



The Streets

Zasemhlabeni

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Chapter 1

My bedroom door was harshly opened by my brother who had blood dripping from his nose and a swollen eye, I didn't have a clear view of how his face looked but the moonlight gave me quite the sight. It was 22:00 pm and my brother dragged me out of bed and told me to pack my clothing in black plastic bags. Being the 12 year old that I was I did exactly as I was told for I knew our situation in that house. After 10 minutes of shoving my whole wardrobe into plastic bags my brother threw one of his oversized jerseys at me and told me to wear it since that night was going to be our longest. He started throwing the black plastic bags out of the window one by one until he slowly put his one leg out the window and told me to follow, I was confused at the time but my brother was the only person who had my back so I trusted him with my life. After stepping on the pavement my brother took my face into his hands and said " you take your plastics, I'll take mine, you run and don't look back" . I asked him "Does umamma know that we are going?" He's brown eyes looked straight into mine and he said "Umamma doesn't know and umamma doesn't care, we have to go ngoba ixesha alikho ecaleni lethu"(because time is not on our side) this very moment was when the seed of hatred against my mother was planted, what kind of a mother watched her children suffer like this? What kind of a mother would allow her children to gallivant on the streets of Pretoria at 22:00 pm at night? Was she even our mother? My eyes filled with tears as i carried one plastic over my head and the other over my shoulder and ran without looking back.

My brother was a 17 year old who seemed to have all types of connections one could think of. We walked out of the estate and stood for a good 10 minutes until a red GTI which had a guy who looked more or less In his early twenties took us from Pretoria East all the way to Sunnyside. I figured this was where he stayed and he seemed to know my brother quite well but I didn't show any interest in any conversation he was trying to make because I was still emotionally scarred at the time. We got to his flat which had two other males living in it, one of them offered me his bed and I couldn't decline, I was scared of sleeping on their couch

and I guess beggars can't be choosers. I assume my brother slept with him on the couch because when I woke up the next morning the flat was empty and it was just my brother and I. My brother was sitting on a bar stool cutting his weed and preparing a blunt as usual. As I went closer I saw bruises on his back since he wasn't wearing a shirt and when he turned around to face me my heart skipped 2 beats just looking at his face. This was worse compared to what I saw last night, both his eyes were swollen and he had a busted lip. His right cheek was bigger than the other and his ribs had blue circled marks. I sat down on one of the bar stools next to him and asked " what happened last night?" he looked up at the ceiling and tears started falling from the side of his cheeks. He took his lighter, lit his blunt, went in for a long pull and exhaled before he looked at me and said "What happened last night was the end of our luxury and the beginning of our struggle. You need to learn how to hustle, start working for everything that you need because it's not coming easy. Our family has shown us the real side of the coin and we're on our own, that's how it's going to be from today onwards. At 13:00 pm we better be on a train to vaal and sizo hlala kwa makhulu ndize ndenze icebo (we're staying with our grandmother until I come up with a plan) I'm going to Bosman to quickly collect money from someone who owes me after that we're getting lost. You're going to put on your big girl panties and hustle with me. Ndingu bhuti wakho (I'm your brother) I'll always have your back mntasekhaya (sister)". I think the high was starting to kick in because what this guy just said made no sense to me, how can our mother turn her back on us? I know our step father despises us and abuses us from time to...it was him...it was him who beat my brother up, that's why my mom wouldn't care. I know my mother loved him more than she loved us but would she love him to this extent? Would she really disown her children all in the name of 'love'?

At around 12:00 pm my brother came back from Bosman with huge suitcases and KFC. He told me to quickly eat and by the time he's done packing our clothes I should be done. At around 12:45 pm one of the flatmates came back and drove us to the Bosman train station. He dropped us off at a dodgy corner and left, my brother seemed to be used to this life because he wasn't shaken by our surroundings. He told me to put on my hoodie and he did the same. We walked across the street and entered a complex which was extremely dirty and cold.

There were rats in the gutter and papers everywhere. My brother knocked on one of the doors and told me to wait outside and take care of the bags. After he got in and closed the door I looked around and there were random people walking around. These people seemed troubled, they seemed suppressed by life's burdens and this showed on the clothing they wore and the type of lifestyle they lived. The mixture of weed and urine was all I could smell and before I knew it my vision was blurred with tears, I looked like a lost child with no mother, no father and no guardian. Standing alone in front of that door with suitcases and a bunch of bags in the middle of Pretoria hit a part of me I can't describe. I felt hollow with no happiness inside me, I felt cold with no one to hold me and this is when my brother's words from earlier sank in and I processed each and every single word he told me. I had come to the realisation that I need to grow up and see life for what it is, kusemhlabeni apha, kunzima. (this is the world, its hard)

Chapter 2

I started hearing loud voices coming from inside and it seemed as though there was an argument, before I could even eavesdrop the door was opened and my brother was pushed out, the guy threw a black bag at him and told him to deliver by next month thereafter closed the door. "Xolani what happened?" I asked. "Ayifuni wena leyo, masambe (That has nothing to do with you, let's go) " So standard procedure commenced, we put our hoodies on and left.

