," I say trying to lean over to hug him. He looks really great.

"Mme, how are you?"

She smiles.

You'd swear this is her funeral. She's on some serious six-inch heels and pantyhose and a hat that can give shelter to all of us in this tent.

"I should have brought you some herbs for those feet. How is your blood pressure? Have you been monitoring it?"

Here we go. The last time I checked I was the doctor here.

"Yes, it's fine, I know how to manage it," me

Qhawe side-eyes me.

Did that come out rude? I've been saying, my hormones are not very friendly. I'm wondering...

"You drove all the way here...."

"My favourite..."Qhawe says.

Really? Is this a confuse Naledi campaign?

"It's here," Mqhele says

Oh great, this funeral can start now.

They are singing church songs inside the house.

The smile on my father's face can only mean one thing....Hlomu is here.

She greets him first, and then mme and then Tshedi.

"Gal, how are you? How crazy did the rascals drive you?" she asks me.

Actually, I'm going to miss them.

"No they weren't so bad, I actually enjoyed having them around,"

Mqhele is standing next to her.

He hugs her and kisses the top of her head.

We are at a funeral for crying out loud.

"Why aren't you dressed?" he asks.

"I'm not going to the funeral, we're staying behind to make sure lunch will be ready when they come back,"-Hlomu

He doesn't look happy.

Now we're all sitting here watching Mqhele being a baby.

"I'm staying here with you," he says.

"No, we're going," Sambulo says pulling his arm.

The coffin is coming out.

Silence.

Nqoba is among the men carrying it. He's in front.

My heart skips a bit when I realise Gugu is going to appear anytime from now.

She does. She looks beautiful, but drained. She looks like she's had a tough time, her face says that. She's wearing black. Her make-up is flawless and her skin is lighter than normal, pale rather. Her eyes are red. She's been crying. She's still crying.

I look at ntate and my eyes get wet immediately. It will be me in Gugu's shoes one day. I don't even want to imagine it.

Qhawe puts his arm around my shoulders. I can't stop crying.

"Let's go to the car, there's water there," he says.

I don't think I need water. What I need is to not be at a funeral and nine-months pregnant.

"Can I go with Tshedi and Ntate please?" me

I hope he won't mind.

I think he does mind.

"Okay,"

I don't trust that okay...but I'm going with them anyway.

This is a township, but it's small, far smaller than Mafikeng. There's remarkable difference between the houses. Some are big, too big. Others look like little white boxes.

"I read somewhere that almost all the people that lived here were cops," Tshedi says.

I doubt that.

We drive past a huge building. You can tell it used to be beautiful but now it looks like it's been neglected for years.

"That used to be the provincial parliament when the IFP was still in charge of the province," ntate

Oh, now I remember.

"So what is it being used for now?" Mme

"I'm not sure," ntate

We are leaving the township behind and driving to a rural area. The sign said Mashona.

The car Qhawe is driving is right behind us.

Tshedi is constantly typing on her phone. She's not her usual talking non-stop self.

Now I'm really confused as to where we are going because we are driving through a forest.

"What's the name of the church we're going to?" Tshedi

I have no idea.

"Let's just follow the other cars," me

We pass a hospital or clinic, and then a school, and then ait's a church.

Why do they like putting these convents deep in the forest?

There must be over 100 cars already here. My guess is some people came straight to church.

"It's 11am already," Tshedi

Yes and according to people here it's still early.

I don't see Qhawe when we walk inside the church, but I think that was Mqoqi I saw.

I haven't seen the older kids and I'm not sure if they're coming. The coffin is already here, inside the church. I didn't know Gugu was Catholic. "Tshedi, we're inside a church, stop with the phone," She rolls her eyes, sends one last text and puts it in the handbag. I still don't get why she's here. She didn't even know Gugu's mother and she didn't seem to be that concerned when I told her about her death. Gugu and the rest of her family are sitting on the front row. There are some with small blankets over their shoulders whom I figured are her aunts. There's also a grey-haired old man, I think it's her uncle because he's been talking a lot with Nqoba. "Where's Xolie?" Tshedi whispers to me. "She stayed behind with Hlomu and Zah," I think I should have done the same. The service is about to start. Now that Tshedi is here, we must decide on a date. On the one I suggested Lesedi was not available. The second date we agreed on Tshedi had to go to a family function at her in-laws. Qhawe said he'll hear from us. I want to do it before I give birth and I have only three weeks left, and I can barely stand for more than ten minutes. I'm scared but I know this is something I need to do, something we need to do for the sake of moving on.

There are women, elderly and middle aged women wearing capes of all colours. They're sitting around the grave. And by sitting I mean sitting butt-flat on the grass around the grave. I've never seen anything like it, I didn't even know there was a custom like this. Funerals in this place, they take long but they are conducted with dignity. It's like they pay as much respect to the person being buried as they possibly can. The priest has started talking, I'm about to switch off because my concentration span is not so great currently. Now I believe everything they say about pregnant women, their sanity is questionable. We spent three hours in the church. When everybody stood up to view the body I sat still, not because I don't believe in looking at dead people but because I didn't want to see Gugu. The wailing and the screams she occasionally broke into during the service cut my heart into pieces. I just couldn't risk having to look her in the eye. Qhawe is there with his brothers. Our eyes have been meeting now and again. No actually, he's been staring at me and I've been catching him staring at me. All the women stand up when the men approach with shovels. I think the first group to shovel the soil are Gugu's male cousins, they have a strong resemblance. Gugu's younger brother looks broken. "Oh look, the millionaires are about to shovel," Tshedi. Can she stop now? They really are shovelling. "So since you're here, I was thinking that I could talk to Chawe to fly us to Pietermaritzburg tomorrow morning so we can go and see wedding venues around that area. It won't take long,"

She frowns and shakes her head.

"Nope, I'm busy tomorrow,"

Huh?

"Busy doing what? What time is your flight back to Joburg? You arrived with ntate right?" me

She doesn't answer me.

"Tshedi!"

"What? No they were already here, they're staying at some jungle guesthouse. I drove from Durban and I have to go back right after this,"

What is she on about?

"Why?"

She looks at me and rolls her eyes.

"I have things to do Ledi. I'm only going back to Bloemfontein on Tuesday,"

What?

"But where are you staying?" me

She's being shady about all this.

"Durban North. I told Sello I'd be with you the whole time, don't answer your phone if he calls," she says.

The strangest thing is that she's saying this with a hard face. But then, I sense a bit of "I don't care" attitude in her right now.

"Tshedi who are you in Durban with?"-

She raises one eyebrow.

Lord!!

"You're doing this live now? You don't even care about what people are going to say? What if Sello finds out? How are you going to explain this to him? To his family?"

"You have no business judging me Ledi, you don't know the life I live,"

I know but going on holiday for five days with the man you're cheating with? No, it's not just wrong, it's downright suicidal.

"I think you're making a mistake. I mean, why not just divorce the guy instead of...?"

"Ledi, come back and ask me that question when you've been married for ten years and have children. Trust me, the answer you have in your head now will be totally different then,"

What does she mean? I'll never cheat on Qhawe.

He's behind us.

"Ladies, please drive in my car? I want to speak to ntate, I'll drive back with him," he says.

I hope they're not going to make any plans that involve me without me.

"I hope you won't be scheming against me with that old man,"

"Why not?" he asks, kisses me on the lips when I least expect it and rushes off.

Now people are looking at me.

"Are they all like this?" Tshedi.

Like what?

I give her a confused look?

"Do they all show affection? In public? I've noticed Hlomu and Mqhele are like this too, random kisses and holding hands and all that...you and Chawe too,"

They are actually. Xolie and Sambulo have gotten worse since that almost-divorce saga,

they're always together.

People are walking back to their cars. It's over.

Now Gugu will have to face reality. It all begins now and she's going to have to do it alone because nothing anybody can do or say will bring back her mother.

I must commend Nqoba for being the husband that he is, he's been supportive throughout this. He even managed not to lose his temper during family drama that I understand has been happening here.

"Tshedi you're driving,"-me

She's still on her phone, typing. She's not even listening to me.

Mme is not happy about being separated from her boyfriend but what can she do? The big-eyed Zulu man wants what he wants.

"There's no signal in this car. How is that possible?"-Tshedi

I would explain but I don't understand it myself.

I wonder where they keep these Jeeps and why the signal is always jammed inside them.

"When are you coming home Ledi? It should be at least a week before you're due.

It's a pity we had to cancel the baby shower, I had already bought..."

Huh? Whoah!

First, who said I was coming home? Secondly, what baby shower?

She looks like she's just remembered something.

"Baby shower?"-me

She tries to change the subject.

Tshedi clears her throat.

"It was supposed to be today but...you know," she says shrugging.

Oh wow! I had no idea.

"You can still have the presents though, they're at Omphi's house," Mme

I'm hurt a little. A baby shower would have been nice.

"Was it going to be at Omphi's house?"

"No, at your beauty spa," Tshedi says and looks at me briefly.

"Don't worry we can still do a baby welcoming party next month," she says.

But...I would have loved a baby-shower.

I wonder who was going to be there and if Qhawe was in favour of it. He's very traditional and I doubt he believes in stuff like baby showers.

I wanted to talk to Tshedi about the "Sbopho problem" but we haven't had much privacy today.

We are among the last people to arrive because we got stuck in traffic coming out of the graveyard.

I expected a queue for food but...she's a Zulu wife, there are waiters, there are energy drinks, there's bottled water, there are set tables....

"I've been looking for you,"-Zah

I didn't even go inside the house when I arrived in the morning.

"You look great," she says brushing my tummy.

She looks....like a hand-crafted human being.