After about 15 minutes of waiting our train arrived and we left. I looked outside the window and started thinking about the future. What about school? Who'll pay my school fees? Who'll feed us? Won't our grandmother demand money? How will Xolani maintain the both of us? He can't be the only one providing, I know I'm only 12 years old but what about my brother, the guy is only 17. He also has ambitions and goals and he can't reach all of that with me being in the way. A

board written "Vereeniging" was approaching and the train started slowing down. As soon as it stopped people stood up. This is when I realised that life moves at a very fast pace, besides the fact that a train awaits no one, things were moving too fast for my liking.

We got out of the train and walked to the taxi rank where we got a taxi that took us to a farm near a place called Henley-on-klip. The last time I was on this road was probably when I was 5 years old if not younger. My brother said "shot left" but I was confused cause he literally wanted us to get off in the middle of nowhere but as the taxi slowed down I realised there was a gravel road. We got off the taxi and as soon as the taxi left we put our hoodies on, pulled our bags and walked. We were literally walking between mielie fields and this seemed like quite a rural settlement. There was not even a single house in site and the gravel was extremely dusty. We walked for 30 minutes straight before I could see cows and chickens. This is when I realised we were going down a hill because further down i could see a bunch of shacks and houses. Thixo wam andizukwazi ukuhlala apha (My god I won't be able to live here)

After about 15 minutes we arrived and there was a huge steel gate which needed to be unchained and pushed like a door in order to open. A women with a blanket around her waist wearing boots and an apron approached us and asked "Ningobani? (Who are you?)" Xolani responded and said "Singabezukulwane baka Mam'qwathi besizom'bona" (We are the grandchildren of Mam'qwathi we have come to see her) The woman responded " Kulungile bantwana bam, ithi ndinibonise indlela" (Alright my children let me direct you)

She led us to our grandmothers hut and the minute we knocked the door opened, i was shocked. My grandmother seemed thinner and darker than usual, she led us in but didn't greet us at all. We placed our first set of bags next to the gas stove, the minute we came back with the last bags she said ".Nizogcwalisa indlu yam nobubanxa bem'pahla (You're going to fill my house with your stupid clothes) Niyazi keh njengoba nilapha anizuhlala mahala, anizutya mahala futhi soze ndinikhumbuze ukundinika imali yam ukuphela kwenyanga" (You guys better know that since you're here you won't be staying for free, you won't be eating for free and I won't be reminding you to give me my money every month end) I can't

believe this is the same grandmother we used to visit years ago, why has she become so bitter and cruel?

At around 20:00 pm we were hungry and Xolani started looking really frustrated. uMakhulu was by the stove preparing pap and spinach so we waited. She then took out 2 plates, she dished pap in one and spinach in the other thereafter added water in the pots and put them in a plastic bath which we called a "vascom". After washing her hands she sat down, put the plates in front of her and started eating. I stood up since she decided not to call us and sat on a crate next to her. Xolani didn't follow me and uMakhulu looked at me as though I was mad. I asked uMakhulu "kuteni singatyeli eziplatini zethu" (why aren't we eating in our own plates) she replied and said "kukutya kabani oku?" (Who's food is this?) So I decided to keep quiet and dig in, before I even put my hand in the pap she said "UPHAMBENE! uk'bambela ntoni ukutya kwam!" (ARE YOU MAD! Why are you touching my food!) It took a while to register in my head that it meant we weren't eating that night. Suka pam'kwam! Uyihlo kange andibone yonke leminyaka, kange andithumelele imali futhi kange nindinike imali yokhu tenga ukutya, Benithi nizoty ntoni?" (move away from my face! Your father hasn't seen me for all these years, he hasn't sent me money and you guys haven't given me money to buy food, what did you think you were going to eat?) After saying that she let out the loudest laugh and continued eating. My throat started becoming stiff and my vision became blurry, the louder her laugh became, the more painful it became to bare and I went into Xolani's arms and we started crying. I didn't understand why Xolani was so quiet and defeated, he usually has a plan up his sleeve but I think we've now hit rock bottom. There was no one there to save us, the world was becoming a dark place for us and it felt like we reached a dead end, it was either this or the streets.

Xolani woke up around 05:00 am and it was a Monday morning. He told me to hang in there he would be back around 13:00 pm in the afternoon and he left. When he left I felt like a part of me left with him, I felt so alone without my brother by my side to protect me. While I was still wallowing in my sorrow uMakhulu came holding a sow and told me to wake up. My stomach was growling and I was extremely hungry. We got out of the hut and she lead me to the fields