"How have you been? I only see you in pictures lately,"-me

We're following her to the main house. I take it that's where all the others are.

We walk past the brothers occupying one table, with my dad. He's talking, they're listening. I wonder what dull story he's reciting this time.

We leave Mme with some elderly women in the lounge and walk on to the

bedroom.

My eyes meet Gugu's the moment I walk in.

Not much has changed. She still looks as stressed as she was at the graveyard.

She's barefoot and has taken off the black scarf she was wearing.

"Hey babe," she says.

She likes calling us ladies "babe".

Tshedi walks in and sits on the bed.

"Hi Tshedi, thank you for coming,"-Gugu

I can tell Tshedi feels as awkward as I do here. We just don't know what to say to her.

Xolie is here too. I must say she's carrying her baby better than I am. She looks good, slimmer and less frustrated.

"Where's Hlomu?"-Tshedi

"Outside, she's seeing her mother out,"-Xolie

Oh, I saw her mother briefly, with that cousin that shagged my sister.

I understand the cousin and Nqoba are very close.

"I can't wait to see my baby. How is he? Has he been fine?"-Gugu

She left Shlangu behind when she left Joburg. He's been living with Xolie, him and Niya while I've been dealing with the older rascals.

Xolie nods.

"I'll come back sometime during the week. There's already drama in this family, my aunts are the worst I tell you, they want to control everything," she says.

I wonder what this is about. I just don't think that anyone should be dealing with drama while dealing with losing their mother.

The door opens and a young girl walks in with a tray of food. It's ours, good, because I'm starving.

My phone.

"Are you okay?"

It's Qhawe.

"Yes, we're in the bedroom with Gugu"

"The old man thinks you're going to the North West to give birth. Is that what you told him?"

Eish..

"No," I reply.

He made it clear that his son will go straight to our house from hospital. My family on the other hand, probably because that's what Tshedi did, assumes that I'll give birth at home and stay with them for the first three months.

I don't even know how I'm going to explain that to my dad and Mme because they are very ready for grand-parenting.

He doesn't say anything more. I hope he's not angry about this.

This food was definitely cooked by Hlomu. I would have expected a catering company to be hired but...

"People are leaving, I'm glad," -Hlomu walks in and says.

She's dressed very casually and looks like she hasn't had much sleep lately.

She gives Gugu a big brown envelope.

"Keep it for now please,"-Gugu

"Okay just tell me if you need it," Hlomu

I wonder...

“Oh and I saw her going inside your mom's bedroom, just now,”-Hlomu
Gugu brushes her forehead and frowns.

Zah grabs her just as she's about to walk out the door.

“No leave it, not now,” Zah

“They've been all over my mother's things all week. She wanted to wear her shoes to the funeral. Why can't they respect her?” she's says. She's visibly upset.

“It's fine Gugu you'll talk to them later when all these people are gone,” Hlomu

It looks like things have been really hectic here. It's crazy how family will turn on you when you need them the most.

These aunts she's talking about must be her father's sisters because I don't remember her ever talking about her mother's side of the family.

The reality is, Gugu is now an orphan. Her father died years ago. It was just the three of them now. Her brother is also actually her half-brother but Gugu's mother raised him from when he was young.

She once told me that her mother loved the boy but she has never gotten over her father's betrayal.

It's a Xolie and Mabutho kind of situation. The worst thing that can ever happen to a married woman.

I can hear the guys laughing with my father outside. This means that the yard is empty except for them and a few people, relatives I assume.

The door opens and Mme peeps in.

She walks in and stands behind the door.

“We think we must leave now,” she says looking at me and Tshedi.

It's really getting late.

“My dear,” she says looking at Gugu.

“You will be fine, God will be with you. Just pray as much as you can,” she says.

I'd expect her to say that. Her generation thinks prayer fixes everything when in fact, sometimes all you need is a whole bottle of champagne and shopping.

“Thank you mme,”-Gugu

I follow her and Tshedi out. I must say it was great seeing them after such a long time, although I didn't get to update Tshedi about the craziness that is my life. She's still scrolling through her phone even now.

My dad is already standing next to the car, with Qhawe. Their friendship is starting to cramp my style. I liked them better when they hated each other because it meant they couldn't make decisions without involving me.

Somehow I feel like I'm caught in between with this going home to give birth thing.

I hope my dad doesn't raise it now, here.

“Thank you again for coming,” Qhawe says shaking Mme's hand.

“Tshedi, it's always great seeing you. Send my regards to Sello,” he says.

For a moment there I think she's going to roll her eyes but she smiles briefly.

Qhawe and Sello have met a few times but I don't think they clicked at all.

Sello is more of the Nkosana type.

They will all drive to Mtunzini where the parents are staying. Tshedi will then take her hired car and drive on to Durban where she's probably going to have sex with her fellow cheater.

I'm in denial of the fact that her youngest daughter looks nothing like Sello.

“Don't forget what I told you,” she says before getting in the car.

Sigh.

Qhawe pulls me to him just as I'm about to walk back to the house.

He's leaning on the Jeep.

"Are you okay? You look tired,"-him

Duuhhh...

"No I'm fine,"

"You don't look fine," he says rubbing my back.

He's too fussy, but he's right. I'd really like to leave this place now.

The only cars left are ours and it's going to get dark soon. But there are still some locals sitting behind the house eating meat and drinking traditional beer.

"What's going to happen to Gugu's brother now? Is he going to live here alone now?"

He shakes his head and takes a deep breath.

"Gugu's aunts have already positioned themselves. One is already asking about the car that Nqoba bought for Gugu's mother. There's a cousin who came with three suitcases yesterday and is already occupying the outside building,"

What?

"I'm telling you. Nqoba is pissed because all of this is adding to Gugu's stress. She's worried about what's going to happen to her brother and her mother's house after she leaves," he says.

"No that is wrong baby. They must just lock it up and move to Joburg. Gugu's brother will study or do something there, maybe work for you," -me

He shakes his head.

"You can't just leave your home my love. He understands that he is the man of this house now and has to take responsibility," he says.

But he's so young, how's he going to do all that?

Huh?

There's shouting coming from...

He pulls me by hand and rushes inside the gate.

It sounds like an argument, inside the house.

"Gugu! No! Come on!"

It's Nqoba's voice. What's going on?

"No! I'm tired of these people! You abused my mother when she was still alive and now you think you can abuse me? I'm not my mother! You can forget it!" she's screaming!

Nqoba is trying to calm her down.

Everyone is standing behind them trying to calm the situation.

"If you are tired then why are you still here? Why are you still here?"- a very big woman asks.

What kind of question is that?

"This is my mother's house!" she shouts again.

"This is my parents' house. It's my home!"-Gugu

This is going to be bad.

"Everyone please calm down,"-Qhawe

Nqoba is not talking anymore. He's just holding Gugu back. Mqhele has gone outside. Good.

I'm not sure where Nkosana is. He should be here.

"You are not getting my mother's death certificate and you are not bringing your

useless kids to live here. I don't care who you think you are. My parents worked for everything they had while the rest of you kept demanding things from them, I won't allow it," Gugu. She's screaming louder now.

"Your parents?" the aunt says. She's speaking softly now.

Someone touches her shoulder, it's that grey-haired uncle.

"Please don't do this," he whispers to her.

She pushes him away.

"Your parents Gugu? What parents...?"

Silence.

"You should have asked your mother where she stole you before she died," she says.

I feel my stomach knotting!

Did she just say what I think she said?

'Car!' Qhawe says pointing me to the door.

"Go to the car!" he shouts.

"Follow her," he says to Hlomu and Zah.

What is...?

"Hlomu get Gugu's things,"-Sambulo says.

I look at Gugu. She's literally standing there like an ice statue.

Nkosana! I don't know where he came from but he's standing between Nqoba and the aunt.

"Mqhele,"-Nqoba says.

He's back.

"Get my wife out of here,"-Nqoba.

Oh crap!

"Get her out!" he shouts.

"Bafo!"-Sambulo.

Nqoba pushes Gugu off him, slowly.

Everyone is standing, in silence.

"All of you, there are two exit doors in this house, choose one closest to you,"-

"Let's go," someone says before they grab my arm and pull me outside.

It's Zah. We are rushing to the cars. Hlomu is behind us with Gugu. Xolie is walking behind them.

A woman screams...

Twenty-Eight

A aaawwwwwwwww!!!
“Ntsika, where’s Chawe?”
He widens his eyes.
He’s smoking. But, where’s everyone?
“What are you doing up?” he asks.
1...2...3...4...breathe Naledi.
“Where is Chawe?”
It’s hot, I’m sweating.
Keep counting Naledi....keep counting....
“They went to...they went out. They left me alone here at the bar and...” he says.
He’s stammering.
I’m trying to stay calm. I made it all the way down the passage to the bar so I’m still capable...
“Listen, my water just broke...”
He looks confused.
I’m calm...very calm. I’m in control.
“You want water?”
Motherfuc...!
“Ntsika, listen to me, my water just broke,”
I’m patting his arm and speaking in a soft voice. We can’t afford to panic. He can’t afford to panic and lose focus...
Breathe in...out...in...
“Okay I’ll get you water,” he says
Fucking hell!!
“Ntsika! My water just fucking broke! I’m about to give birth! Drive me to the fucking hospital!”
He jumps! Opens his mouth and closes it again. He runs. Where’s he running to?
Breathe Ledi....the contractions have started. I need to stay calm.
What am I going to do? He ran away. Breathe....
He comes back...
“Okay, I’m going to wake everyone and...”
Is he crazy?
“No! You’re going to drive me to hospital! Now! Here!” I say throwing him car keys.

I swear I can feel this baby's head inside my vagina right now! The bloody thing is trying to murder me!

"Aaaaww!"

This is beyond painful!

"Stand here, I'm going to get the car, stand here..." he says and runs off.

I have to sit! No I have to lie down! I have to open my legs!

"Aaaawwww!"

I must walk! Yes walk! It's helping!

"Aawwww!"

"I'm here! I'm here...do you want to sit on the front seat? The back seat is bigger..."

I'm going to slap him so hard...! I know how to do this! I know this. I've told women to do this many times...yes...count down...breathe in...breathe out...back up...back down....

"Auwwwww!"

This shit is not working!

"You must relax..." he says

What??

I give him a look and he raises his arms.

Is he raising his arms at me?

Awwwwwwwww

"Push,"-he says.

I'm going to murder this man!

"Push what? Drive faster!" I scream and slap him on the shoulder.

He's driving and trying to dial on his phone at the same time.

Jizas! I don't even know where I am! I'm going to give birth here? I don't even know how to get to Richardsbay from Gauteng!

"Drive faster!!!"

"We're.... almost there," he stammers.

My back! That sharp pain on my back!

Why are these contractions so quick and so close? My spine has flames coming out, it's burning!

"We're here!"

That was the worst 45 minutes of my life!

"We're here, it took us ten minutes...." he says standing at my door.

He has no clue! Absolutely no clue!

"Ntsika, I have to go inside...."-

Be calm Naledi...be calm...

He opens the door very quickly.

"Where the heck is Chawe???"

He doesn't answer me. He's walking ahead of me! He's supposed to be walking behind me.

He's running!

"The baby! She's pregnant, the baby is coming now!" I find him screaming at reception.

I have to sit down.

"Aaawwww,"

I'm going to sit on the floor.

“No mam, don’t do that. Someone is coming to get you now, don’t sit there,”
I’m not going to be told what to do.

“What’s the patient’s name?”

Really?

“Dr Naledi Montsho,”-Ntsika

“ID number?”

“I don’t know,”-Ntsika

“Medical Aid number?”

What the hell?

“I don’t know. Can’t we do this later?”-Ntsika.

There’s someone in front of me with a wheelchair. I can feel my abdomen
burning. My back feels like it’s going to open up like a freakin’ volcano!

They’d better get this baby out now!

“Ntsika where’s your brother?”

This is starting to piss me off now!

“I’m going to call him...he’s coming now!”

I’m going to kill Qhawe for making me go through this alone! I’m going to murder
him!!

“Must I get her something? Water? Food?”-Ntsika.

I give up!

He’s walking alongside the wheelchair. I have no idea where the labour ward is!

We meet a doctor on the passage. I want to pull him by those scrubs he’s wearing!

“How far apart are the contractions mam?” he asks.

How should I know? I’m not counting minutes!

“Awwwwww,”

“She’s screamed like this three times in the past 30 minutes,” Ntsika.

At least someone has been counting!

The doctor pushes my shoulder down when I try to stand.

“Get her out of those clothes,” the doctor says when we enter the ward.

There are other people here, about five women, they look as crazy as I am.

“We want a single ward,” Ntsika says.

Yes, this is a private hospital, I’m supposed to be in a single ward.

“We’re having some problems at the moment,”-doctor.

I’m not interested.

Silence.

“This is the labour ward for now,”-Dr

“Yes, but we want a single ward,” Ntsika

I don’t care what ward I’m in I just want to give birth! Now!

“Awwwwww,”

I’m helped into bed. Whew! This is it! I open my legs wide.

The doctor looks at me and shakes his head.

I don’t care that Ntsika is here.

He leaves the ward.

“Let me see,” the doctor.

See what? Pull the baby out moron!

There’s this woman who’s walking back and forth, talking to herself and
screaming and breathing and....

Another one is on her knees, as in crawling on the floor with her robe open on

front. She's not even wearing underwear.
I used to laugh at this. I thought the women were exaggerating but now...
"Nope, we're not there yet," he says taking off the gloves.
"What do you mean we're not there yet?"-me
"You are in labour but you're not ready yet, I'll check you again in an hour or so,"
An hour? An hour of what?
"I can't wait an hour...awwwww"
He's gone.
How can Qhawe just disappear and leave me alone like this?
I feel like there's a flame on my back! I have to stand.
Awwwwwwww....
"Mam let me help you out of those clothes..."someone says.
It's a nurse I think.
She hands me a hospital gown.
I'm not wearing underwear.
"No this goes to the front,"
"I know!" I snap.
I want to wear it backwards. My back needs to get some cool air.
"Woooooooooooooooo!" the woman on her knees screams.
This is not how I imagined this!
Someone walks in, it's another doctor.
"Ms Xaba, how are we doing?" he asks.
The look on Ms Xaba's face is deadly.
"Where have you been?" she screams at the doctor.
He smiles.
Is he serious?
She's still pacing around the room.
"We can go to theatre now,"-doctor.
I should have opted for caesarean too! This hell I'm going through is not worth it!
I want caesarean now!
It's been 30 minutes and this is getting worse and worse. It's only two of us here
now.
I've been to the bathroom twice. The first time I thought I had to pee but nothing
came out. The second time was to wash my face, I don't know why because it
didn't help me at all.
I have to sit. The tiles are cold on my butt, it's a nice feeling, let me lie on my
back.
"Naledi!"
He's standing over me. I'm lying on my back, on the floor, with my legs wide
open. My vagina is staring back at him.
"Where have you been Chawe??" I scream.
He steps back a little.
I want to throw something at him!
He's looking at this other semi-naked woman in the room.
"I'm here. What's going on? What did the doctor say?" he asks.
"Awwwwwwwwww,"
He bends over me.
"Let me help you up,"-him

I don't want to get up.

"Get your child out of me Chawe!"

He widens his eyes.

I will hate him forever for this!

"If you ever get me pregnant again Chawe I will kill you! I swear!"-

He looks scared all of a sudden.

"Sir you can't be here, please leave,"- a nurse comes in and says.

He looks at her and frowns. He doesn't move.

"Sir there are other people here. This is a female ward, please leave. You will be allowed in once we move Mrs Zulu to a private ward," she says.

That back pain again!

"Baby we're moving you to a private ward, now,"-him

It won't make any difference!

"Is that ward going to get this baby out?"

"I'll be back," he says and leaves.

Is he running away?

I'm still fine here on the floor but I know it won't last very long.

The doctor from earlier walks in. I guess I've been in labour for an hour then.

"How are the contractions Dr Zulu?"

Oh, now he's calling me by my "job name"?

I'd love to answer him but I can't speak right now.

"Is this your first child?" he asks.

I nod.

There's a slight smile on his face. I hate him!

"Back to the bed, let's see,"-him

We're still "seeing"?

I drag my heavy frustrated self up from the floor and onto the bed.

I will never have sex again in my life! Never!

"Nope, not there yet," he says.

I'm going to die if this baby doesn't come out now!

"I want caesarean," I say. I'm begging.

He looks at me once and shakes his head.

"You don't need a caesarean. You're doing great. Your husband asked us to move you to a private ward immediately, the porter will be here just now,"

This private ward nonsense is not going to help me with anything!!!

They are outside, I hear them talking when the porter opens the door.

"Mrs Zulu," he says.

I guess then that Qhawe pulled some "I'm Qhawe Zulu" stunts when he arrived, judging by the way I'm suddenly being addressed.

"You might want to tie that around you,"- the porter.

Voetsek!!

I don't know what's worse, my back or the feeling in my stomach.

I sit on the wheelchair with my legs wide open.

It's Qhawe and Ntsika outside the ward.

I give them one look and Ntsika moves away.

Qhawe follows me to the lift.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

What shitty question is this?

“I don’t have baby clothes, I left the bag in Joburg,”
That’s all I’m thinking about.
“Don’t worry Hlomu will sort that out in the morning. How is the pain? Is it bad?”
he asks.
The porter looks at him. I think he’s telling him to shut up.
It’s quieter on this floor. There are no nurses and patients walking around.
“What time is it?”-me
He looks at his watch.
“Almost 3am,”he says.
I’ve been in labour for three hours! No four hours!
He walks in first and I find him already throwing the pillows to the floor.
“Do you want to lie down?”
I don’t answer.
“Aaaawwww,”
“Call the doctor!” he shouts at the porter.
I’m going to give birth here, everything I’m going to need is here.
A nurse walks in instead.
I’m sitting on the floor.
“Are you going to stay?” the nurse.
He ignores her.
“Yes, he wants to be present,”-me
I still think it’s a bad idea.
She looks at him from head to toe.
“You have to change clothes then,”
She’s so grumpy you’d swear she’s the one in labour!
“When is the doctor coming?”-him
She shrugs.
Really?
I wonder if they’ve called my dad and Tshedi. And how am I going to travel back
to Joburg with a new born baby? This changes my plans, totally.
“Please come with me,” the nurse says to him.
He looks at me, I nod, he follows her out.
I have no energy to scream, not anymore, I’m just clenching my teeth and holding
my breath now. That’s all I have energy for.
Good, the doctor is back.
“You don’t look too bad,” he says.
They should have given me a female doctor.
“I can’t do this anymore. Take me to theatre please,”
He won’t, I can just see it in his eyes.
“You’re almost there,” he says.
“Almost?”
“Yes, it won’t be long now,”
Qhawe walks in just as this man’s face is in-between my thighs.
He doesn’t look happy, and that’s because he’s stupid.
“I’ll come back in another hour,” the doctor says and leaves.
Qhawe is wearing hospital theatre clothes. He even has the shower cap on.
The pants are too short, they’re above his ankles. He looks funny.
“Are you sure you want to be here?”-me

He nods.