and pointed at a bunch of trees and said “Hambo teza inkuni, zibenintsi!” (Go fetch wood and it must be a lot) she threw the sow at me and left. I was so confused, how on earth was I going to cut wood off a tree and carry it all the way. As I walked towards the trees there were a bunch of boys cutting wood and the girls took the wood, tied it up and carried it on their heads. They all looked at me puzzled and I greeted “Molweni” (Morning)...* silence. The girls just stared at me and moved on with their lives. The boys greeted back and carried on with what they were doing. I guess this is how people lived around here. I sat on a log and attentively looked at what the others were doing so I could do the same. After an hour of sitting thinking about my miserable life something tapped me on the shoulder and when I looked behind me there was a boy wearing a blue overall and black boots. He was tall, dark in complexion but seemed much cleaner than the rest of us. “ Lebitso laka ke Lesedi, wena umang?” (My name is lesedi and who are you?) My sotho was quite broken so I opted to respond in English “My name is Athi". He smiled and said “Its nice to know that someone can speak fluent English around here" Mxm I wasn't in the mood to be flirting with some bilingual Sotho guy, I had a problem at hand and I needed to stay focused. “ So why are you hear?” he asked. “ My grandmother told me to fetch wood" I responded. “ Do you even know how to get the wood?”. His question annoyed me because if I did I wouldn't be sitting on a log for an hour looking clueless. I kept quiet and looked away. “If you want wood, follow me.” He started walking and I was extremely sceptical because this guy could do anything to me but my instinct told me to trust him so I followed. He started a conversation which I wasn't interested in because I was stressed and after 10 minutes we reached a well-built house which had a gate and a fence. He took out a remote from his pocket and opened the gate. “Welcome to my home" he said. I was in shock, I couldn't say a word. Why was this guy letting me into his home? What was so special about me that he had to leave other children and opt for me?

He lead me all the way to the backyard which was full of wood stacked on top of each other. That wood could literally last someone a year if not more. He started packing the wood up in bundles for me and tied it. He gave me one bundle and told me to carry it on my head, he took about 3 bundles and asked me whether this would be enough. At this point I was crying because why would someone be so generous to me. This world was such a cold place yet there were still people as

generous as him. He comforted me and after a while we walked to my grandmother's hut. I started becoming scared because what if she went all psycho If she saw me with a boy? Lesedi had a plan and said " Don't worry, we'll appear from the back of the hut so she doesn't see me then I'll put the wood at the back and leave." His idea seemed quite good so we continued walking. After 15 minutes we approached the hut but from behind it. He stacked the bundles on top of each other and said " I hope to see you tomorrow again, there's a lot of wood at home so you don't really have to struggle and maybe we can become friends" I nodded and he left. When I got into the house umakhulu looked at me and said " ukawuleze wabuya, lphi inkuni?" (You came back quickly, where's the wood?). " Isemva kwendlu" (its behind the house) I responded. She was in disbelief, she went behind the hut and came back with the same facial expression and before she could say anything I left the hut and sat outside waiting for my brother.

I sat there for about 2 hours before I saw Xolani approaching , I got up and ran to him since he was holding a bunch of plastic bags and i helped him with a few. He seemed to be in a good mood when we entered the hut. I realised there were groceries in the plastics and umakhulu seemed quite delighted by this. " ohhh mntanam ude watenga nokutya, yilento ndikuthanda kangaka ufuze utatakho ngosebenza nzima. Ohhh yini bantwana bam" (ohhh my dear child you even bought food, this is why I love you so much you have taken after your father because you're a hard worker, oh my dear children) Heee! So this woman can actually be nice, wow I'm shook.

Xolani gave umakhulu her rent money for the month and she lead us to another hut which was behind the hut she stayed in, she unlocked the hut, gave us the key and left. We entered the hut and it was quite spacious, we moved our bags into the hut and started cleaning. We were done at around 18:00 pm in the evening and we started cooking. " I got us into a public government school which isn't far from the farm, we won't be paying school fees so we'll be saving money. It isn't much but it's the least I could do" I looked at him with the biggest smile and hugged him. I decided not to ask him where he got the money since I didn't want to kill the mood. After washing the dishes at around 20:00 pm Xolani went

outside for a smoke and I stayed inside and sat on the mattress trying to plan out my future till I fell asleep.

“Vuka siyothenga iuniform” (wake up we're going to go buy uniform) it was around 06:00 am in the morning and Xolani had already bathed. He said by the time he's done smoking I should be done. I quickly bathed in the vascom and by 07:00 we left. We went to town, got what we needed and started hiking our way back. A white van stopped and we got in at the back and drove to the farm. We got to the farm and I realised this van was heading towards Lesedi's home. The van stopped in front of the gate and we got out. The drivers door opened and Xolani gave the man R20, he looked exactly like Lesedi. He was tall, dark in complexion and wore good quality clothing. He spoke to Xolani for about 30 minutes and I couldn't hear much since I didn't know Sotho. After a while we left and Xolani explained to me that he'll be taking us to school every morning and we'll come back with him in the afternoons since his child attends a multi racial school around the corner. I assumed that was Lesedi and I must say I was quite excited.

We started school the following week and we noticed that umakhulu was a drunkard who constantly drank everytime she got money. Lesedi and I became really good friends and he was the only friend I had since I couldn't really gel with anyone at school. We became extremely close and we knew everything about each other. Xolani had a really good hustle going on, he never told me what it was but it always bought food on the table so i opted to stay quiet. Xolani and I started getting really good grades and Xolani was starting matric the following year so he had to consider bursaries which would fund his education and universities. He seemed quite stressed about me but he said we would cross that bridge when we got there. Lesedi's family has been really good to us and during December that year we spent Christmas and new year with them. Umakhulu didn't care one inch about us and she decided to go to Eastern Cape for the festive season. Life wasn't really the way we wanted it to be but we were grateful for what we had, it could've been much worse but none the less we made it through 2016.