I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing.

"They said I can hold your hand while you push. They said it's going to help,"

I've seen that happening and all I can say is, it is irritating to have the father present when a woman is giving birth because you can't slap her thighs as hard as you want.

"I'm tired Chawe. I can't do this anymore,"

He looks more sad than worried now. He doesn't know what to say but I need him to say something to make me feel better.

"Talk to him," I say.

He doesn't look confused by what I've just said.

He rubs his hands together and takes a deep breath.

He kneels next to me and brushes my tummy...

"Mageba...."

"Are you going to hang her legs like that?"

This is worse than I expected!

"You are disrupting us. You're supposed to stand there and encourage her to push harder, that's all you have to do!" the doctor snaps.

He's been asking questions and watching everything they do with a suspicious eye.

Why is he even here?

He squeezes my hand tighter.

There are three doctors and nurses and other people. I don't need all of them here.

"Once the baby comes out I'll call you to cut the umbilical cord. For now, just stand there and do what you have to do,"-doctor

I hope he'll listen.

Someone slaps my thigh.

This is it!

I hold my breath and pushhhhhhhhhhh.....

"Press her shoulder down," someone says.

He looks at me and puts one hand on my left shoulder.

I hold my breath again and pushhhhhhhhh

He's holding his breath too.

"You're doing great baby," he says.

One nurse rolls her eyes. They have had it with him, all of them.

"Give me another one," doctor.

I push again.

I don't feel anything yet.

"You're going to have to push harder. I'll count you down," doctor.

Soon I'll have no energy left.

I push five times before I feel my inner thighs getting heavy.

"He's coming...push harder!"

Qhawe presses harder as I push as hard as I can.

"I see the head, push!"

I'm still pushing.

“Come and see,” one nurse says to Qhawe.
He lets go of my hand quickly and goes to where they all are.
I get distracted and stop pushing.
“No! no! no! I told you not to come here!” doctor.
Someone slaps my thigh! I push immediately!
There’s chaos and noise and I can’t see what’s happening.
I can’t see Qhawe!
“Don’t touch that! Get him out of here! Get him out!” someone screams.
The slap again.
I hold my breath and push with all the strength I have.
I feel relief in my lower body before I hear the first loud cry, but it sounds like it’s disappearing.

I’m cold.
“Ouch!”
Urgh! I have a drip on.
The last thing I remember is....
Huh? Qhawe? What happened to him!
“Chawe! Chawe!”
He doesn’t respond. Why is he here? Why did they put a drip on him?
“Chawe!”
He won’t wake up!
I press the bell frantically until the door swings open.
“What’s wrong with him? What happened to him?”
He’s lying still, his eyes are closed.
This nurse looks too calm.
“Nothing. Don’t worry he’s fine,” she says.
What does she mean he’s fine? He’s lying on a hospital bed with a drip in his arm.
“He’ll wake up soon. He just...had a little episode in the delivery room but he’s okay,” she says.
I don’t understand. I remember someone shouting for him to get out but I didn’t see what happened after that.
“Did you have to put a drip...?”
“Yes, like I said, he had an episode. Don't worry it's just water in there,”-nurse.
I’m lost.
“I can bring the baby now,” she says.
The baby. I’m a mother. I haven’t met my baby yet. The only thing I heard was a cry.
I nod.
“Your family is here, but I won’t let them come in yet,” she says and leaves.
Not all of them will be allowed in anyway, just one of them and my dad if he’s here.
I feel sticky all over.
“Naledi!” he shouts.
Huh? He’s awake.
He jumps out of bed.

“Don’t!”-me

He’s stopped by the needle in his arm.

There’s a frantic look on his face.

“Sit down,” I say.

I guess this is the episode they were talking about.

He looks at the bed behind him, then at me, then around the room.

“They’re bringing the baby,”-me

I have to calm him down.

“Is he okay? The baby?”

“Yes, I haven’t seen him either, but they’re bringing him now,”-me

He looks crazy right now.

“It’s okay, we don’t have to have another one. We can have one child that’s fine with me,” he says.

What is he on about?

The door opens and the nurse walks in pushing a small cot bed.

We look at each other.

“He can’t stay long,” the nurse says.

“Get this thing out of my arm,” Qhawe says to the nurse pointing at the drip.

I had not decided on whether to breast feed or not.

She picks the baby up and tries to put him on my chest.

“No let him hold him first,” I say pointing at Qhawe with my head.

It’s what he wanted, he wanted to be the first to hold him, that’s why he was in the delivery room in the first place.

She looks unsure.

I nod.

She hands him the little man wrapped in a blue blanket.

He hesitates.

“Take him Chawe,”

I don’t know what’s going on but he is not the man he was when we entered that delivery room. It’s like something happened to him in there.

He looks at me first, and then stretches his arms.

The nurse hands him the baby and leaves immediately.

“What happened to you?” I ask.

I’m starting to worry about this now.

“I don’t know. I saw...a head coming out,” he says, but he’s not looking at me, he’s looking at the baby in his arms.

Oh that’s what this is about? I did say child birth was not a man thing. Some are able to stay and be comfortable throughout but others are left traumatised for the rest of their lives.

But, we have a baby now, it’s here and it’s alive and it’s healthy. It came earlier than expected but it’s perfect. And I haven’t even seen its face.

He’s holding him like he’s scared or something.

“Hold him with your one hand behind his head,” I say.

He doesn’t know how to hold a baby?

He’s still looking at him. I’m going to let him have his moment.

“He has your big forehead,” he says.

Whew! I think he’s coming back, now that he’s cracking jokes.

“You can touch his fingers,”

He looks at me briefly, like he was asking for assurance.

“They’re so small,” he says about the hands.

He obviously has never seen a new born premature baby if he thinks these hands are small.

I want to hold the baby too but he’s hogging him now.

He comes and sits on the edge of the bed.

I stretch my arms but he’s not even looking at me.

I lean over to look at his face.

Oh well, he looks exactly like we all expected.

I still don’t know how he ended up lying on a hospital bed, next to mine. And I think this bed was put in here just for him because this is a single ward. And it’s a different ward, not the one I was in earlier.

“Can I see him?”-me

He’s totally forgotten about me or that I’m the mother of this baby and I want to see him too.

He looks exactly like him. He hasn’t opened his eyes but his face is exactly like the many faces I see every day.

I kiss his tiny fist and open it with my thumb.

“He’s so big,”-me

He’s supposed to be premature but he is just perfect and beautiful.

He has an armband written “baby Zulu”.

Oh by the way.

“Chawe,”

“Mmmm,” he says.

His eyes are on the baby. I can already see the gallons of love written all over his face.

“He doesn’t have a name,”-me

Silence.

“We agreed on Sbopho, me and Nkosana,”

I get this feeling in my stomach. I don’t know why. No actually, I know why. They say sometimes people live up to their names. He might just grow up to be exactly like the original Sbopho Zulu.

I’m not happy. But I’ve learned a lot in the almost two years that we’ve been together. I’ve learned to look beyond myself and what I want.

I don’t know why he chose this name, but this is his son, his first son.

When he feels that it’s important to explain, he will explain. I’m comforted by the fact that I know he’s going to be the best father in the world and that he is going to love this child like he’s never loved before.

So, let me give him this.

I raise my eyes, they meet his.

“He’s beautiful. Sbopho Zulu, it’s a beautiful name,” I say.

He smiles back.

I expected to see relief on his face, but it’s not there, which means he wasn’t worried, which means it was not negotiable in the first place.

Sbopho opens his eyes.

We look at each other, and laugh.

“He couldn’t be saved could he?”-me

“Saved from what? This is Zulu, we come with zoom lenses,” he says laughing.

Twenty-Nine

We pick up all three of them from Omphi's house. I expected this trip to be like all others, tinted cars in front and behind us but no, not today, it's just the four of us and Qhawe. What happened with Gugu freaked me out enough to want to do this now, soon, when my baby is only three months old. I can't say I'm prepared or ready to deal with whatever I will find, wherever we are going, but what has to be done must be done. I'm getting married in a couple of months and when I come back from wherever we are going, I'll know whether I want my mother at my wedding or not. They say I look exactly like her, but I can't build a picture of her in my mind. I try to imagine myself as her but it never works, in my mind she exists only in words, in what I have heard from people. Ntate knows about this. He said it was our choice to make. In fact he wasn't even worried. That's what happens when someone is over you, they stop caring all together. I don't know who is more worried between Tshedi and Lesedi, the two who remember her, Omphi the one that resents her and me, the one that doesn't know her at all. Qhawe has been quiet today. My feeling is, he knows exactly what lies ahead and he is worried about how we are going to handle it. Family issues are always the worst to deal with, evidence of that is all the nonsense Gugu has had to deal with after finding out her mother was not her biological parent but a baby thief who stole her from some woman. She's not mad at her mother, no, she said it herself that she was the best mother in the world. She's angry about the way she found out and she's mad about what her family members, whom she thought were her people, have turned out to be. That night, Nqoba did the unthinkable. I don't want to go into deeper details but it was one of those incidents that make Monday news headlines. The house is empty and locked. Gugu's mother's car is parked in the garage. Her brother is somewhere in Durban. There's peace. No actually there's fear. But that has not stopped some of them from trying to steal what belongs to Gugu and her brother.

We're quiet again and just staring at this little thing we created.

"I don't regret stealing your parking," he says.

I laugh.

"I don't regret blocking your car,"

The nurse comes back. She's here to take him away.

I don't want to let go.

"Are you okay now Mr Zulu?"-nurse

She sounds a little sarcastic.

Qhawe doesn't answer her, he's still looking at the baby.