2017

Chapter 3

A new year was starting and my mother was the first person on my mind. It shocked me to think that she hasn't checked up on us or even bothered herself to look for us. Anyway this is life, we keep it moving. Xolani and I had spent almost the entire festive season with Lesedi's family and they've filled the void we had of having absent parents. I understood they're concern towards us and appreciated everything they did but being helped and considered didn't feel normal anymore. We're so used to providing for ourselves and being exposed to this cold world that being offered help seemed as though the person would want something in return yet Lesedi's parents proved us wrong and have taken us as their own. We stayed with them and they promised to maintain us for the entire year. Xolani was in matric and having Lesedi's parents by my side was a relief knowing that Xolani could go to varsity without having me as an expense. Xolani stopped his illegal ways but he would always say "ungabom'themba umntu, angakujikela nje ngotywala esiswini" (You can never trust someone, they'll turn their backs on you just like alcohol in your stomach). We also wanted to be like other children and live our lives without having to worry about bills but that didn't mean we shouldn't watch our backs.

Lesedi's parents were people who constantly traveled so having the house to ourselves was a norm. It was a Friday afternoon around July and they were going to leave at around 15:00 since they had to catch a flight. The sun sets quite quickly in winter so they insisted on leaving sooner. We were going to walk our way home that afternoon and Lesedi didn't go to school so I had to wait for Xolani afterschool. The bell rang and we were dismissed, I waited for about 30 minutes yet he didn't show up. I went back inside the school, looked in open classrooms, asked boys who came out of the bathroom, called him on his phone but he was nowhere to be found so I decided to leave. While I was walking on the sidewalk of the gravel road I saw Ntate Mokoena's van approaching. This was Lesedi's father's van, I was confused because I thought they had already left. As the van came closer I realised Xolani was driving it. Uphambene lo?(Is he mad?) Ntate

Mokoena would kill him if he found out. The van stopped and I got into the passenger seat, he took a U turn and we were on our way to the farm. "Xolani, yintoni lento oy'yenzayo? Uzosifaka enxakini!" (Xolani what are u doing? You'll get us into trouble!) "Mamela mntasekhaya, ndisenxakini. Namhlanje andizulala endlini, ikhona into ekhufanele ndiyenze kodwa ndizobuya ngomso ekuseni. Ungaxeleli uLesedi ukuba ndihambe nge moto"(Listen sis, I'm in trouble. I won't be sleeping home today, there's something I need to do but I'll be back by tomorrow morning. Don't tell Lesedi I took the car) I just kept quiet because I really didn't know what to say. I don't know why he can't just be grateful for what we have and leave this life that he's living but he seems to be addicted to it and it keeps getting worse each time he goes back to it. In order for his plan to go well we had to leave the van with one of Xolani's friends so Lesedi doesn't hear anything, then Xolani would get into the house, act normal then later on leave and pretend he's going to a party and will be back the next day.

After getting into the house I decide to chill since it was a Friday and Lesedi didn't seem like he was in a good mood so I spent most of the afternoon cooking alone. At 19:00 pm Xolani was all dressed up for the "party" he was going to so Lesedi would be convinced. They had a mini bro convo before Xolani gave me an unexpected hug. "Ndiyakuthanda yevah mntasekhaya" (I love you sis). Its been a year since this guy told me he loved me so I knew whatever was going to happen was serious. I returned the hug and he left. The minute he stepped out of that door I had a very uneasy feeling, a feeling that something bad would happen but I decided to block the feeling and I didn't think much of it. An hour later I dished up, washed the dishes and watched a movie with Lesedi until around 23:00. By the time we watched the second movie I was exhausted so I passed out.

*It felt like a dream, I couldn't see anything and there were loud voices in the background, it felt like there was a lot of chaos and before I could hear the voices properly, something shook me awake. "Ngwanyana ke wena! Abuti wahao ukae?"(You girl! Where's you're brother?) Ok maybe I was still dreaming, this isn't who I think it is. Lesedi's parents were standing in front of me and Lesedi's dad had the sleeves of his shirt rolled up and his mother had the most disgusted look on her face. I rubbed my eyes before I could lift my legs off the couch and sit up straight. "Bowa!" (Talk!) I was speechless, the words wouldn't come out of my mouth and I was too terrified to say anything. Lesedi's mother pulled me by the

arm so I could stand up and she dragged me to the room, she closed the door and said “We have done you a favour by bringing you into our household only for you to mess that up, as she said this she placed her hand behind her and took out a shjambok. This brought back memories of my stepfather hitting us when we were little and my brother would take most of my beatings for me by standing in front of me so the shjambok wouldn’t hurt me too badly. Now there was no Xolani to protect me, no Xolani to hide behind, no Xolani at all. Before I could even zone out of my thoughts I felt her pulling my hair, I don’t know why this reminded me of what my mother would do to me everytime I didn’t do something minor like washing the dishes or cleaning the house. Before Lesedi’s mother could even begin Ntate Mokoena walked in and shouted “The safe is unlocked!” Mam' Mokena immediately dropped the shjambok and ran out of the room. “Pack your clothes including you’re brother’s clothes and I want you out of my house in the next 30 minutes or else...” with that said he walked away and I was left alone in that room. Lesedi came in with black plastics and threw them in my face, “Don’t leave anything behind”. He stood at the door and watched me pack my clothes while throwing insults at me. Before I could finish packing Ntate Mokoena came into the room, took a bundle of our clothes out the wardrobe and walked out of the room. He came back, took the suitcases and threw them out of the room, Mam' Mokoena pulled me by my hair and dragged me out of the house where I found our clothes scattered on the floor and Lesedi threw our bags outside. I noticed Lesedi’s dad holding a gun and before I could even start pleading he said “You have 10 seconds starting now.” I carried the scattered clothes under my armpit and took one of the bags, placed it on my head, dragged the suitcase and started running.

It was dark and I didn’t even know where my phone was, I found myself standing next to someone’s compound and there was a wooden bench next to the gate so I decided to sit on it. I had to pack the clothes that were bundled under my armpit properly into plastics so it would be easier to carry. The only person I could go to was umakhulu but she’s probably at some tavern around the farm drinking. Kodwa thixo wam kutheni sisoloko sehlelwa ngamabadi? Oh yini bawo ndicela uxolo, zonke izono endike ndazenza apha emhlabeni ndicela uxolo. Nalapho uXolani ekhoyo ndicela umgade thixo wam.(But God why do bad things always happen to us? Oh lord I’m sorry, all the sins I have ever committed on this earth I

ask for your forgiveness. Wherever Xolani is please protect him my lord)It's weird how the world can move you from one place to the next, only to take you back to where you come from.

As I walked into makhulu's compound I left the bags in front of the backroom door and walked to makhulu's hut. Before I even knocked on the door I started hearing weird sounds coming from inside. "Abantwana baka mam'gcina banga phumeleli! Umntanakhe oyintombazana akazufumana abantwana! Soze baphile ubomi obumnandi! Unyanakhe uzofa kwi ngozi yemotho! Makhubenjalo!" (Mam'gcina's children shall not prosper! Her daughter shall not bear children! They shall never live a prosperous life! Her son shall die in a car accident! May it be so!)

I couldn't move, my ears couldn't believe what they just heard. This woman is responsible for everyone's misfortunes in this place. She's probably the reason why there's been constant bad luck in my life and Xolani's. She doesn't want to see anyone prosper and on top of that, she's a witch!

I couldn't get myself to knock on her door so I decided to sit on the floor in front of the backroom and cry. I was cold, scared and alone. I searched in the bags and plastics until I found my phone. It was 02:48 in the morning and no missed calls from Xolani. Was he still alive? Where was he? The more questions I asked myself the louder my cries became. Xolani's words from earlier in the year kept repeating in my head "Ungabom'themba umntu, angaku jikela nje ngotywala esiswini" (Never trust someone, they can turn their backs on you just like alcohol in your stomach).

Ubomi bunzima (Life is hard)

Ubomi bukhohlakele (Life is cruel)

Uzalwe wedwa futhi uzofa wedwa (You were born alone and you shall die alone)

"Zibulale!" kwacho ilizwi elincinci ("Kill yourself!" said a small voice)

"Kutheni usaphila?" ("Why are you still alive?")

"Funa intambo uyozixoma" ("Find a rope and go hang yourself")

Kwabamnyama, ndangaboni (It became dark, i couldn't see anything)

Ndaziva ingathi ndiyaphakanyiswa (I felt like I was being lifted up)

Ndazibona sendisemthini ndiphete intambo (I just saw myself standing by a tree holding a rope)

Ndakwela bez'kwalomthi (I climbed onto this tree)

Ndazibophelela ngentambo entanyeni (i tied the rope around my neck)

"Hamba kakhuhle ntombi yam" kwacho ilizwi (Farewell my daughter said the voice)

Sizophinda sibonane (Until we see each other again)

"Athi!"..."Athi!" "Dont do it!" Get off that tree!" I didn't want to turn around to see who it was, this was my moment, my moment to die and I wanted it to happen in peace. " Oh yini mntasekhaya ndiyakucela ,sendilapha asoze ndiphinde ndikushiye. Ndiyakhucela, cela ungayi'yenzi lento" (oh my dear sister im begging you, I'm here now I'll never leave you again. I'm begging you please don't do this) as I tried to look down my vision was blurry because of the tears, Xolani reached out his arms to me and I dropped the rope, jumped off the tree and went into his arms. I let out the cry I was holding inside and Xolani held me tighter towards him and I felt my forehead getting wet from his tears. We were hurt, we were bruised and we just needed each other to lean on. I can't live without my brother, he's all I have. What would become of me if he left me, I can't face this world on my own.

Umakhulu heard the commotion outside and opened the door to see who it was. " Heeee! Niyandihlolela! Nifuna ntoni apha kwam?" (Heeee! You're disrespecting me! What do you want in my compound?) Begging wasn't something Xolani liked to do but it had to be done, we had no where else to go. Xolani let go of me and dug into his pocket , took out money and handed it to umakhulu. "Nantsi imali, sicela ukulala noba zintsuku ezinthathu ngale mali" (Here's money, may we please sleep here , even if it's for three days). Umakhulu went back inside and came back with the backroom keys and handed them too us. "Intsuku ezinthathu qa" (Only three days). With that said she went back into her hut. After we unlocked the backroom Xolani went back outside for a blunt. I sat on the crate which was by the corner and started thinking about my way forward in life. The fact remained that I was hungry for success, I was ambitious and I had dreams that needed to be fulfilled, how I was going to do this? I don't know. My life

seemed to have reached a dead end and being so dependent on my brother was weighing heavily on me. Times were going to get tough and I needed to do something about it, Xolani was In matric and soon he'll have to start making a plan for himself. He can't make plans for the both of us, I needed to make a plan and fast.