"What happened?" I ask.

There's a brief smirk on the nurse's face.

"He fainted. He saw the head coming out and he fainted," she says, takes the baby and leaves.

Whaaaaat?

"You fainted??? What happened to the car thief taxi driver thug who got me pregnant?"

The door opens and the whole of Mbuba walks in, big eyes and all.

I'm not looking forward to when his brothers find out about the fainting, they are going to laugh at him for the next 20 years.

They're looking around the ward.

"They've taken him for feeding," Qhawe

They look disappointed.

"I have the clothes,"-Hlomu

Oh yah I forgot my baby had no clothes.

"You can take them to the nurses, tell them they are for baby Sbopho Zulu,"-me

Silence. Awkward silence.

Ntate is here. I'm only seeing him now.

The look on his face!

There's a two-plate stove on top of a small cupboard. Somewhere there is a basin full of unwashed dishes. That's the kitchen, it begins and ends there.

In front of us is a curtain, or what is supposed to be a curtain, it separates the shack into two rooms.

"I don't think there's someone here," Lesedi says.

Qhawe rubs his hands together.

"Don't worry someone will walk in anytime from now," he says.

Yeah but we are sitting in someone's house, and they're not even here.

"I came from this. I grew up in a place like this so I know the life," he says.

My sisters don't understand.

I remember he said when they arrived in Joburg they lived in an informal settlement with a certain woman they shared a surname with.

There are people talking outside, women, and they are coming here.

"Whose car is this?" one asks in SePedi.

"It's the police," another says.

Police? It's a Range Rover.

"What do they want from Bettina?" another

There are three of them.

No actually it sounds like a lot of them. It sounds like a crowd has gathered outside.

There are two standing at the door with their hands on their hips, looking at us like we are aliens.

"Where is Bettina?" one asks. She has pantyhose on her head and is wearing only a skirt which could be mistaken for a dress because she's pulled it up to her chest.

But...who is Bettina? Tshedi said our mother's name was Matebello.

We don't answer, simply because we don't know the answer.

"We're looking for her too," Qhawe says.

I did say he knew everything about this place and what we are about to experience.

"Bettina!" the same woman shouts.

No answer.

"Bettina!" she shouts again, coming in this time.

She opens the curtain and I get a glimpse of a bed.

"Bettina wake up!" she shouts.

She's here?

Another woman comes in, walks past us and straight to the "bedroom".

"Aish...pull her from that side," - we hear her say.

She's being pulled out of bed? Is she sick?

"Bettina!"

It sounds like they're slapping her now.

I hear a "mmmmmmmm".

"There are people here looking for you, wake up!"

This is not what I expected at all.

I wish Qhawe could hold my hand but I know he's going to make me do this on my own.

We wait while the women try to convince her to put on something presentable, she's been swearing at them since she woke up and started talking.

When the curtain finally opens one of the women comes and stands at the center

I also have my own problems, my father has a serious issue with his grandchild being named after a famous killer, or that he hasn't been to the North West since he was born, or that he doesn't have a single Tswana name.

But I'm a mother now, my priorities have changed, and so the number of battles I find worth fighting has dropped.

We turn right after a sign that reads Zandspruit. It hasn't even been ten minutes since we left Omphi's house in Northriding.

I assume that there's a short-cut going through this very overcrowded informal settlement which will take us to wherever we are going.

Qhawe touches my hand and squeezes it. He's communicating. I think he's telling me to be strong.

We turn left on the next street. There are people, too many people doing too many things. Every business is run from a shack, be it a hair salon, a shebeen a Pakistani shop...everything! It's shacks everywhere!

"Is this where...?"-Omphi is the first to ask.

I was about to ask too.

Qhawe nods.

This is where our mother lives? Ten minutes away from Omphi's house?

My gut tells me Qhawe has been here before because he is just driving, he's not asking anyone for directions. He knows exactly where we are going and he knows exactly what we are going to find there.

I expected a lot of things but not this, especially not this tin shack we've just parked in front of.

He looks at me, and then turns to look at my sisters at the back.

"I'm going to go in with you. But, I will leave as soon as you start talking to her,"

Omphi gulps.

"No don't worry I'll wait for you here, outside, I won't leave you," he says.

Whew!

There is a group of kids gathered next to the car when we come out, we don't know where they came from. Some of them look like they haven't taken a bath in days.

"Hello," Qhawe greets them, with a big smile. He even shakes one's hand. Call me a snob but I'm not touching any of them.

He leads, we follow.

He knocks, but the door is already open, that's if you can call what we see here a door.

Tshedi has been too quiet, which is strange because she's the free spirit of the family.

Lesedi is...I'm unable to figure her out right now, but her face is hard.

Omphi looks disgusted. Me, I'm shocked and lost.

There is one very old sofa, it looks like it has a hole where there is supposed to be a cushion.

Qhawe pulls an empty beer crate from somewhere and sits.

We are still standing. The truth is, we are royalty, we are princesses and no matter how much we want to be humble, we can never humble ourselves enough to be able to adjust to what we are seeing here.

It's just not happening.

We are inside. But we haven't seen anyone.

always thought I would ask have suddenly escaped me, they are not relevant anymore. I don't want to know, whatever happened, I don't want to know about it.

From what I know, she was fine when she left my father. She was a smart woman with class and grace. So I'm thinking that whatever happened to her to make her end up like this had nothing to do with my father. She must have lost herself along the way.

"Why did you leave?"-Omph

Does it matter anymore? The person she's asking doesn't look bothered at all.

"Where is your father?" she asks just after burping again.

The two women are seated next to her. They look surprised, shocked that "Bettina" has daughters, daughters like us.

She hasn't answered the question.

"Ntate is fine, he's at home. Why did you leave us?"-Lesedi

It's pointless really. She's not showing any remorse at all, there is just no emotion in her.

"Do you have children...?" -mother.

Omph takes a deep sigh, she's getting irritated.

"Why did you abandon us? I asked you that question please answer!"-Omph

She frowns. I see a bit of me there somewhere. We do look alike, or at least we used to look alike before life dealt with her.

"Abandoned you? How did I abandon you?"

She mustn't do this! We didn't come all the way here to hear her deny doing us wrong.

"You left us and never came back. What kind of a mother leaves her four children just like that? Who do you think was taking care of us?"-Tshedi, she's still teary.

I'm not there yet.

She raises one hand and puts the almost empty beer bottle on the floor.

"Don't come here and accuse me of things please..."

"Bettina the children want to know..."

"Hey hey! Do you want me to stab you?" she asks pointing a finger at this woman.

"I said to you this is my house, and these are my daughters. This is my business. Do you know them?"

The woman shakes her head.

"Good," she says and comes back to looking at the four of us.

"What do you mean I abandoned you?"

She's in denial I see.

"Did I leave you on the side of the road? Did I leave you in an orphanage...or dump you under a bridge or something?" she asks, drunken tone and all.

Sigh.

"No I didn't do that, I left you at your home, with your people, the people you share a surname with. You are related to them, not me. You are all Montshos and I'm the one that is not royalty, or Tswana or good enough for your father,"

Is that why she left us? Because of the in-laws?

"I don't understand this "abandon" word that you are using Omphemetse. I left you with your family, not my family, your family. What was I supposed to do? Take you with me? Your father and I would have divorced eventually, we were never going to last, one of us was always going to leave. If I had taken you with

of the room. The second one follows her and then...

I hear my sisters gulping.

She is definitely our mother. I don't remember her but I know she is our mother.

She's standing with her hands on her hips and is looking at all four of us.

Qhawe looks at me briefly, I think he's telling me this is his cue to leave.

I don't want him to leave.

She's still just standing there, her eyes going through all four of us, it's like she doesn't see Qhawe at all.

"Matshediso," she says, finally. She's looking at Tshedi.

Qhawe tries to stand up but I grab his arm and hold on to it for dear life.

"Naledi, no I'm going,"

He can't leave me here!

"I'll be outside," he says.

No! He is the only thing that makes sense to me right now, he can't leave.

"Ledi!"-Lesedi says and holds my hand, I let him go.

After what felt like years, she pulls a chair and sits.

It's one of those plastic chairs, I don't know where it came from.

She's sitting next to that only cupboard, and she's still looking at us.

We don't know what to say.

She opens the cupboard and pulls something out.

"Bettina, not now," one of the women says.

It's a beer, a cot of Castle Milk Stout.

We look at each other.

"Bettina..."

"Voetsek!!" she shouts.

And then she opens the beer bottle with her teeth...

"I will stab you, this is my house," she says to the two women before taking the first sip, straight from the bottle.

She burps.

"Lesedi," she says looking at her.

We're still quiet.

"Omphemetse," she says and takes another sip.

She looks at me longer than the others.

I'm beginning to think she doesn't remember my name.

"Naledi,"

I'm not sure anymore if coming here was a good idea.

She looks...ravaged. It's like she's given up on life altogether, in fact it looks like she gave up a long time ago. To say that her face is evidence of a drinking problem would be an understatement. It's like she washes her face with alcohol, every day.

"These are my daughters," she says.

Tshedi breaks. She's the first to break.

"You have daughters?" one of the women asks.

I feel neither love nor hate for her. Like I always say, I don't know her.

"Don't cry my dear," one of the women says to Tshedi.

Mother is still sipping and burping. She's drinking that beer like it is water.

We are probably supposed to be comforting Tshedi, or even crying too, but...

The funny thing is that I don't want any answers from her, all the questions I

me, we would be sitting here asking your father why he “abandoned” you,” she says.

The sad thing about all this is she sees nothing wrong with what...

“I’m not saying I was right, no, I’m not saying that. What I’m saying is that you all turned out right, you look like you have good lives, so I don’t understand why you are stressing yourselves about the past,” she says.

These women here have stopped trying to reprimand her. She is who she is, I have accepted this.

“Who do you live with here?” I ask.

This is the first time I’ve said anything.

She looks at me from head to toe, and smiles. Some teeth are missing.

“You look just like me,” she says.

I feel a wave of emotion, for the first time. I look outside, the car is still there, Qhawe is still here.

It’s clear we are not going to get any answers from her, not today. She still hasn’t answered my question.

Does she live with a man? Does she have other children? How did she end up here? Like this.

“We have four children, I have two, Lesedi has one and Naledi had her first child recently,” Tshedi says.

I’d forgotten she asked us if we had children.

All I know is I don’t want this woman in my son’s life. I don’t care that she gave birth to me, I don’t want her and that’s it.

“That is nice, I have grandchildren,” she says to these two women next to her.

They are still shocked as hell.

“We didn’t know she had children, or any family for that matter. She’s been living here, alone, for years,” one woman says.

But why?

“Have you ever thought about going back home? To your family?” Lesedi asks her.

She shakes her head and drinks up what’s left of her beer.

“What home?” she asks.

And then she pulls a R20 from her boobs.

“Get me another beer,” she says giving it to one of the women.

I guess then this is her life, this is how she lives and she doesn’t care at all if the world is judging her.

I’ve seen enough I think. I don’t care to know more. Whatever it is that brought her here had nothing to do with me or my sisters.

“I live ten minutes away from here,” Omphi says to her.

I don’t think she cares at all.

“Oh really? Where?” she asks.

Wow. She’s interested in something.

“Northriding, Silverlakes Estate,”-Omphi.

She frowns.

“Oh, the one close to the shopping centre, I used to work in one of the houses there as a domestic worker,” she says.

A domestic worker? She has a degree.

Omphi breaks, she’s the second one to break.

I'm not there yet. I don't think I'm going to get there today.

"I found the letter you wrote before you left,"-Lesedi says.

We all look at her. What letter? How come we don't know anything about a letter?

"You know what the great thing is?" Lesedi.

She raises her eyebrows, she's showing interest.

"The great thing is that ntate still loved me like I was his own. He loves me with all his heart and I'm glad that you are the one that left, not him. Your life now, this..." Lesedi says looking around the shack.

"You deserve it, you deserve all of it..." she says.

No wait, what does she mean ntate loved her like she was her own?

"Lesedi?"-Tshedi

What is Lesedi talking about?

"I don't know about you but I'm done here. I'm ready to go,"-Lesedi

No, she just dropped a bomb here!

"You will never understand, and I'm not going to try to make you understand," mother says.

The beer arrives. She opens it with her teeth again.

Qhawe walks in. I think he's been worried about what is happening here.

He looks at all four of us.

Tshedi and Omphi are emotional. Lesedi and I, well, we just want to get out of here.

Qhawe stands next to me and holds my hand. There is nowhere for him to sit.

"I want to go home," I look up at him and say.

That's what I want, to go home to my son, to call my father and tell him that I love and appreciate him, to start my life with my husband, to do introspection and to let go of the anger I've held for so many years for a woman who doesn't care about me.

I want to live and I want to be free.

Lesedi is the first to stand up, I follow.

We leave her still sitting there, sipping beer and swearing at anyone who speaks.

If this was supposed to be closure, then closure is what I got.

This chapter is closed.

"Lesedi,"- Tshedi says as we drive out of the yard.

"I'll tell you all about it, but not now, I can't now,"-Lesedi.

This is going to be the most painful thing about this reunion, truths. Truths that should have remained buried.

The ten minutes back to Northriding are silent.

"Chawe, thank you for this, thank you very much," Tshedi says when they get out of the car.

We don't talk about when we will see each other again.

Now it's just the two of us.

"How are you doing?" he asks.

How am I doing? I don't know.

"I'm fine. I don't want to see her again,"

He takes my hand and kisses it.

I look into his eyes.

He puts his arm around my shoulders and rests my head on his left shoulder.

"I'm fine with whatever you decide," he says.

Now I can focus on moving forward.

"Lesedi is not ntate's daughter," I say.

Maybe I shouldn't tell him this but I rely so much on him for everything, emotionally, somehow he always knows what to do.

"Mmmmmmm," he says.

I know that "mmmmmm". It means he knows.

"How did you know Chawe?"

He brushes my arm.

"I had a talk with ntate," he says.

Ntate. This must have been really hurtful for him.

"When?"

He takes a deep breath. I know what that means, he doesn't want me to know.

"I don't remember, some time ago. He asked me if it was a good idea to let you find your mother, he wanted advice. So I explained a few things to him and he understood why it was important for you to do this,"

Okay.

"Explained a few things?" I ask.

He doesn't answer immediately but I know he's thinking, probably trying to find an easier way to say what he wants to say.

"Yes, I explained how this whole thing about your mother affected you and our relationship in the beginning. How you are quick to walk away from people and things because you expect them to disappoint you or leave you in the end,"

I never saw it like that, not even once. In fact, I've been convinced all my life that my mother's absence had very little effect on how I turned out.

"Is that what it is? This? My mother? Did it have that much effect on me?"

Why am I asking him this? Why have I never looked at myself and tried to figure out why I am the way I am?

He nods.

"I think so. Not that there is something wrong with you, you're perfect baby, you're perfect for me because you are open and emotional. You let me in. I don't have to figure you out, you show yourself to me, the good and the bad," he says.

He does know me better than I know myself.

"How did you find her?"

I'm asking too many questions aren't I?

He kisses my forehead.

"Mpande, he's good at tracking people,"

That means all his brothers know about my drunkard mother.

I won't ask how she ended up like this but I have a feeling he knows, ntate told him what happened.

"I can't wait for us to move to our new house,"-me

I'm random, I know.

He pushes my face up and looks into my eyes.

It's probably about my sudden change of topic.

"We're moving forward Chawe, I want us to focus on the future, you, me and Sbopho, that's the future,"

He's quiet.

Oh I forgot, and the 21 other people.

When I think about those two months that I wasted thinking I had left him, I ask

myself why I was so stupid.

I love this man with everything I have. It's not just his good looks and his success and his status and amazing sex, it's the wisdom that he carries naturally. The way he looks at life, his simple soul, his generosity and his love for me, it's beautiful.

The glass house. We're not going to sell it but we are definitely vacating it soon. It's just going to be here, empty, just like my house in Kimberley.

"I'm going to miss the glass house, it has so many memories," I say.

"Good and bad hey,"-him.

Yes. Good and bad.

We confirmed our relationship in that house, made love for the first time in that house, lost our baby in that house, broke up in that house, got back together in that house, it is our first child's first home...

"I can't believe I once left you..." I say.

I expect him to laugh and make some silly joke about it.

But he's hard-faced.

"I knew you'd come back. You love me, I've always known that. Do you remember when you came to my house for the first time..."

I nod.

"And you asked me why I did 'this' to you?"

I remember that.

"You said I had made you love me, and I believed you," he says.

Maybe that's why he's been patient with me. But, I've also been patient with him, the guy is a screw up. He once walked into my father's house like a big-eyed fool. Oh and he kicked me out of his house when I was pregnant.

I suggested that we rent my Kimberley house out but he said no, he doesn't want strangers in our property. So now, it's registered under a Trust along with many other things.

We're home.

He gets out of the car very quick. I'm used to it.

I must accept that I'm not number-one in this union anymore.

He's awake.

Hlomu is looking at me like she's trying to figure me out.

"It went well," I say.

I'm lying, I still have to lock myself in the bedroom and let it all out. I have to come to terms with the Lesedi situation. I have to call my dad.

They came here in the morning to babysit while we went on this difficult journey. We didn't even ask them, they volunteered because Mqhele believes Sbopho is his fourth child, he loves him that much.

I've always found him to be the most intense but I see a totally different side of him when he is with the kids.

"Here is your fainting father," he says handing the baby to Qhawe.

That has become a family joke. There's a video but nobody knows about it except us.

Qhawe organised that the whole process be documented but he didn't tell me about it, he said he wanted to make it a surprise. And now, he doesn't want us to watch it because I end up laughing at him. Things were going fairly smooth until that nurse called him to "see". From then, things went haywire. There is a point where he is wearing an enamel bowl over his head, yes the one we use in hospitals

to sterilise equipment. They threw him out when he started pacing up and down the ward screaming with his hands over his head.

“MaMontsho,”-Mqhele.

I expect him to ask something but he doesn't, he just looks at me. The look in his eyes says he's asking something, I know what it is.

“I'm fine. I'm glad I did it and I think I've found closure,” I say.

He nods.

Sbopho is on his father's chest. He won't last long. It happens all the time. He listens to his father's heartbeat and falls asleep.

Next step is Mbuba next weekend. We are doing a small traditional ceremony for Sbopho. Apparently he has to be introduced to the ancestors since he was born before we got married.

It's a goat thing.