I woke up at around 08:00 and Xolani was still asleep, I boiled water so I could take a bath but there wasn't a vascom (plastic bath) that I could use so I used a 5 litre bucket instead. After getting dressed I headed out and walked to the end of the farm where I'd catch a taxi. Lesedi's parents would give me pocket money every Friday and I'd save it, it wasn't a lot but it was enough for me to go buy a few essentials that would keep us surviving for the week. I got into Shoprite and bought meat and mielie meal since it was much cheaper there, I couldn't buy much meat because it would start rotting in a few days. I decided to also buy a lamp which worked on paraffin, that room was quite dark and eating in the dark bothered me. Buying vegetables from the people that sold them on the side of the road was much cheaper and they seemed fresh so It was the best option.

Around 13:00 I decided to go window shopping for clothes at a Chinese shop in the middle of town. I've never like dresses, I only wore them because I was forced to so drooling over a pair of kicks was my type of thing. Timberlands where one of the most popular shoes at the time and I loved them. Seeing them being displayed made me thirst for them even more. Chinese shops sold the shoe for about R500 since it wasn't the original shoe anyway. While I was still looking through the window I heard a deep voice behind me say, "How about I get you the real ones?". I slowly turned my head and a tall, light in complexion male was standing in front of me wearing a black Adidas tracksuit with white Lacosta shoes. He was holding keys to a Volkswagen and I assumed he was 19 or 20 since he looked quite young. "No it's fine thanks" I replied and picked up my plastics. Before I could even start walking, one of the plastics ripped from the bottom and everything fell out. I tried picking everything up as fast as I could but other items just kept rolling of the pavement and on to the road.

"Allow me to assist you" he said while touching my shoulder. "I'm fine thanks" I said and quickly shoved everything into one plastic bag to refrain from embarrassing myself any further. Despite me saying I'm fine and needed no

assistance this guy still stood next to me and helped me pick up the items which were scattered around. "Do you have transport to go home?" I ignored his question and decided to walk away. He gently held my arm and said "Allow me to at least take you home, I promise I have no bad intentions". "No, I'll be fine" I said and before I could even go 2 steps further the plastic I was holding started to stretch and it was clear that it would tear anytime soon because all the items were stuffed into it. I looked behind me and he was still standing there with a grin on his face. "You taking me up on my offer?" he asked. At this point I had no choice, the idea of carrying a 2kg mielie meal bag on my head and the rest of my items by hand wasn't pleasing at all. We walked to his car which was a black VW Polo and he took my plastic and placed it in the boot. I opened the back passenger door and got in, he immediately opened my door and said "I don't like sitting alone" so I had to get out and move to the front. My phone rang and it was Xolani, I didn't know whether I should answer it or just let it ring. "Aren't you going to answer it?" he said while intensely looking at me. "No I won't answer it". He looked at me for another minute before starting the engine and getting us on the road. As he was driving I could feel him stare from the corner of his eye, looking out the window and giving him one word answers was all I decided to do. He asked me where he should drop me off and I directed him to the far end of the farm. "So how are you going to get home? I don't mind driving you straight to the gate" Yoh Xolani would flip, there's absolutely no ways. "No it's fine thank you, you've already done so much for me" I replied and asked him to pull over. After pulling over I got out and he helped me put my groceries into black plastics that he had. "Can I please have your number" he said while closing the boot. I must say he was quite good looking and kind hearted so I decided to just give him my number, a gent like him wouldn't bother himself texting a 'farm Julia' anyway so I took my plastics and started walking. "I'm Hloni by the way!!" he shouted with his one leg in the car and his arm on the car door. "Ok" I replied without looking back and continued moving.

When I got into the compound my feet were killing me and Xolani was sitting on the crate outside. "Uvelaphi? Zinantoni eziplastic ezimnyama?" (Where do you come from? What do these black plastics have?) I was exhausted and hungry, instead of asking me 21 questions he should be asking me what I would like to eat for lunch. "Xolani ndilambile, ndidiniwe, ndidikiwe, kawukuphe izinto kweziplastic