Thirty

I've lost only 5kg.
Okay, I lost most of the baby-fat in the first four months after giving birth, and then Lloyd started making my wedding dress, it was perfect. I went for a final fitting two weeks ago. It was a little tight. Today, it is really tight.
“Tuck your stomach in, it's going to fit, we will not be defeated by a dress!” I will be dead by the end of today I swear!
“Here!”-Lloyd walks in and throws something at me.
“It's a waist-trainer, wear it under the dress,” he says.
Oh wow! Now I have to take it off and start all over again?
“I don't judge people for being big but you, I should be slapping your face right now,”-Lloyd.
Urgh!
And where are my sisters?
I'm being abused by these two gays here when they should be here helping me put this wedding dress on.
I haven't finished doing my hair and make up and I'm left with just two hours before the wedding starts.
I know that Qhawe is ready wherever he is. I haven't seen him since breakfast this morning although we are all staying in this hotel.
This is our second wedding. The first was in the North West last weekend, a traditional Tswana wedding.
Everyone, and I mean everyone showed up, even the deuchebag who got my husband beaten up by my father was there acting important.
There were various completely different crowds, Tswana royalty, taxi industry royalty, money royalty and Mbuba in large numbers.
I don't think the family invites any of their business associates to private family functions except the taxi people. Oh and the family tokoloshe, Peter.
It was a beautiful ceremony and my father looked happy to give me away. But I know Qhawe didn't really see it as his wedding. His wedding is next weekend, at his home, in Mbuba.
Today, well, it's just to make me happy because you know, every girl wants to be in a white dress and look glamorous and take beautiful pictures on one special day.

Oh, another gay comes in.

“What is going on? You're sweating,” he says to Langa.

He's sweating alright. He's been jumping and pulling and pushing to try and tie my dress at the back.

“Here, it's your turn,” he says to Tsietsi.

The dress is beautiful, more beautiful than I imagined it.

It's mermaid-shaped.

I wanted a big skirt but Langa talked me out of it.

I'm just standing here trying to imagine what the venue looks like after the decorating. I wonder if the food is going to be nice. I wonder how many people will show up. I wonder if they will dress up and look nice like I specified in the invitation.

We chose Isibaya Casino. Actually I chose Isibaya Casino. No it was Tshedi.

She saw pictures of some wedding on the internet and decided it was exactly the place “she wanted”.

I hate to admit it but she was right, it is exactly what I want too.

“Where is your maid-of-honor?” Langa

I don't know. Where is my mother? I call her mother in my head, but when I'm addressing her I call her Mme Menkwe.

I talk to her a lot. We've become really close since I had the baby. She was at my house for the first two weeks and I must say, I would have really struggled without her.

Ever since that day of my biological mother, whom I don't plan on seeing again, and the birth of my son, my look at life is totally different. I don't do petty any more. I don't flinch at things that are less important. I've learned to listen and think before reacting and I've learned not to judge.

Just now I'm going to be officially someone's wife. I'm going to be officially a Zulu. Mbuba is going to be my home now and Qhawe is going to be my husband. My loving husband who treats me like I'm perfect in every possible way.

My dad, he calls the baby “boy” because he just can't get himself to say “Sbopho”.

He doesn't approve and he is disappointed that I allowed it to happen. He says the child is going to carry a stigma with him all his life.

But I think he's overreacting, the children of that family know who they are and they are not ashamed of it.

I've made peace with that they are going to raise him a certain way, but I find joy in knowing that he is going to be loved and protected and taught values. He's going to be part of a family that excels in everything. He is going to know who he is and he is going to be proud of his identity.

This waist-trainer thing is really working. I thought it was going to tie my intestines but no, I feel more comfortable than I expected.

“Whew! My work here is done, I need just one flute of champagne,” Langa says picking up a bottle.

They left three bottles here and the first thing Hlomu did when she walked in earlier was open one and drink.

She said she was going to check on the venue when she left but she never came back, and the venue is downstairs.

“We have two hours, I suggest we do make-up at least 45-minutes before the wedding starts,”-Lloyd.

It's cold, so I'm not sure what inspired his suggestion but I'm in no position to argue.

"You look beautiful," Tsietsi says, randomly.

I smile.

I called him a few days after that mother episode. When he was cold towards me Qhawe called him. A few days later he showed up at the glass house with baby clothes.

I laughed when Qhawe reminded me how many times he told me Tsietsi was gay and I denied it.

I have time to spare.

"Guys, I'm going to go across the corridor. I want to see my dad before everything starts," I say.

Lloyd doesn't look happy. He must be worried that I'm going to mess the dress before people see it. Forget that I paid him thousands for it so basically it is my dress.

When news broke that we were getting married, I was flooded by calls from designers offering to make my dress, some for free.

But, Lloyd is practically family, and he doesn't ask, he tells you that he's making you a dress.

We accepted an offer from a TV show, a lifestyle show to cover this wedding ceremony. The traditional two was a no, Qhawe wouldn't allow it, but with this one, since he doesn't care much about it anyway, he easily agreed.

I hope I'll find ntate alone in his room because I want him to be honest with me. I want him to complain if he wants to and tell me whatever he wants to tell me.

Great, he's here, the door is slightly open. But...he's with someone. There are voices coming from inside.

It's Qhawe's voice...

I stop.

"Yes, I understand ntate,"-Qhawe.

Ntate: "Take care of my girls Zulu, all five of them. No actually all eight of them, I don't trust Sello at all.

Huh?

"I'll do that ntate, I'll do that,"-Qhawe

What are they talking about?

"We must go now, I hope Naledi is ready...."

Oh shit!

I make it back to my room before they get to the passage.

"And then?"-Langa

I'm trying to catch my breath.

"I need to use the loo," I say.

The door opens.

"You don't look ready," ntate says.

He's right, I don't.

What did he mean Qhawe must take care of his girls?

Tshedi is the first to walk in with her dress in a suit-cover over her arm. The rest follow and it's chaos all over.

Ntate is gone by the time I look up.

"Niya and Agape are with their grannies, they'll dress them up," Lesedi.

Oh yah, the flower girls.

Xolie is here so that means the babies are somewhere with their grannies too.

Nkosana named Xolie's baby Nsingizi. Apparently it's a special kind of bird that was known for communicating messages between the heavens and the people. They said when iNsingizi was heard singing, it meant that rain was coming. I don't know if the bird still exists.

We call him Nsingi.

The make-up lady is here. I don't know her, she's one of Lloyd's people.

Our rings are custom-made. His is a simple silver band, mine is a band with just one diamond. Yes, it did cost almost half-a-million like Gugu once warned me.

Where is my phone? I've just heard it beeping.

Oh. Here.

"I love you big forehead"

And then he makes me blush with all this make-up on my face.

"I love you too big-eyed fainting thug,"

I know his response is going to be stupid, I just know it.

"And just for that, I'm going to fuck you until your knees break tonight,"

I told you.

He was here last night. We were supposed to sleep in separate rooms but he said he missed his son. So I had to kick everyone out with their alcohol. As soon as the baby fell asleep we put him in the bedroom and he chased me all over this hotel room.

It reminds me of the time we started having sex again, which was just days after I gave birth. He wanted it all the time, everywhere.

Everybody is ready.

I look great if I may say so myself.

Mme is here.

"Let's say a prayer," she says.

Totally expected of her.

She prays, we listen.

I'm just going to block that conversation I overheard. I'll push it back until my wedding day is over.

"They are already waiting. The priest is here," she says.

We had to fly a priest from my father's church all the way from North West to Durban.

I'm ready.

"You're still going to come home often right?"

Ntate though. He's supposed to be quiet and walking me down the isle but he's busy whispering instructions to me.

"Yes ntate, I'll come home,"

"Okay good. You're going to tell me if he mistreats you right?"

Really? I thought he trusted him.

"Yes, I'll tell you,"

We're almost there.

Qhawe is standing with his brothers, Mqhele next to him. The boys too, Sbani and

Lwandle are standing with them.
The boys are all page-boys, Sisekelo is playing the piano.
Yes, it looks like a choir.
The closer I get to the love of my life the more my heart pounds.
This is us, the crazy duo, we made it this far.
My dad is holding my hand very tight.
"I hope you still remember those slaps," he whispers to Qhawe.
He smiles and nods.
My dad lets go.
I take my man's hand.
"You're beautiful," he whispers.
We're not supposed to be talking, the priest is right in front of us and everybody is watching us.
I squeeze his hand.
These tiffany chairs remind me of that afternoon where I had to run around like a headless chicken to prepare for a taxi association meeting.
They are here, all those taxi people, they are here with their Brentwoods and leather jackets.
We're holding hands as the priest speaks. He keeps squeezing mine tight.
"You're wearing them?" I whisper.
He smiles and nods. He knows what I'm talking about.
It feels like a long time ago since I gave him these cuff-links for his birthday.
It's time for the vows. We stand up.
I'll go first, no, he'll go first.
He says them with such sincerity and I know he means every word.
He promises to love and cherish and provide...
"Yeeeesss," Tshedi says out loud when the word "provide" is said.
People must be allowed to choose family. God must make it like that.
It's my turn.
"Naledi Montsho, do you take Qhawe Zulu to be your wedded husband.....to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health....."
I do. I agree to all of it.
But I have more....
I raise my hand to stop the priest.
The panic on his face!
"Can I..?" I ask.
He hands me the microphone.
I didn't plan this but I have to tell him. I'm going to speak from my heart.

"Chawe,"
Everybody laughs. I'm lost.
Oh, it's the "Cha..." thing.

"My love. My husband. Father of my child. My everything,"
Silence.

"If I said I loved you I'd be lying. What I feel for you is more than just love, it cannot be described in words or measured by how many times I tell you or how

Naledi

much I try to show you. My life changed the moment I stopped fighting it and admitted to myself that I was not complete without you. The first time we met, I wanted to strangle you..."

Laughter.

"And later on I realised that everything I was going through at that time was part of the journey to you, I was there, at that mall in Kimberley, on that day because it was God's plan that I'd meet the love of my life right at that moment. The best thing that has ever happened to me, the best and strongest love I've ever experienced. A beautiful and wise and intelligent man who has a good heart and who gives meaning to the word selflessness,"

He is looking into my eyes. I can see deep his soul. He's looking deep into mine.

"You've loved me for who I am from the beginning. I'm beautiful and I believe that now because of you, because you let me know every chance you get and because you show me how beautiful I am. You see me, you talk to me, you put me first, most of the time before yourself,"

"I'm thankful to God for many things, but mostly for giving me a great man like you to love me. For giving my son a great father and for trusting me enough to put me in charge of your heart and your well being,"

He's blinking, a lot.

"You made me quit my job and made me pregnant very quickly and..."

Laughter.

He's also laughing.

"But...you were worth it all. I'd do it all over again. I'd block your car at the mall and throw your flowers out the window and leave you hanging again...just to be with you, here, at this moment,"

Okay now I'm getting emotional because he's crying.

"Thank you for your patience Mageba. For not giving up on me, on us, and for doing everything you can to make me happy. Thank you. And yes, I do take you as my husband, my soulmate, my big eyes, my love, until death do us part"

I can't continue...

I give the microphone back to the priest.

There's a long silence.

"Rings please,"-priest.

Oh, we have to put on rings by the way.

Shlangu is the ring-bearer. I hope he didn't chew them.

“Chawe don't let him eat that,”

As to why Sbopho is sitting with us at the table when he should be there with other guests, I don't know.

He took him from Mme when we entered the reception hall.

“It's food,” he says.

Yes I know but...

“He's five months old Chawe he can't eat meat,”

We've been married for a few hours and already we are having “married couple fights”.

Ngcobo is also not helping with his long speech. It's all about how he met Qhawe when he was a young boy and how, from that young age, he proved to be a great thinker.

It's a great speech but I don't trust Ngcobo, he seems like a chauvanist.

Tsietsi is the next speaker, I wonder what he is going to say.

He clears his throat before he speaks.

“Qhawe and I hated each other at first. We were basically fighting over Naledi,”

Oh no!

“Naledi and I have been best friends for years so you will understand why I thought it was my duty to protect her. I was convinced that Qhawe was no good, that he was going to break her heart and leave me to pick up the pieces. There were times where I thought it was going there, but he kept proving me wrong time and time again. I remember this one time, I'm not sure if Naledi remembers but I pointed out to her that she did not complain about being overweight as much as she used to, and she said to me:”Qhawe loves my body”.

He looks at me and squeezes my hand.

This is sweet of Tsietsi, although I know that if Qhawe put one foot wrong he will hate him again.

The nice thing about afternoon weddings is that people leave, they go home, early.

The hall starts clearing after dinner is served.

The wives of this family and my sisters have gathered in one place, featuring the gays.

There's Ndoni too, Langa is interrogating her. She was unlucky enough to be asked to fetch Hlomu's aunt from KwaMashu this morning. The experience, as she described it, was traumatic.

She told her not to give Mpande sex until he pays lobola.

My husband is talking to people. I don't know them.

His brothers are gathered at the bar, drinking of course.

“I made it,” she says.

Where did she come from?

I hear a spoon dropping. It's Hlomu's.

She's here? The wedding is already over.

Hlomu puts her plate aside and looks at her. The look on her face says a lot.

“Hi ladies,” she says.

She's still standing.

Xolie frowns. She looks at Hlomu and then at Lerato.

They must be wondering who the heck this is now.

“Guys, this is my step sister Lerato Malope. She knows a lot about all of you, I

guess she's a fan," I say jokingly.

Nobody is laughing. Oh well.

"Why are you so late anyway?" Tshedi asks Lerato.

She looks at Hlomu and smiles.

"I was here. Okay I missed the ceremony but I made it to the reception. I was sitting there at the back," she says.

I didn't see her at all.

Something is going on here, I don't know what it is but there's something going on.

"Lerato?"

And who is this now?

Lerato's eyes are all over the place. She looks uncomfortable and anxious.

"I thought you were bluffing. Oh my God! Send your manuscript! We will gladly publish your book. I didn't know your book was based on personal encounters with the Zulus," she says.

It's a white woman. I don't know her.

She leaves.

Hlomu's face!

Lerato has a book?

Qhawe pulls me away from whatever it is that is happening here.

"I want my wife to myself now," he says.

There are a few people left. The grannies left a long time ago with the kids.

Hlomu's cousin is at the bar. He came with a woman. Omphi is just going to have to be strong because I told her to stay away from this guy.

"Let's sneak out of here,"

Yeah. I know exactly what we're going to do.

He's holding my dress up as we climb the stairs.

Our room is only two floors up.

"Today was great," he says closing the door.

It was perfect.

"I loved your vows," he says.

I blush.

He hugs me.

"So how are you? Are you good?"

Yes.

"I'm good, really good and just pregnant that's all,"

"What?? Again??"

Thirty One

What did you do Mqoqi?"
He's still not talking. He keeps rubbing the palms of his hands together.

He walked in here like a crazy man and now he's just sitting on my couch and not talking?

"Tell me what you did so I know how to help you,"

He raises his eyes.

"I don't want help Hlomu,"

I'm supposed to be at Zandile's house and he's supposed to be wherever his brothers are, but he's here, on my couch, looking like he just did something evil.

We have enough troubles with that girl thinking she's going to publish a book about us without our consent. The bitch doesn't even know us.

And by the way, that could have something to do with why Mqoqi is here. She is his ex.

"You can talk to me," I say.

I know this behaviour, Mqhele brings it home sometimes and I always know he did something bad when he behaves like this.

"Is it about this book thing? Don't worry about that, we'll close the publishing company down if we have to," I say.

He's acting really strange.

He looks at me briefly.

"Don't worry about that, there will be no book," he says.

But...

"I had a talk with her," he says.

Huh?

"A talk?"

He doesn't respond.

"A talk Mqoqi?"

Silence.

Please Lord! Please tell me this is not what I think it is!

“Did you tell your brothers about this?”

He looks annoyed.

“I’m here, I’m telling you,” he says.

Why is he getting upset?

“You didn’t do anything to her did you?”

I know Mqoqi. After Mqhele he is the one I understand most in this family. We have a lot in common, including a good heart that can turn evil if provoked.

I don’t believe he would harm a woman though. Let alone one that is his brother’s sister-in-law.

That being said, he did do something to her, and whatever it is that he did made him come here, to my house with no plan whatsoever.

“Mqoqi talk to me, what did you do?”

His jaw is tight. He’s popping his fingers, and when he does that it means things are not good at all.

I just wish he would talk to me.

“Why do I always choose the wrong ones?” he asks.

Really?

This is about women?

“What do you mean “wrong ones?”

He pops the fingers more furiously.

He’s starting to freak me out now, and I don’t even know where Mqhele is.

“You know what I’m talking about,” he says.

Okay. I don’t know where I am or what is going on...

“If you’re talking about Amanda and this other skank that just came back to our lives.....”

He’s looking at me. Staring actually.

“That’s what I’m talking about,” he says.

I’m tempted to roll my eyes, he can’t seriously be wasting my time like this, over that.

I wave my hand dismissively. But then, I feel his eyes on me...

This is not how our conversations usually are. We are both quirky and a little odd, that’s why we have chemistry, but this is not a conversation we’d normally have.

This is intense.

Let me put on my wisdom hat now.

“Mqoqi, you can’t stress yourself like this over women. Some are good and others are bad, you’ll find one....”

“Why does everyone keep telling me that bullshit?”

Whoah!

I raise my eyebrows. This is new.

I’m expecting him to apologise and calm down but no, he’s still militant.

“Mqoqi,” I say.

He stands up.

“Why does it always have to come down to women?”

Wisdom hat come back.

“It doesn’t always come down to women, it comes down to what you want. What do you want Mqo...?”

“I want you!”

Excuse me?

“You heard me. I want you Hlomu, that’s what I want,”

I take a few steps back, there’s a wall behind me.

I have to say something but...he’s going to say he’s joking, I know he is.

He’s not joking.

“Is that why you came here?”

I’m looking into his eyes and I see Mqhele. I see Mqhele when he was younger.

He has the same depth and mystery in his eyes. He has the same nicotine scent, he is the same height and same size.

Why is he coming closer?

My back is pressed on the wall. I’m looking at his chest. I can feel the air he’s breathing out over my head.

“Mqoqi, get away from me,”

He hasn’t touched me, but he’s too close.

He’s silent but I can hear him breathing.

Suddenly he steps back,

“I didn’t mean to say it out loud. I’m sorry. Mami,” he says and walks out the door.

I’m still leaning against the wall. The bike takes off in high speed.

What just happened here?

Mqhele is home.

His face says he’s about to ask something.

“Mqoqi was here looking for you. I think he did something to Lerato,” I say before he asks.

I know he saw his bike somewhere on his way here.

“Shit! I told him not to go there,” he says.

I hope they haven’t graduated to murdering anything that upsets them, including women.

He calls him, his phone rings unanswered.

“You look...are you okay?” he asks.

I’m not okay.

“I’m just worried. Mqoqi seemed...I think he did something to that girl,”-I’m lying.

He hugs me and kisses my forehead.

I couldn’t care less about Lerato. My problem is...what am I going to do now?

How do I look at Mqoqi after tonight?

“Hlomu, Hlomu,” he’s shaking me.
“Your phone is ringing, where is it?” he asks.
I don’t know, it’s on the floor.
“Hi,”
“Speaking...”
“What????”
I feel every single bone in my body trembling.
No!
My hands are shaking.
“Hlomu, who’s that? What’s going on?”
No!!!
I can’t speak!
We’re having another funeral.

Naledi His Love is the third of the Hlomu Series Books. The Story is pure fiction, but some of the places mentioned do exist. The Zulu brothers, however, are a fiction of the author's imagination, but you are welcome to turn any man into one.

Naledi