togo" (Xolani I'm hungry, I'm tired, im annoyed, please take out the items in these plastics). Before I could even sit down he started giving me a lecture on how he's the man of the house and that he'll provide blah blah blah. I was starting to get annoyed and before he finished his sentence I said " If you were actually providing we wouldn't have gone to bed on an empty stomach last night and you wouldn't have messed up our chance of getting an education and a bright future, if you were the man you claim to be I wouldn't have come back to you sitting on that crate outside waiting for me to come back, you would be studying for that exam you're writing on Monday or better yet, looking for a piece job. So don't you dare come here and tell me about being a man Xolani, stand up and do something useful with your life." I wanted to continue but before I could I realised that Xolani looked different. His eyes were red, he seemed weak and something just didn't seem right. The look he gave me confused me, it was as though he couldn't even hear what I was saying. "Xolani..." before i could even finish he sat down and started laughing, the louder his laugh, the more obvious it became. Xolani was high and it's wasn't weed, when he was high from weed he was calm and focused but this... it has to be something else. In between his laughs he said, "Athi asina bazali...sisodwa...andinokwazi ukufunda...Kuphelile ngathi" (Athi we don't have parents...we are alone...I won't be able to learn...its over for us) I looked at him and this was a whole different person, this was not my brother. I didn't know the person sitting in front of me but who ever he was I didn't like him, I didn't like his mindset, I didn't like his mentality. Xolani just kept laughing on and on and I became scared. As much as I was trying to play it strong his words triggered me, they hit me from deep within and I was afraid to break it to myself but I was alone here. If Xolani is on drugs this was going to be a problem, a serious one.

I made pap and cabbage for supper and Xolani was outside with a friend of his I didn't really know. A few minutes after dishing up Xolani came inside and I offered him food. He literally ate that plate in 5 minutes and demanded more food."Xolani you can't eat like this, we need to save food for tomorrow as well. You know it's a Sunday and we are going to starve if we finish the food that I bought in less than 2 days." I felt like I was talking to a brick wall because he continued finishing the food that I made. When he was done eating I stood up, took the plates and washed them. He stood behind me and said "I paid Mr. Molefe his money, Umakhulu wants her rent money by Monday so I'll be back

tomorrow morning. Lock the door and don't open up for anyone." While he said this he put on his leather jacket, changed his shoes, took his wallet and after finishing his sentence he left. Immediately after he left I locked the door and put newspapers under the door to prevent wind from coming in. While I was wearing my pyjamas I received a call from an unknown number.

Me: Hi

Unknown number: Hey, it's the guy that gave you a lift earlier, still remember me?

Me: Oh, Hloni, what's up?

Hloni: I'm glad you remember my name, nothing much really I was just hoping we could hang out during the week.

Me: I'll be at school.

Hloni: How about the weekend?

Me: I'll see

Hloni: Alright, you sound annoyed, are you ok?

Me: Yes I'm fine is that all?

Hloni: You're very beautiful by the way

Me: Ok I assume that's all, Goodnight.

Hloni: I still don't know what your name is hun

Me: Just call me "hun" for now

Hloni: Alright, I'll call you again tomorrow hun just to check if you're ok

Mxm, I hung up and decided to fall asleep. This day was the pits and I just really needed to sleep it off.

It was 06:00 am on a Sunday morning and I expected Xolani to be awake by this time but instead he wasn't home yet. I woke up and boiled water to make tea but I realised that I forgot to buy sugar. I had about R300 left of my savings from the last few months and I decided to hide it somewhere in the house to avoid being tempted and spending the rest of that money. By the look of things we were

going to starve for the next upcoming months because Xolani just seemed to be going around in circles. I wasn't even in high school yet but at least I had quite a thick body so it wasn't really obvious that I was too young, so looking for a job was something I definitely started to consider. I tried calling Xolani twice but it went straight to voicemail. At around 10:00 I decided to do my laundry and clean the house since I had nothing much to do really. "Yeyi mntanandin iphi imali yam!!" (Hey you child where is my money!!) I didn't even turn around because I knew umakhulu was just becoming a problem in our lives. "Ubuthi akafikanga namhlanje" (My brother hasn't arrived today). I could see the disgust on her face and I was scared she would kick us out because we really needed a place to stay. "Xalitshona ilanga ndiyayifuna imali yam" (When the sun sets I want my money) and she went back into her hut. I tried calling Xolani again and he still didn't pick up. I was becoming stressed and overthinking started becoming a norm for me. I decided not to cook since I didn't have an appetite so I just listened to the radio on my phone until 16:00. I decided to bring my laundry back into the house so I went outside and heard my phone ring in the house. I ran inside thinking it might be Xolani only for Hloni's name to flash onto the screen. I was annoyed because I was really stressed and I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone but I ended up answering the call.

Me : Hi

Hloni: Hey you sound off, are you ok?

Me: NO HLONI NOTHING IS OK! NOTHING IS OK!

I didn't realise how all of this was affecting me and by the time the words slipped out of my mouth I was a complete mess and in tears.

Hloni: Please talk to me what's wrong?

Me: I don't have money Hloni, my grandmother is demanding rent money before the sun sets today and I last saw my brother last night. The only money I have left amounts to R300 but if I give it to her then I'll starve. A lot has happened to me these past few days and this life just hasn't been easy since last year. I don't know what to do Hloni, everything is just a mess.

My voice was breaking in between each sentence and the tears just came flooding down my cheeks. I started getting a headache from all this venting and to think I

was venting out to a stranger instead of someone close to me just frustrated me even more.

Hloni: Are you home right now?

Me: Yes

Hloni: How much does your grandmother want?

Me: I think R500, I'm not really sure.

Hloni: Ok listen to me, give your grandmother the remaining R300 that you have and tell her you'll pay her R200 tomorrow. I assume you still attend school so tomorrow when you come back from school at around 15:00 I'll wait for you by the spot I dropped you off yesterday and I'll give the remaining R200 as well as compensate you're R300.

Me: What do you want in return?

Hloni: Nothing at all, I just want you to know that you're not alone and I swear I won't take advantage of you. Please allow me to help you

I needed the money and there was no way I could reject this money because I didn't even know when Xolani would be back.

Me: Thank you so much, I really appreciate this.

Hloni: No problem hun, I might not even know you're name but I got you're back.

Me: My name is Athi by the way

Hloni: Athi...what's you're full name?

Me: Athiyabulelamayiga but let's just keep it as Athi.

Hloni: I might just call you yiga, sounds dope don't you think

For the first time in a really long time I actually smiled, I didn't think I'd ever smile after everything I had been through.

Me: Nah dude let's keep it as Athi

We spent about another 30 minutes on the call before we hung up. It was now 17:00 and I just decided to take out the R300 which I hid and gave it to umakhulu. I went outside and found her sitting on her wooden stool peeling a peach with a pocket knife. " Nantsi imali yakho makhulu, ayipelelanga kodwa ngomso xandibuya esikolweni ndizakunika yonke imali yalenyanga" (Here's your money, it's not complete but when I return from school tomorrow I'll give you the rest of the money for the month.) I put the money next to her and I left.

I decided to eat yesterday's food for supper and prepare my stuff for school since there was nothing much I could do. At around 20:00 decided to fall asleep and just forget about Xolani, maybe he would come back tomorrow afternoon.

At around midnight I heard footsteps of someone running towards the door, I was still sleepy but my heart started racing so I sat up and stared at the door. The sound of the footsteps became silent and after about 30 seconds a very violent and loud knock followed. I shook due to the knock and I dug in one of the plastics which had Xolani's clothes and took out his pocket knife. A stood up and slowly approached the door. "Ngubani?" (Who is it?) I said, "Ndim uXolani, ndicela uvule" (It's me Xolani, please open up). I was confused as to why he was whispering but I slowly opened the door and he got in. He looked like a complete mess, his leather jacket was dirty and he seemed intoxicated. "Athi mntasekhaya ndicela sithethe" (Athi my dear sister, may we please talk). Tears were streaming down his eyes and he seemed so miserable and defeated. I sat on the mattress and he sat down on the wooden chair in the corner, it was quite dark so I couldn't see him. "Athi you know that we have come this far together, the past months have not been easy for us but look at us today. I'm so sorry...I'm so sorry". He started crying and I was so confused as to what was happening, he wasn't making sense at all and he just started to frustrate me even more. "Let me finish what I wanted to say. I couldn't come back home yesterday, I'm on bad terms with a lot of people at the moment and I decided to contact our biological father. He stays in Cape Town and he's extremely cruel Athi, I don't want to expose you to the life that people live in Cape Town. You deserve so much better mntasekhaya (sister). You are smart and I know you are capable of making it in this world. If I continue staying with you it will not only put you at risk but it will hinder your process of having a bright future. I'm leaving Athi, I'm catching a bus to Cape Town which leaves at 06:00 and I need you to do me a favour. Athi I need you to be strong, I

need you to think of your future and I need you to be smart. Kusemhlabeni, kunzima (This is the world, its hard) but I know you will make it, I know you will succeed and I know you are destined for greatness. I love you Athi, I will always love you.”

He stood up and took a sports bag where he packed most of his warm clothes. The tears that were streaming down burnt my cheeks each time they came out. I couldn't blink, I couldn't move and I couldn't speak. My cry was so silent I couldn't utter a word, I could barely breath. I felt like something was burning my chest, I needed to cry, I needed to scream. “Xolani no!!! Xolani please don't leave me!! I'm nothing without you. I have no one!! Xolani I need you! You are everything I have. Please Xolani please. I started screaming, I felt my lungs rise in my chest, I took out a cry that was similar to a scream and the ending breath of that cry sounded like a choke. I held onto his legs and scream out his name. “Oooh bhuti yini, bhuti ndiyakucela, oh yini bhuti” (Oh Brother please, brother I'm begging you, oh brother have mercy) Xolani couldn't even look at me, tears were streaming down his cheeks and as he walked towards the door my scream became louder. He was leaving me in this cruel world. God why me! God why is this happening to me! The minute Xolani opened the door I looked up but my vision was blurry and I couldn't see much. His back was facing me and his left foot was already outside, he slightly turned his face to the side and looked down. “Ndiyakhuthanda mntasekhaya, uthixo soze akulahle” (I love you my sister, God will never forsake you). He then faced the front, stepped out and closed the door. This was when reality hit me.

This was when life showed me its true colours

I didn't know that life could be so cruel, that life could be so wicked.

This very moment symbolized the beginning of my life, the beginning of the mistakes and hurdles that were bound to come along the way.

I had to grow up now, life was going to throw me the worst obstacles and I had to suck it up

Crying was not a solution and screaming wouldn't bring food on the table.

Lixesha lophanda ngoku (Its time to hustle now)

Lixesha lozakhela ik'sasa lam (it's time to build my future)

Hope you enjoyed the first insert 😊, tell me how this made you feel...the second insert is still in progress

Love and light